

***DECEPTION  
HUMILITY, CONFESSION and JUSTIFICATION***

**February 1, 2015  
Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican  
Revision E**

**GOSPEL: Luke 18:10-14  
EPISTLE: 2 Timothy 3:10-15**

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Today's Gospel and Epistle lesson begins the journey into Lent and toward Pascha. Following the Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican (today) comes the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, then Meat Fare Sunday, then Forgiveness Sunday and Lent.

In the Western Church, today's Gospel lesson is used in either July or October. Today's Epistle lesson, however, is used in the West only in part. Verses 14-17 are used in late October, but verses 10-13 are not used at all. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16) is a well-known rallying point for many Bible-based churches; but the context is often overlooked.

## **Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15**

Deceivers played a major role in the life of the Early Church. A few mentioned in the Scriptures are Simon Magus, Nicholas of Antioch, Demas, Hermogenes, Phygellas, Hymenaeus and Philetus. Simon had been a follower of John the Baptist, and four of the others had been numbered among the original Seventy Apostles. This presented a real problem for the Early Churches, since these men were not just newcomers, but they had real apostolic credentials. They abandoned the Faith in the face of temptations with the things of this world, and they attempted to lure others in the Church to follow them in their heresy.

### **Deceivers Who Are Also Deceived**

Paul stated, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). Paul gives an example of who these evil men are: Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian magicians<sup>1</sup> who resisted Moses, “As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the Faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

### **The Magicians Who Opposed Moses**

In the first encounter between Pharaoh and Moses and Aaron, Aaron’s staff turned into a snake. Pharaoh then called in Jannes and Jambres and they turned their staffs into snakes also, using their secret arts. Aaron’s staff (snake) then swallowed those of Jannes and Jambres (Exodus 7:9-12).

Pharaoh’s heart had hardened and he wouldn’t listen to Moses and Aaron; thus began the ten plagues. Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate the first two plagues (see Table 1), but not the third and following. They reported to Pharaoh that the third and following was “the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19), but Pharaoh wouldn’t listen. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote<sup>2</sup>,

“Magic arts were taught among them, and oracles in diverse places led men astray, and all men ascribed the influences of their birth and existence to the stars, having no thought of anything beyond what was visible. And God alone, and His word, was unknown, although He had not hidden Himself out of men’s sight, but had unfolded the knowledge of Himself to them in many forms and many ways” (On the Incarnation of the Word).

Even though Jannes and Jambres recognized the Lord as a Power beyond their secret arts, they did not repent. As a result, the plagues affected them as well as the rest of the Egyptians (Exodus 9:11).

Paul comments that people who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, and who have a form of piety, but deny its power will come into contact with Timothy. Like Jannes and Jambres, they will have corrupt minds, having the characteristics Paul described (2 Timothy 3:2-

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 554.

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy*, VIII, v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, XI, 6-7.

4; 1 Timothy 6:3-5), and will resist the Truth. Paul refers to them as “evil men and impostors, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 8:13). Yet, Paul says, “They will advance no farther, for their folly will be clear to everyone as was that of Jannes and Jambres, when Egypt was destroyed by the plagues and in the Red Sea” (2 Timothy 3:9).

**Table 1**  
**Egyptian Plagues Duplicated by Jannes and Jambres**

Plague/Event	Moses & Aaron	Jannes & Jambres
Initial Meeting	Staff became snake	Staff became snake
#1	Nile became blood	Nile became blood
#2	Frogs came	Frogs came
#3	Dust became gnats	See Exodus 8:19
#4	Insect swarms	
#5	Pestilence on livestock	
#6	Soot became skin boils	Magicians got boils also
#7	Thunder, hail and fire	
#8	Locusts	
#9	Thick darkness (3 days)	
#10	The first born	

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>3</sup> that this may seem contradictory, since Paul had just said, “They will increase to more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16).

“He means that beginning to innovate and deceive, they will not pause in their error but will always invent new deceits and corrupt doctrines, for errors are never stationary. But here (2 Timothy 3:9), he says that they shall not be able to deceive, nor carry men away with them; for however at first they may seem to impose on them, they will soon be easily detected. ‘For their folly, will be clear to everyone, as Jannes’ and Jambres’ deceit was also’ (2 Timothy 3:9). If errors flourish at first, they do not continue to the end. For so it is with things that are not attractive by nature, but attractive in appearance; they flourish for a time, then are detected and come to nothing. But not such are our doctrines, and of these, you (Timothy) are a witness. For in our doctrines there is no deceit, for who would choose to die for a deceit?”

John Chrysostom stated<sup>4</sup> that God allows magicians and imposters to rise up in order to show their limits compared to those of God. In this way, imposters do us good. In any encounters, we should concentrate on our relationship with God and not concern ourselves with what people might think.

“God allowed the magicians, who opposed Moses, on purpose in order that Moses might not be suspected of being a magician. He let these magicians teach all men to what length magic can go in making a fantastic show; beyond this point they could not deceive, but themselves confessed their defeat.

<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 9.

<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XLVI, v. 38.

Impostors do us no harm, rather they do us good, if we will apply our mind to the matter. If we are partners with them in the eyes of the people, let us remember that the people don't have good judgment, and we should not care what they think. To God we live, not to men; in heaven we have our conversation, not on earth. In heaven are the awards and the prizes of our labors; there we look for our praises, there for our crowns. Let us not trouble ourselves about men, that we do not give them an opportunity against us. If they choose to accuse us thoughtlessly and without discrimination, let us laugh, not weep. 'Provide honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men' (2 Corinthians 8:21); if you provide honorable things, yet that man derides you for it, give yourself no more concern for that. You have your patterns in the Scriptures. Paul said, 'do I now persuade men or God?' (Galatians 1:10), and again, 'We persuade men, but we are well known to God' (2 Corinthians 5:11). Christ spoke of those that take offense, 'Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14); and again, 'Woe to you, when all men speak well of you' (Luke 6:26); and again, 'Let your works shine, that men may see, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). Also, 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea' (Matthew 18:6). These sayings are not contrary; they are very much in agreement. When we offend God, woe to that man who blasphemes the Name of God! (Romans 2:24). What then if I do what is right in anything, but another blasphemes? That is nothing to me, but only to him; for through him God was blasphemed. How is it possible to do what is right in anything, and, yet give an opportunity for blasphemy? I'll give examples. Paul supported Judaism in Jerusalem, but not so in Antioch; he supported Judaism, and they were offended<sup>5</sup>, but they had no right to be offended. Paul is said to have greeted both Nero's cupbearer and his concubine; what do you think they must have said against him because of this? But they had no right to do so. If he drew them to himself for the purpose of loose living or any wicked acts, one might well be offended; but if he drew them to right living, what is there to be offended at?"

## **The Deception of Adam and Eve**

The Church Fathers have referred to the deception of Adam and Eve many times, and this deception set a pattern for future generations. Adam and Eve had been established in Eden, the Paradise of God, among every tree that was beautiful and edible. There, the Lord planted the Tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam's job in Eden was to cultivate it and guard it. Cultivation was not difficult since there were no thorns or briars. The only thing to guard was the Law that God gave him (Genesis 2:16-17). Tertullian described<sup>6</sup> the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) as having been given in embryo to Adam in Eden. Clothed in the glory of God, theirs was a trouble-free life similar to that of the angels. This is similar to the life of the righteous after the Lord returns, where they will shine with the glory of

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<sup>5</sup> That is, any that were offended at Paul for supporting James and the elders in Jerusalem had no right to be offended.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, iii, 2.

God (Daniel 12:3, Matthew 13:43). Blessed and created in His image, Adam began his rule over the earth and all things on the earth (Genesis 1:27-30).

Adam could eat freely from any of the trees in Eden, except one. God set this up<sup>7</sup> as a test for Adam's faith. God, in His Goodness, gave them all of Paradise so that they were under no constraint to transgress the Law. In His justice, He wanted to give them immortal life from eating of the Tree of Life. If they would willingly reject the temptation to disobey the Lord's commandments, and reject the serpent along with sin, they would have eaten from the Tree of Life and the tree of knowledge would not have been withheld from them. In order that Adam would have to go out of his way to do this, the temptation came via a serpent, who was utterly despicable and hideous, rather than via an angel or some other attractive being. In order that hunger would not be the temptation, temptation came before they knew what hunger was. Therefore, it was out of their own avarice that they followed the counsel of the serpent. If they had been victorious in this one momentary battle, they would have had by Justice all that had been given to them by Grace.

In tempting Eve, Satan told her that if she ate of the tree of knowledge, she would obtain divinity and know good and evil. Eve already knew good and evil from the commandments of God. Had she wanted to discern the evil intent of the serpent's words, she could have done so. But she was puffed up with the hope of equality with God apart from God's commandments. She then took the fruit to Adam and persuaded him to eat also and join her rebellion; Adam listened to his wife rather than to God. In doing so they lost the glory of God with which they were clothed and then realized that they were naked. By promising them divinity, the serpent, which they were created to rule over, prevented them from receiving divinity. By denying Him, who had made them ruler over everything, they put their faith in the crafty one, who took away their rule completely. By succumbing to the serpent's craftiness, Adam and Eve lost those things that they should not have lost even in a great battle.

While Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves to cover their nakedness, the Lord delayed His coming to them so that they might admonish each other and plead for mercy. When He did come to them, He purposefully gave sound to His footsteps so that Adam and Eve might be prepared to make supplication before Him. Instead Adam and Eve hid, and when confronted, Adam refused to confess but blamed the woman. Eve did so also and blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:8-13). Both Adam and Eve were without excuse for they had knowingly neglected the Lord's commandment out of the avarice of their own hearts. No one forced or pressured them; they chose and decided for themselves.

After the Fall, the serpent was cursed beyond all the other creatures. Eve was cursed with pain in childbirth and in being subject to her husband. Adam was cursed with hard labor in working the ground from which he came (Genesis 3:14-19). In each of these, the Lord's love is apparent in that the punishment is a continual guidance of the magnitude of the Fall. In order that this cursed state of suffering might not be eternal, the Lord withheld the Tree of Life and sent them away from Eden. The Lord also made them garments of animal skin, teaching them about animal sacrifice that would later be written down in detail by Moses, and which illustrated to them the fulfillment by Christ, the Lamb of God.

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<sup>7</sup> Ephraim of Syria, Commentary on Genesis.

John Cassian stated<sup>8</sup> that the devil fell from grace twice: once out of pride before Adam and Eve, and a second time out of envy as a result of his deception of Eve. The lesson we learn from this is that while deceivers are punished, so are those who yield to the deceit. To guard us against deceit, an angel accompanies every person, such that we always have a choice whether we will yield to the deceit.

“The beginning of the devil’s fall and ruin came before Adam and Eve. Before their deception he had already been branded with the name of the serpent, where it says, ‘But the serpent was more cunning than all the beasts of the earth, which the Lord God had made’ (Genesis 3:1). He had fallen away from his angelic holiness even before he deceived the first man, so that he not only deserved the title ‘serpent’, but actually excelled all other beasts of the earth in the strategies of wickedness. Scripture would not have designated a good angel by such a term, nor would it say this of those who were still continuing in that state of bliss. The title of serpent and the comparison to beasts most clearly suggests not the dignity of an angel but the infamy of an apostate. The occasion of the envy and seduction, which led him to deceive man, arose from his previous fall, in that he saw that man, who had but recently been formed out of the dust of the ground, was to be called to that glory, from which he remembered that he himself, while still one of the princes, had fallen. That first fall of his, which was due to pride, and which obtained for him the name of the serpent, was followed by a second fall owing to envy. His first fall found him still in the possession of something upright so that he could enjoy conversation with man. By the Lord’s sentence after his second fall, he was very properly cast down to the lowest depth, that he might no longer walk erect as before. Instead he should cling to the ground and creep along on his belly and feed on earthly food and works of sin. He proclaimed his secret hostility, and put between himself and man an enmity that is to our advantage, so that while men are on their guard against him as a dangerous enemy, he can no longer injure them by a deceptive show of friendship.”

“We learn a special lesson from the fact that though the author of the deception obtained a fitting punishment and condemnation, yet still the ones who were led astray (Adam and Eve) did not escape punishment, although it was somewhat lighter than the author of the deception. We see this very plainly expressed. For Adam, who was deceived, or rather acquiesced to the wishes of her who was deceived, yielded a consent that was deadly, is only condemned to labor and the sweat of his brow. This was assigned to him not as a curse on himself, but as a curse on the ground, and its barrenness. But the woman, who persuaded him to this, obtained an increase of anguish, pain and sorrow, and also given the yoke of perpetual subjection. But the serpent, who incited them to this offense, is punished by a lasting curse. Therefore we should be on our guard against evil counsels; while they bring punishment on their authors, they do not allow those, who are deceived by them, to go free<sup>9</sup> from guilt and punishment.”

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<sup>8</sup> John Cassian, *Second Conference of Abbot Serenus*, I, viii, 10-11, 17.

<sup>9</sup> That is, we choose our companionship, and we share in whatever punishment they deserve.

“Scripture bears witness that two angels, a good and a bad one, cling to each one of us. Of the good ones Jesus said, ‘Do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 18:10); and this also, ‘The angel of the Lord will encamp round about them that fear him, and will deliver them’ (Psalm 34:7). This is also what was said of Peter, that ‘it is his angel’ (Acts 12:15). If we consider about him who attacked the blessed Job we shall clearly learn that it was he who always plotted against him but never could entice him to sin. He therefore asked for power from the Lord, as he was beaten, not by his Job’s virtue, but by the Lord’s protection, which always shielded him. Of Judas it is also said, ‘Let the devil stand at his right hand’” (Psalm 109:6).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated<sup>10</sup> that we have been given great blessings to discern the workings of evil. Eve did not have this discernment, and our adversary deceived her by perverting the meaning of the words of God. After deceiving Adam and Eve, he thought he had the entire earth in his hand. But he could not deceive Christ; and now Christ has given us the same abilities. Children now mock him who deceived Eve; those who carry the Sign on their forehead detect his devices.

“Beyond human conception are the instructions and gifts of grace, which He has laid up in us. But the mind of man is prone to great evil; moreover, our adversary the devil, envying our possession of such great blessings, goes about seeking to snatch away the seed of the word, which is sown within us. The Lord said, ‘Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in My name, saying, “I am he”; and “the time has drawn near”; do not go after them’ (Luke 21:8). This is a great gift, which the Word has given us, that we should not be deceived by appearances; however these things are concealed, we are able to distinguish them by the grace of the Spirit. The devil is utterly hateful, and as soon as he shows himself, he is rejected by all men. Whether a serpent, a dragon, or a lion seeking whom he may seize and devour, he conceals what he really is, and craftily impersonates that Name which all men desire, deceiving by a false appearance, that he may fasten in his own chains those whom he has led astray.”

“Thus he deceived Eve, artfully adopting the words of God, and perverting their meaning. Thus he suggested evil to the wife of Job, persuading her to pretend affection for her husband, while he taught her to blaspheme God (Job 2:9). Thus does the crafty spirit mock men by false displays, deluding and drawing each into his own pit of wickedness. When he deceived the first man Adam, thinking that through him he would have all men subject to him, he rejoiced and said, ‘I will take with my hand all the world as a nest; I will take them as eggs that have been left; and there is no one that shall escape me’ (Isaiah 10:14 LXX). But when the Lord came to earth, the enemy was unable to deceive the flesh, which He had taken on Him. Even children mocked the one who promised himself the occupation of the whole world. For now the infant child lays his hand on the hole of the cobra (Isaiah 11:8), and laughs at him that deceived Eve; and all that rightly believe in the Lord tread under foot (Luke 10:19) him that said, ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like

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<sup>10</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, To the Bishops of Egypt, I, 1-3.

the Most High' (Isaiah 14:14). Thus he is dishonored, although he still disguises himself; yet now those that carry the Sign on their foreheads detect him; he is rejected by them, is humbled, and put to shame. Even if he transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), his deception will not profit him; for we have been taught that 'though an angel from heaven preach to us any other gospel than what we have received, he is anathema' (Galatians 1:8).

"Although he conceals his natural falsehood, and pretends to speak truth, yet are we 'not ignorant of his devices' (2 Corinthians 2:11), but are able to answer him in the words spoken by the Spirit against him, since 'Praise is not fitting in the mouth of a sinner' (Ecclesiasticus 15:9). Even though he speaks the truth, the deceiver is not worthy of credit. Scripture showed this, when telling of his deception of Eve in Paradise; so the Lord also reproved him. This occurred first on the mountain (Matthew 4:8), when He showed who the crafty spirit was, and proved that it was not one of the saints, but Satan that was tempting Him. For He said, 'Away with you Satan; for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'" (Matthew 4:10).

John Chrysostom spoke<sup>11</sup> of the deception of Eve as the beginning of the deception of humanity. A similar series of events occurred in Corinth. Paul stated, "But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). Just as Eve was deceived into trying to acquire more, so the heretics coming to Corinth spoke as if the Apostles taught incompletely, and overlaid their poison on top of good teaching.

"Even though the serpent was malignant, and Eve did not understand, yet none of this caused the woman to escape punishment. 'Beware then,' he says, 'lest such be your fate, and you have no one to screen you. The serpent promised great things, and so deceived. It is plain that these heretics too, by boasting and puffing themselves up, deceived the Corinthians. We can see this from what follows, 'If he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or if you receive a different Spirit which you did not receive, or a different Gospel which you did not accept, you may well put up with it'" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

"Paul does not say, 'Lest by any means as Adam was deceived' but shows that the men of Corinth were like abused women, sucked in just as Eve was deceived. Paul did not say, 'so you also should be deceived', but, 'so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ'. That is, the deception was not out of wickedness, or out of unbelief, but out of simplicity. Even under such circumstances the deceived are not entitled to forgiveness, but they will be punished, as Eve showed. This is much more the case, when the deceived ones are vain glorious about what they receive."

"Paul's statement, 'If he that comes preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach' (2 Corinthians 11:4), shows that their deceivers were not Corinthians. They were persons from somewhere else who were previously corrupted."

"Instead of recoiling from these heretics, the Corinthians bore with them (2 Corinthians 11:4). Let us pay attention to this, for the danger is great, and the precipice deep, if men run past this carelessly; what is said here gives an entrance

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIII, vv 3-4.



to all the heresies. Those heretics boasted as if the Apostles taught incompletely, and the heretics were introducing somewhat more than they. The heretics were overlaying their doctrines on what the Apostles had taught. Therefore Paul mentioned the serpent and Eve, who was thus deceived by the expectation of acquiring more (i.e. becoming like God). Alluding to this earlier, Paul said, ‘Now you are already rich, you have reigned as kings without us’; and again, ‘we are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ’” (1 Corinthians 4:8, 10).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated<sup>12</sup> that the Arians deceived the Churches just as the serpent deceived Eve; they quote the Scriptures, but interpret them perversely.

“The Arians put on, as the Lord says, sheep’s clothing, and appear like white sepulchers; they took the divine words in their mouth, while inwardly they cherish evil intentions. The serpent was the first to put on this appearance, that inventor of wickedness from the beginning who, in disguise, spoke with Eve and deceived her. After him and with him are all inventors of heresies, who refer to the Scriptures, but do not hold such opinions as the saints have handed down. They receive them as the traditions of men and are mistaken, because they do not rightly know them or their power (Matthew 22:29). Therefore Paul justly praises the Corinthians, because their opinions were in accordance with his traditions (1 Corinthians 11:2). The Lord most righteously reproveth the Jews, saying, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandments of God on account of your traditions?’ (Matthew 15:3) They changed the commandments they received from God after their own understanding, preferring to observe the traditions of men. About these, Paul gave directions to the Galatians, who were in danger of deception. ‘If any man preaches to you anything else than what you have received, let him be accursed’” (Galatians 1:9).

### **The Jewish Leaders Opposed Christ**

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out<sup>13</sup> how Cain, Esau, King Saul and the Jewish people perished because they imitated the devil in his jealousy, deceiving and being deceived.

“At the beginning of the world, the devil was the first who both perished himself and destroyed others. He who had been sustained in angelic majesty, he who was accepted and beloved of God, when he saw man made in the image of God, became jealous with malevolent envy. He hurled down another by the instinct of his jealousy after he himself was first hurled down by jealousy, captive before he took captive, ruined before he ruined others. At the instigation of jealousy, he robbed man of the grace of immortality conferred on him. How great an evil is it, brethren, where an angel fell, where that lofty grandeur could be defrauded and overthrown, where he who deceived was himself deceived! Since then envy rages on the earth, in that he who is about to perish by jealousy obeys the author of his ruin, imitating the devil in his jealousy. As it is written, ‘Through envy of the devil, death came into the world’ (Wisdom 2:24). Therefore they who are on his side imitate him.”

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<sup>12</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, Paschal Letters, II, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cyprian, Treatises, X, 4-5.

“This began the primal hatred of the race of man, hence the abominable fratricides; the unrighteous Cain was jealous of the righteous Abel, in that the wicked persecuted the good with envy and jealousy. The rage of envy prevailed to the consummation of Cain’s wickedness, that he didn’t consider the love of his brother, the immensity of the crime, the fear of God or the penalty of the sin. He was unjustly struck down, who had been the first to show righteousness; he endured hatred who had not known how to hate; he was impiously slain, who did not resist dying. Esau’s hostility to his brother Jacob arose from jealousy also. Because Jacob had received his father’s blessing, Esau was inflamed to a persecuting hatred by jealousy. Joseph was sold by his brethren, where the reason of their selling him proceeded from envy. As a younger brother, he spoke to them in simplicity about what had been shown to him in visions, but their malevolent disposition broke out in envy. King Saul hated David, so as to seek repeated attempts to kill him — innocent, merciful, gentle, patient in meekness — what else was the provocation except the spur of jealousy? When Goliath was slain, by the aid and condescension of God and so great an enemy was routed, the wondering people broke out with acclamation into praises of David. Saul through jealousy conceived the rage of enmity and persecution. Observe also the destruction of the Jewish people, who perished once for all<sup>14</sup>. They perished because they chose to envy Christ rather than believe Him (Matthew 26:3-5). Belittling those great works which He did, they were deceived by blinding jealousy, and could not open the eyes of their heart to the knowledge of divine things.”

### **Simon Magus: A 1<sup>st</sup> Century Equivalent of Jannes and Jambres**

As Philip was preaching Christ to the Samaritans, he ran into Simon Magus, a sorcerer, who had astonished the people of Samaria for a long time. Simon claimed to be someone great and everyone had been saying, “This man is the great power of God” (Acts 8:9-10).

Simon was born in the Samaritan village of Gettai<sup>15</sup>. He was by profession a magician, which trade he learned<sup>16</sup> in Alexandria, Egypt, but he didn’t begin his self-promotion until after the death of John the Baptist in c. 28 AD. He was even referred to<sup>17</sup> as a disciple of John the Baptist for a while. He was a very learned man, and was exceedingly well trained in Greek literature. As a magician, Simon was very much like Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh’s magicians who opposed Moses (2 Timothy 3:8). Just as Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate some of Moses’ miracles, so Simon was very powerful in magic, and Simon learned the black arts from similar sources in Egypt, where Jannes and Jambres had learned them.

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<sup>14</sup> That is, in 70 AD and 135 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup> There are various spellings of the town of Simon’s birth, each phonetically similar to Gettai.

<sup>16</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 23, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Simon produced “miracles” using his secret arts. Clement of Rome wrote<sup>18</sup> of some of these “miracles” that the people of Samaria witnessed.

“He makes statues walk, and he rolls himself on the fire, and is not burned; and sometimes he flies. He makes loaves of bread out of stones; he becomes a serpent; he transforms himself into a goat; he becomes two-faced. He changes himself into gold; he opens locked gates; he melts iron. At banquets he produces images of all manner of forms. In his house he makes dishes fly through the air by themselves to wait on him. I wondered when I heard them say this; but many bore witness that they had been present, and had seen such things”.

Prior to Christ’s baptism, Simon had been a follower<sup>19</sup> of John the Baptist, putting his secret arts on hold for a while, and became one of John’s thirty chief men. When John was beheaded, Simon was in Egypt practicing his secret arts. When Simon returned, a man named Dositheus had taken over as leader of John’s followers. Simon murdered Dositheus, making it seem like he died of natural causes, and then took over the leadership of John’s followers himself.

This didn’t last too long, however. Simon revealed his exalted views<sup>20</sup> of himself to fellow members of the Thirty, where he claimed to be God, and born of a virgin, just like Christ. The other members of the Thirty did not go along with Simon in this heresy, but instead inquired of him as to the extent of his opinions. They were all aghast at what Simon rushed headlong into, and they were ashamed of their association with him<sup>21</sup>, and counseled him to change. Unlike Simon, they were not after personal glory and honor. All their efforts were to no avail however.

In the 40’s AD, following his encounter with the Apostle Peter a second time, Simon went to Rome and he so impressed<sup>22</sup> the Emperor Claudius and the Roman Senate by his secret arts that Claudius erected a statue of Simon along the Tiber River with the inscription, “To Simon, the Holy God”. Thus Simon was very prominent across the Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Justin Martyr stated<sup>23</sup> that the statue was still there over 100 years later. Simon was so influential that four of the original Seventy Apostles apostatized to follow him.

When Simon encountered Deacon Philip in the city of Samaria, Simon was struck with the fact that Philip could do things that he could not, just as Jannes and Jambres were struck with the fact that Moses could do things that they couldn’t. In order to get a closer look at Philip’s technique, Simon asked to be baptized, and became a follower of Philip (Acts 8:13). When Peter and John came from Jerusalem, Simon saw the Holy Spirit conferred on people by the laying on

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<sup>18</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 32-34, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 23-26, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, II, 14-15, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 27-28, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI.

<sup>23</sup> Justin Martyr, First Apology, LVI.

of hands (Acts 8:17-18). Simon offered to purchase this ability from Peter, but Peter rebuked him saying, in effect, “Take your money and go to hell!” (Acts 8:20)

John Chrysostom stated<sup>24</sup> that Peter saw right through Simon Magus. Simon was an unbeliever throughout his contact with Philip, and did everything from malice. His only “belief” was such as is expressed by the demons (James 2:19). Philip’s miracles made Simon’s sorcery look impotent, and Peter read Simon’s thoughts. Simon didn’t care to receive the Holy Spirit; he only wanted the ability to confer it on others to show how powerful he was.

“Simon had such a low conception of the gift of God, that he imagined it to be entirely a thing of man. It is not this! Peter well calls the affair a gift, ‘You thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money’ (Acts 8:20). Notice how on all occasions the Apostles are not interested in money! Peter told Simon, ‘Your heart is not right in the sight of God’ (Acts 8:21). Notice how Simon does everything from malice? To be simple, however, was what was needed. For had it been done with simplicity, Peter would have welcomed Simon’s willing mind. Do you see that to have low conceptions of great things<sup>25</sup> is to sin doubly? Accordingly, Peter asks Simon to do two things, ‘Repent and pray, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven’ (Acts 8:22). It was a wicked thought Simon had entertained, and Peter knew him to be incorrigible. ‘For I perceive that you are poisoned by bitterness, and bound by iniquity’ (Acts 8:23). These are words of tremendous wrath! But otherwise Peter did not punish him, that faith may not be of compulsion, and that he may introduce the subject of repentance. Also, it sufficed for correction to convict him, to tell him what was in his heart, to bring him to confess himself. Simon said, ‘Pray for me’; this is a confession that he had done wrong. Notice what an unbeliever he is; when he was convicted, and then he “believed”. When he was convicted again, then he became humble. That is, seeing Philip’s miracles, Simon was amazed (Acts 8:13), and came over. He thought he would be able to escape detection; he thought the thing was an art. But when he didn’t have power to defeat the Apostles, again, he fears the multitude, and is afraid to deny it. He might have said, ‘I did not know; I did it in simplicity’. But he was struck with dismay first because he was blown away by the miracles and secondly, that his thoughts were made clear. As a result, Simon eventually went a long way off, to Rome, thinking that Peter would not soon come there.”

Chrysostom also stated<sup>26</sup> that one reason why the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria was to rid the Samaritans of the influences of Simon’s sorcery. After all, Simon had been working his sorcery on the Samaritans for a long time, and his influence was extensive throughout Samaria (Acts 8:9-10).

“Why do they go there where the tyranny was really bad, where those most bent on killing them were? Just as generals do in wars, they occupy that part of the scene of war, which is most distressed. That is, ‘They preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans’ (Acts 8:25). Observe how they do not of set

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<sup>24</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v. 18-20.

<sup>25</sup> That is, (1) to not recognize the work of the Holy Spirit; and (2) to blaspheme the Holy Spirit by calling His work a thing of man.

<sup>26</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v 25.

purpose come to Samaria, but driven by the stress of persecution, just as it was in the case of Christ. When the Apostles go there, it is to men now believers, no longer just Samaritans.”

“When you see thorns, you cut them up, you burn them, and you utterly destroy them, to rid your land of the hurt that arises from them. If you see the laborers overrun with thorns, and do not cut them up, wouldn’t you be afraid of the Owner, Who shall call you to account?”

We might ask why the Evangelist Luke included mention of Simon Magus at all in Acts. Simon was a major heretical force to be reckoned with in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was a time of great turmoil due to the extreme heresies that the Church had to deal with. Simon was referred to as the source of all these heresies, and had many followers, where each added a little twist to make their own teachings unique. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, writing at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (c. 107 AD) referred<sup>27</sup> to Simon as the firstborn son of Satan. Irenaeus of Lyons (2<sup>nd</sup> Century) documented<sup>28</sup> Simon’s heresies, referred to Simon as the father of all heretics and described many of his followers. Cyril of Jerusalem (4<sup>th</sup> Century) stated<sup>29</sup> that Simon was the source of all the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century heresies.

As Luke was writing his account of the Acts of the Apostles in the early 60’s AD, where he ended his account before Paul was released from house arrest in c. 62 AD, Simon was still alive and had become good friends with Emperor Nero. Peter had already had a major encounter with Simon in Rome in the mid 50’s AD, where he debunked Simon, incurring Nero’s wrath; as a result of this, Peter had to leave Rome quickly. To continue the fight against Simon’s influence in Rome, Peter and Paul had 18 of the original Seventy move to Rome temporarily. These are listed in Table 1 (Romans 16):

**Table 1**

**The Seventy in Rome in 55 AD**

Aquila	Epaenetus	Andronicus
Amplias	Urbanus	Stachys
Apelles	Aristobulus	Herodion
Narcissus	Rufus	Asyncritus
Phlegon	Hermas	Patrobas
Hermes	Philologus	Olympas

As Luke was finishing his account of the Acts of the Apostles, one of the original Seventy had already apostatized to follow Simon, and three more would soon follow. These four are:

**Table 2**

**The Seventy Who Apostatized**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Nicolas of Antioch	Revelation 2:6, 15

<sup>27</sup> Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, Preface.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxvii, 4.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, ix, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.

Demas	Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, 2 Timothy 4:10
Hermogenes	2 Timothy 1:15
Phygellus	2 Timothy 1:15

The Evangelist Luke had good reason to include the early encounter of Simon Magus with the Evangelist Philip and the Apostle Peter in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke's account served as a warning for the Churches to beware of Simon and his followers.

## The Antichrist

Deception has a direction and it will have its climax just before the Lord's return at the end of the age. One might say that all deception leads up to this point, and that everyone involved in organized deceit anticipates their master, the Antichrist.

Jesus spoke of the Antichrist's coming just before He returns, "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22). Daniel had predicted of the Antichrist, "Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity" (Daniel 8:25).

Paul gave some more details about the Antichrist, referring to him as "the man of sin" and "the lawless one", whose mode of operation is deceit.

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

The Apostle John predicted, "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived" (Revelation 13:13-14). John also referred to the many heretics coming into the Church as antichrists just like the Antichrist, who is to come.

"You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but

they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made clear, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:18-19).

John Chrysostom also compared<sup>30</sup> the deceivers in the days of the Apostles with the deceit of the Antichrist before the Second Coming.

“Notice how Jesus said nothing of war, when He taught about His Advent, but of those that attempt to deceive. Some in the days of the Apostles deceived the multitude, ‘For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ”, and will deceive many’ (Matthew 24:5); and others shall do so before His Second Coming, who shall also be more grievous than the ones in the days of the Apostles. ‘For they shall show’, He said, ‘signs and wonders, so as to deceive if possible even the elect’ (Matthew 24:24): Here He is speaking of Antichrist, and indicates that some also shall serve him. Paul spoke of him likewise. Having called him ‘man of sin’, and ‘son of perdition’, He added, ‘he is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish’ (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). For great then will be the deceiving, because even deceiving miracles are performed”.

Cyril of Jerusalem summarized the Church’s expectation of the Antichrist in the times of the Apostles. While it is not for us to know the times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own power, we needed to know the signs of the times, since we are looking for Christ’s return. He did not want us to die in deceit, led astray by that false Antichrist, so He gave us some things to watch out for.

1. “Pay attention<sup>31</sup> that no man mislead you; for many shall come in My Name, saying, ‘I am Christ’, and shall mislead many” (Matthew 24:5). This has happened in part; already Simon Magus has said this, and Menander<sup>32</sup>, and some others of the godless leaders of heresy; and others will say it in our days, or after us.
2. “The Apostle Paul gave<sup>33</sup> a clear sign, saying, ‘Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Now is the falling away, where men have fallen away from the right faith. Some preach the identity of the Son with the Father; others dare to say that Christ was brought into being out of nothing. Before the heretics were made clear; now the Church is filled with heretics in disguise.”
3. “When Christ was<sup>34</sup> about to take man’s nature, and God was expected to be born of a Virgin, the devil created prejudice against this, by craftily preparing among idol-worshippers fables of false gods, begetting and begotten of women, that, the falsehood having come first, the truth, as he supposed, might be disbelieved. Now, since the true Christ is to come a second time, the adversary, taking advantage of the simple, and especially of those of the circumcision, brings in a certain man who is a

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<sup>30</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVI, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Menander was a master of illusion, like Simon Magus, and deceived many with his magic tricks, making people think that he worked miracles like the Apostles. For more information, see the Study on Simon Magus Heresiarch.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 11.

- magician, and most expert in sorceries and enchantments of beguiling craftiness. He shall seize for himself the power of the Roman empire, and shall falsely style himself Christ; by this name of Christ he will deceive the Jews, who are looking for the Anointed, and seduce those of the Gentiles by his magical illusions.”
4. “Satan will use<sup>35</sup> the Antichrist as an instrument, working in his own person through him; for knowing that his judgment shall have no rest, he wages war no more by his servants, but by himself more openly. The father of falsehood will make a show of the works of falsehood, that the multitudes may think that they see a dead man raised, who is not raised, and lame men walking, and blind men seeing, when the cure has not been made.”
  5. “At first he will make<sup>36</sup> a pretense of benevolence, but afterwards he will display his relentless temper, chiefly against the Saints of God. Daniel said, ‘I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints’ (Daniel 8:12-13, Revelation 13:7); and again elsewhere, ‘there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation upon earth’ (Matthew 24:21). Dreadful is that beast, a mighty dragon, unconquerable by man, ready to devour.”
  6. “The Martyrs of that time excel<sup>37</sup> all martyrs. For the Martyrs up to now have wrestled with men only; but in the time of Antichrist they shall do battle with Satan in his own person. In earlier ages, persecuting kings only put to death; they did not pretend to raise the dead, nor did they make false shows of signs and wonders. But in the time of Antichrist, there shall be the evil inducement both of fear and of deceit, ‘so that if it be possible the very elect shall be deceived’ (Matthew 24:24). Let it never enter into the heart of any then alive to ask, ‘What more did Christ do?’ For by what power does this man do these things? If it were it not God’s will, He would not have allowed them. Paul warns us beforehand, ‘For this reason God will send them strong delusion’ (2 Thessalonians 2:11); not that they might make excuse, but that they might be condemned. This refers to those, who won’t believe the truth, that is, the true Christ, but had pleasure in unrighteousness, that is, in Antichrist.”

### **The Demons Are Involved with Deceit**

All deceit comes from the demonic powers. This is the case whether one is speaking of individuals or nations. Unbelievers even recognize this on occasion.

Cyprian of Carthage stated<sup>38</sup> that the kingdoms of the earth do not rise to supremacy through merit, but usually start with criminals founding a state to promote their own agenda. Some are aware of the workings of God, but it is mostly the workings of Satan that affect their daily lives and try to turn them away from God.

“The principle is the same with every nation, which misleads and deceives a credulous and foolish rabble with tricks that darken the truth. Impure and wandering spirits, steeped in earthly vices and ruined themselves, do not cease to seek the ruin of others. They infuse into others the error of their own degradation. The poets acknowledge these demons, and Socrates declared that he was

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<sup>35</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, VI, 6-7.



instructed and ruled at the will of a demon. The Magi have a power either for mischief or for mockery, of whom, the chief Hostanes<sup>39</sup> says that the form of the true God cannot be seen, and declares that true angels stand round about His throne. Plato concurs, maintaining one God, and calls the rest angels or demons. Moreover, Hermes Trismegistus<sup>40</sup> speaks of one God, and confesses that He is incomprehensible, and beyond our estimation.”

“These spirits, therefore, are lurking under the statues and consecrated images; these inspire their prophets with their supernatural knowledge, animate the fibers of the entrails (to predict the future), direct the flights of birds, rule the lots, give efficiency to oracles, are always mixing up falsehood with truth, for they are both deceived and they deceive (2 Timothy 3:13). The demons disturb their life and their sleep; creep into their bodies, secretly terrify their minds, distort their limbs, break their health. They excite diseases to force them to worship of themselves, so that when glutted with the steam of the altars and the piles of cattle, they may loosen what they had bound, and so appear to have healed someone. The only remedy from them is when their own mischief ceases; nor have they any other desire than to call men away from God, and to turn them from the understanding of the true Faith, to superstition with respect to themselves. Since they themselves are under punishment, they wish to seek for themselves companions in punishment, whom they may make sharers in their crime. When commanded by us through the true God, they yield and confess, and are constrained to go out from the bodies possessed. You may see them at our voice, smitten with stripes, burned with fire, stretched out with the increase of a growing punishment, howling, groaning, entreating, confessing where they came from when they depart, even in the hearing of those persons who worship them. They either come out at once or vanishing gradually, as the faith of the sufferer starts to help, or the grace of the healer affects it. Because of this, they urge the common people to detest our name, so that men begin to hate us before they know us, lest they should either imitate us if known, or not be able to condemn us.”

Cyprian gave<sup>41</sup> an example of the workings of a demon in an Egyptian prophetess in his day, where she imitated the things of the Church, including Baptism and celebrating the Eucharist, but who also seduced a presbyter and a deacon into intercourse.

“A certain woman arose among us, announced herself as a prophetess, and acted as if she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She was so moved by the principal demons, that for a long time she deceived the brotherhood, accomplishing certain wonderful things, and promised that she would cause the earth to be shaken. The power of the demon was not so great that he could shake the earth, but sometimes a wicked spirit, perceiving that there will be an earthquake, pretends that he will do what he sees will happen. By these lies he had so subdued the minds of individuals that they obeyed him and followed whatever he commanded. He would make that woman walk barefoot in the winter with bare feet over frozen

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<sup>39</sup>Pliny wrote that Hostanes or Osthanes was a soothsayer who introduced Persian magic into Greece by accompanying the Persian King Xerxes on his expeditions in c. 480 BC.

<sup>40</sup>Hermes Trismegistus was a combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth and was connected with astrology and alchemy.

<sup>41</sup>Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, LXXIV, 10.

snow, and not to be troubled or hurt in any degree by that walking. She would say that she was hurrying to Jerusalem, pretending as if she had come from there. She deceived one of the presbyters and a deacon, so that they had intercourse with her, which was soon detected. All of a sudden there appeared to her one of our exorcists, an approved man who, stimulated by the exhortation also of very many brethren, raised himself up against that wicked spirit to overcome it. The demon, by its subtle fallacy, had predicted this a little while before, that a certain adverse and unbelieving tempter would come. Yet that exorcist, inspired by God's grace, bravely resisted, and showed that that, which was thought holy, was indeed a most wicked spirit. That woman, by deceitfulness of the demon, was attempting many things for the deceiving of the faithful. She had deceived many, and had frequently dared to pretend that she celebrated the Eucharist, and offered sacrifice to the Lord. She also baptized many, making use of the usual words of the Church, that nothing might seem to be different from that of the Church."

John Chrysostom noted<sup>42</sup> that it is extreme delusion to think that the unrighteous will be included in the Kingdom of God.

"Paul had said, 'Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, sodomites, the covetous, thieves, drunkards, revilers, and extortionists, shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). When Paul was speaking about the unclean he mentioned all the unclean together (Ephesians 5:5, 2 Corinthians 6:17); so again, when mentioning the covetous he brings forward all the covetous, thus making his rebukes familiar to those who have such things on their conscience. For the continual mention of the punishment laid up for others makes correction easy to be received, as it comes into conflict with our own sins. Paul uttered this threat, not as being conscious of their doing such things, but being spoken indefinitely and so wounding their conscience secretly."

"By saying 'Do not be deceived', Paul referred to some who maintain what many men now say: God being good and kind to man, does not take vengeance on our evil deeds. They say that He will never exact justice of anyone for anything. On account of these Paul said, 'Do not be deceived'. It is the extreme of error and delusion to think such things about God that no rational man would consider. Therefore David said, 'You have conceived iniquity, that I shall be like you; I will reprove you and set before your face your iniquities'" (Psalm 7:14; 51:3 LXX).

"Many have attacked these words as extremely severe, since God places the drunkard and the reviler with the adulterer and the abominable. These offenses are not equal; how then is the award of punishment the same? First, that drunkenness is no small thing, seeing that Christ Himself delivered over to hell the one that called his brother 'Fool' (Matthew 5:22). Often that sin has brought death. Second, the Jewish people committed the greatest of their sins through drunkenness. Third, it is not about punishment that he is speaking of so far, but of exclusion from the kingdom. From the kingdom both are equally thrust out; but

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<sup>42</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XVI, 8.

whether in hell they will find any difference, it is not for this present occasion to inquire.”

### **The Result of Deceivers: Persecution of Christians**

There is a partially hidden agenda with deceivers. The key is, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12) i.e. like Moses and like Paul himself. The Lord spelled out the reasons for this: some people simply hate God! (John 15:18-16:4) Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”, and “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18, 20).

And why does the world hate God? He exposes its inadequacy just as Moses and Aaron exposed the inadequacy and impotence of the secret arts of Jannes and Jambres.

This happens to us also, without our even trying. Jesus 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 abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:23-24). The world, on the other hand, loves the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (John 2:5-17). By loving God, we testify that all this is passing away and is inadequate and impotent, whether we say anything or not!

This was true in Paul’s experience also and he reminded Timothy of this (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Timothy was evidently familiar with what happened to Paul on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:44-14:20) in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium and Lystra. The persecution grew worse as Paul and Barnabas went along. The more miracles Paul performed, the greater the persecution. In Lystra, Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

So what did Paul say Timothy should do, knowing that persecutions will come? “But you must continue in the things which you have learned, the Holy Scriptures which make you wise to salvation.” Paul continues, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The Scriptures are also encouraging in that we see that we have a lot of company: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely (i.e. lying) for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Apollinarius of Hierapolis, writing against the Montanist heretics, asserted that the ungodly are not persecuted:

“Let them tell us, before God, who of all their prophets, beginning with Montanus and his wives, has been persecuted by the Jews and killed by the ungodly. No one! Who among them has been arrested for the Name of Christ, and crucified? Again, no one!”

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic adds<sup>43</sup> that heresies are usually closer to the worldly point of view:

“Heresies are usually closer to the worldly and demonic spirit, and therefore the world and the demons do not persecute their own. To be constantly under persecution, with short breathing spaces, is a distinguishing mark of the Faith and of the Orthodox Church. This persecution has existed throughout the whole of history, whether externally or internally; externally from unbelievers and internally from heretics”.

Paul warned Timothy of trouble ahead in Ephesus, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). The Apostle John had to deal with one of these men over 20 years later in ex-deacon Nicolas (Acts 6:5) who tolerated idolatry and encouraged fornication (Revelation 2:6, 15) as did others.

Addressing times when the evil men seem to prevail, John Chrysostom added<sup>44</sup> that we should not be disturbed by any of this.

“Let none of these things disturb you, if they are in prosperity and you are being tested. Such is the nature of the case. From my own instance you may learn that is impossible for man, in his warfare with the wicked, not to be exposed to tribulation. One cannot be in combat and live luxuriously; one cannot be wrestling and feasting. Let none, therefore, of those who are contending seek for ease or joyous living. Again, the present state is contest, warfare, tribulation, distress and trials, and the scene of conflicts. The season of rest is not now; this is the time for work and labor”.

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic added<sup>45</sup> that the Lord and the Apostles demonstrated this by their own example.

“The Lord Jesus both foretold this and showed it by His own example. And the Apostles said it, and showed it by their own example. And all the God-bearing Fathers of the Church, and confessors and martyrs, said this, and showed it by their own example. Can we have any further doubt that it is by the narrow gate that one enters into the Kingdom of God?”

In the Gospel lesson, we have a small example of one form persecution can take: ridicule by the proud and self-righteous. For more discussion on the subject of persecution by men who hate God, see the Feast Days of Demetrius and George and the Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Cross, with the Sundays before and after.

### **Antidotes to Deception:**

There are a number of antidotes to deception, where each one provides some means to disconnect us from the operations of the demons. Knowing the Scriptures is a good first step, and the application of the Scriptures requires some thought and guidance. Living a godly life is

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<sup>43</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

<sup>44</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v.13.

<sup>45</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

also critical as an antidote as is being wise for salvation in knowing some of the methods the demons use.

## Knowing the Scriptures

The Scriptures are an immensely valuable resource against deception, but there are other resources also. Abraham managed to be a model of godliness for all future generations before Moses had drafted<sup>46</sup> the Pentateuch, but not everyone has the faith to do what Abraham did. We desperately need to know what others before us did to avoid deception and seduction by demons.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>47</sup> that paying attention to the Scriptures not only helps us avoid entanglement in deceit, but can also protect our friends. The Scriptures have been preserved for our benefit; not knowing them results in our accomplishing nothing profitable.

“Few men are willing to pay attention to the Scriptures. If we did pay attention, not only would we avoid ourselves being entangled by deceit, but we would also set others free who are deceived, and draw them out of danger. For the strong soldier can not only help himself, but also protect his comrade, and free him from the malice of the enemy. But as it is, some do not even know that there are any Scriptures. Yet the Holy Spirit made so many wise provisions in order that they might be preserved.”

“And look at it from the beginning, that you may learn the unspeakable love of God. He inspired the blessed Moses; He engraved the tablets; He detained him on the mountain forty days, then forty days additional to give the Law. After this He sent prophets who suffered innumerable hardship. Wars came; many people were killed, and the books were burned. He inspired another admirable man, Ezra, to publish them, and caused them to be put together from the remains. After this He arranged that the Seventy should translate<sup>48</sup> them. Christ came and received the Scriptures; the Apostles dispersed them among men.”

“After so great painstaking, the Apostles wrote, ‘they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come’ (1 Corinthians 10:11). Christ said, ‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures’ (Matthew 22:29); Paul said, ‘That we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope’ (Romans 15:4). Again, ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable’ (2 Timothy 3:16). And ‘let the word of Christ dwell in you richly’ (Colossians 3:16). David said, ‘he shall meditate in His Law day and night’ (Psalm 1:2), and Solomon said, ‘Let your talk be with the wise and all your communication be in the Law of the Most High’ (Ecclesiasticus 9:15 LXX). Again, ‘How sweet are Your words to my<sup>49</sup> throat’; ‘more than honey and the honeycomb to my mouth’ (Psalm 119:103 LXX). Moses said, ‘You shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down,

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<sup>46</sup> It is possible that Abraham had some written records from the Patriarchs before him, but he certainly did not have the Old Testament that we have today.

<sup>47</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, VIII, 9.

<sup>48</sup> That is, the Septuagint translation from Hebrew to Greek that was started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC by seventy translators. Most of the Old Testament quotes that appear in the New Testament come from the Septuagint. The Septuagint is often referred to today as the LXX, from the Seventy translators.

<sup>49</sup> Chrysostom noted that He said this not to my hearing, but to my “throat”.

and when you rise up' (Deuteronomy 6:7). Paul said, 'Continue in them' (1 Timothy 4:16). Innumerable things one might say concerning them. But after so many things, there are some who do not even know that there are Scriptures at all. For this cause, believe me, nothing sound, nothing profitable comes from us."

## What Are the Scriptures?

When the New Testament writers referred to "The Scriptures", they were referring to the Old Testament, since the canon of the New Testament was not established until the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. Among the Christian communities, it was the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) that was used exclusively, except for the Hebrew-speaking communities in Judea. The Septuagint translation (or LXX from the Seventy Jewish scholars who did the translating) was done in Alexandria between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, and had become very highly respected among Jewish communities throughout the world. When the Christians began using the LXX exclusively, however, it fell<sup>50</sup> into disfavor among the Jewish communities beginning in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

Today the oldest complete copies of the Old Testament date from the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD for Hebrew texts (the [Masoretic Text](#)) and from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD for LXX texts. Fragments of LXX texts date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, and fragments of both Hebrew and LXX texts are included in the Dead Sea Scrolls collection (1<sup>st</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). As a result of detailed studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there has been renewed interest in the LXX since it seems to have been based on an earlier text<sup>51</sup> than the existing copies of the Masoretic Text available today. Many of the fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls agree<sup>52</sup> with the LXX and not with the Masoretic Text.

A problem with corruption of Hebrew texts in the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries resulted from the opposition by the Jewish leaders to the spread of Christianity throughout the world. Since the Christians were using the LXX, Jewish leaders stopped using the LXX, and retranslated<sup>53</sup> the Hebrew text into Greek. In addition, Jewish leaders dropped some books from the Hebrew canon; these deletions became known as the "Apocrypha" or "hidden" books<sup>54</sup>. At about the same time, Jewish scholars also began to modify the Hebrew text to delete obvious references to Christ and thus secure their theological position. Justin Martyr mentioned some of these deletions<sup>55</sup> in his *Dialog with the Jewish philosopher, Trypho*, in the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The Masoretic text today has been restored to include the deletions that Justin objected to, but there are other obvious references to Christ that remain deleted from the Masoretic text, but are present in the LXX. One example of this can be seen from an Old Testament quote from the LXX that appears in the New Testament. If we compare Hebrews 1:6 with Deuteronomy 32:43, it is a

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<sup>50</sup> See [http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history\\_of\\_lxx.pdf](http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history_of_lxx.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint>

<sup>52</sup> See <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Pines/7224/Rick/Septuagint/spindex.htm>. In addition, Jones concludes his study by saying that the Dead Sea Scroll fragments support the LXX text almost universally and not the Masoretic Text.

<sup>53</sup> See [http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history\\_of\\_lxx.pdf](http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history_of_lxx.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> During the controversies of the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Apocrypha began to take on a negative connotation as being "spurious" or "false". For details, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocryph>.

<sup>55</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Trypho*, 71-74.

word-for-word quote from the LXX, but this significant reference to Christ is completely missing from the Masoretic Text. [Almost all English translations of the Old Testament today are from the Masoretic Text.] This can be seen from the following quotes:

- But when He again brings the Firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." (Hebrews 1:6)
- Rejoice, ye heavens, with Him, and let all the angels of God worship Him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with His people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in Him; for He will avenge the blood of His sons, and He will render vengeance, and recompense justice to His enemies, and will reward them that hate Him; and the Lord shall purge the land of His people (Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX).
- "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people" (Deuteronomy 32:43 NKJ based on MT).

As the New Testament writers drafted their respective writings, most of their quotes came from the LXX, and only a few came<sup>56</sup> from the Hebrew text. The Orthodox Church has always used the LXX as the Old Testament text, while the Western Church began using a version of the Hebrew text starting with Jerome in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, Jerome's Hebrew text was apparently different<sup>57</sup> from today's Masoretic Text.

### **Abraham: Godliness Prior to the Scriptures**

Old Testament and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called "The friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). By faith Abraham obeyed and he had the vision to wait for the city, which has foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham believed God and the belief (i.e. faith) was reckoned to him as righteousness. He is called the father of all who believe, and the heir of the world (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:11ff). Thus Abraham exemplifies the Grace of God. Abraham received faith according to grace (Romans 4:16), just as all who since him have received faith.

Yet Abraham didn't live in a vacuum; he lived according to the Law that had been handed down from Adam. Tertullian stated<sup>58</sup>,

"In this Law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, 'You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; you shall not kill', etc."

John Cassian added<sup>59</sup> that the saints prior to Abraham observed the commands not only of the Law but even anticipated those of the Gospel. In Abraham this "law of love" produced a close relationship with God, and Abraham was called "The friend of God" (James 2:23, 2

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<sup>56</sup> See the works of Rick Grant Jones in comparing the New Testament quotes from the LXX versus the Hebrew text. See <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Pines/7224/Rick/Septuagint/spindex.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> R. Grant Jones, Notes on the Septuagint, February 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

<sup>59</sup> John Cassian, Conferences I, viii, 23.

Chronicles 20:7). Similarly with Moses: God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). Christ illustrated this further. Speaking to His disciples, the Lord said, “No longer do I call you slaves, for a slave does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

As drafted, “The Law is not made for a righteous person” (1 Timothy 1:9). Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote<sup>60</sup>,

“The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the Law in themselves”.

The Early Church taught<sup>61</sup> that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law but the bonds and the collar.

The purpose of the Law was as our pedagogue until Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Yet Jesus said of Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). As a result, Abraham is referred to as “The father of all those who believe” (Romans 4:11). Those who obey the Law as Abraham did are now sons of Abraham and heirs according to the promise and are blessed with the believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29). John Chrysostom added<sup>62</sup>,

“Paul showed that Faith was prior to the Law, as is evident from Abraham’s case, who was justified before the giving of the Law. He showed too that later events fell out according to prophecy. ‘The Scripture’, Paul said, ‘foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham’ (Galatians 3:8-9). Before He gave the Law, He Himself had decreed that the Gentiles should be justified by Faith. For He said, referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, ‘In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (Genesis 12:3); this was at a time when Faith existed, but not the Law. ‘So then, those, who are of faith, are blessed with the faithful Abraham’” (Galatians 3:9).

Comparing Israel to the Church, Chrysostom continued<sup>63</sup>,

“If now they were chosen by God, not for their own good deeds, it is clear that by grace they obtained this honor. And we too all are saved by grace, but for objects much greater and higher. By this grace we have become the beloved of God, no longer as servants, but as sons and friends”.

## **The Scriptures Are More Trustworthy Than an Angelic Appearance**

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<sup>60</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 20-21.

<sup>62</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary On Galatians, Chapter 3.

<sup>63</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John XIV, 2



When it comes to trustworthiness, the Scriptures are very good. An appearance of an angel can be misleading, since Satan can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

John Chrysostom noted<sup>64</sup> that the Lord and the Apostle Paul preferred the Scriptures over both the raising of the dead and over an angelic appearance. An angel is only a servant; but the Lord Himself sent the Scriptures.

“When the rich man requested Abraham to send Lazarus with his finger dipped in water, Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them; if they won’t listen to them, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead’ (Luke 16:31). Christ introduced Abraham speaking this way to show that He would have the Scriptures counted more worthy of credence, even than one raised from the dead. Paul also prefers the Scriptures over an angel come down from heaven (2 Corinthians 11:14). And justly so, for the angels, though very strong, are only servants, but the Scriptures were all written and sent, not by servants, but by God the Lord of all. Paul said, ‘if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be anathema’ (Galatians 1:8, 2 Corinthians 11:4). In that he anathematized evangelists and angels who strayed from the truth, he included every dignity, and included himself. ‘Don’t tell me’, he exclaims, ‘that my fellow-apostles and colleagues have so spoken; I don’t even spare myself if I preach such things’. He didn’t say this to condemn the Apostles for swerving from the message they were commissioned to deliver; far from it. He showed that in the discussion of truth, the dignity of persons is not to be considered.”

### **The Treasures of the Scriptures**

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Timothy learned a lot from Paul and others of the Seventy who traveled with Paul. He had also been prepared in his childhood with an excellent knowledge of the Scriptures, which became a treasure stored up in his heart.

John Chrysostom spoke<sup>65</sup> of reading the Scriptures as getting a look at a treasure, where Satan tries to keep us away from this.

“Do you suppose that the reading of the Scriptures pertains only to monks, when you need it much more than they do? Those that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds have the most need for medicines. Worse than not reading is to think of reading the Scriptures as superfluous; these are the words of diabolical invention. Don’t you hear Paul saying, ‘all these things are written for our admonition?’ (1 Corinthians 10:11) If you had to pick up the Gospel Book from the altar at Church, you would not choose to do so with unwashed, dirty hands, would you? The things that are stored within it, don’t you think that they

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<sup>64</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 8-9.

<sup>65</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, II, 10-11.

are highly necessary? It is because of this, that all things are turned upside down.”

“If you want to learn how great the profit of the Scriptures is, examine yourself; what do you become by listening to Psalms, versus what do you become by listening to a song of Satan. What frame of mind do you have when staying in a Church, versus sitting in a nightclub? Think about this and you will see that great is the difference between one soul and another. Therefore Paul said, ‘Evil company corrupt good habits’ (1 Corinthians 15:33). For this cause we need good songs continually; they serve as charms from the Spirit. This is why we excel the irrational creatures; with respect to all other things, we are actually inferior to many animals in strength, coordination and the five senses. The Scriptures are a soul’s food; this is its ornament, this is its security.”

“Let us not despise the hearing of the Scriptures. To do so is of Satan’s devising, not allowing us to see the treasure, lest we should gain the riches. Therefore he says that listening to the divine Laws is nothing, lest he should see us acquire the practice from the listening. Knowing that this is his evil art, let us fortify ourselves against him on all sides, that being fenced with this armor, we may remain unconquered ourselves.”

Chrysostom also compared<sup>66</sup> reading the Scriptures to mining for gold. Even the smallest clue could reveal great wealth.

“As in gold mines, skilled miners would not dare to overlook even the smallest vein of gold as possibly producing much wealth. So in the Scriptures; we may miss great wealth if we pass by the smallest letter or stroke (Matthew 5:18); we must investigate them all. For they are all uttered by the Holy Spirit, and nothing useless is written in them.”

Chrysostom also spoke<sup>67</sup> about how Jesus tried to get the Jewish leaders of His day to dig below the surface to find the treasure He was speaking of. However, they were content to a reading of the Scriptures by rote and without faith.

“In the things of this life a man can gain no great profit if he conduct himself in an indifferent and chance way. Much more will this be the case in spiritual things, since these require yet greater attention. Because of this, Christ referred the Jews of His day to the Scriptures, not to a mere reading, but a careful and considerate search. He didn’t say, ‘Read the Scriptures’; He said, ‘Search the Scriptures’ (John 5:39). The things about Him required great attention, for they had been concealed from the beginning for the advantage of the men of that time. He asked them now to dig down that they might be able to discover what lay in the depth below. These things were not on the surface, nor were they in open view, but lay like some treasure hidden very deep. He that searches for hidden things will never find the object of his search, unless he seeks them with care. He said, ‘Search the Scriptures, because in them you think you have eternal life’ (John 5:39). He didn’t say, ‘You have’, but ‘you think’, showing that they gained nothing great from them. They expected to be saved by the mere reading, without

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<sup>66</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVI, 1.

<sup>67</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XLI, 1.

the addition of faith. What Christ said is this: ‘Don’t you admire the Scriptures; don’t you think that they are the causes of all life? By these Christ confirmed His words, because the Scriptures testify of Him. Yet the Jewish leaders would not come to Him that they may have eternal life’. It was thus with good reason that Christ said, ‘you think’, because the Jewish leaders would not obey, but merely prided themselves on the bare reading.”

Ambrose of Milan looked<sup>68</sup> at the Scriptures as a feast of wisdom and the individual books as the dishes prepared. We need to carry out in action what we receive in order to show the grace that was granted to us.

“It is a good thing for us to be exhorted by the Scriptures, and that the word of God should come down upon us like the dew. When you sit at the table of Solomon, understand who that great man is. Set in the paradise of delight and placed at the feast of wisdom, think of what is put before you! The divine Scriptures are the feast of wisdom, and the single books are the various dishes. Know what dishes the banquet offers, then stretch out your hand, that those things which you read, or which you receive from the Lord your God, you may carry out in action. Nourished by the feast, you may show the grace that was granted to you by your duties. Such was the case with Peter and Paul, who in preaching the Gospel made some return to Him, Who freely gave them all things. So that each of them might say, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace in me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all’” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

### **The Mind of the Scriptures**

There is a mind of the Scriptures just as there is a mind of the Church. If all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16), one can surmise that there may be hidden meanings and a depth that is hard to fathom. The key to understanding the mind of the Scriptures is a purifying of one’s heart in order to become close to God.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>69</sup> that some people insult God by saying that the Readings of the Scriptures are always the same. Yet they don’t mind seeing the same shows over and over in the theater. It is not possible ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures in these Readings.

“Just as our mouth is the mouth of our soul, though the soul has no mouth, so the mouth of the Prophets is the mouth of God. The deacon cries out, ‘Let us attend to the Reading’. It is the common voice of the whole Church, the voice that he speaks, and yet no one listens. After him the Reader begins, ‘The Prophecy of Isaiah’, and still no one listens, although Prophecy has nothing of man in it. Then after this, the Reader says, ‘Thus says the Lord’, and still no one listens. After this comes punishment and vengeance, and still even then no one listens. What is the common excuse? ‘It is always the same things over again’. Most of all, this is what ruins you. Suppose you knew the Readings, even so you certainly should not refuse to listen. In the theatres, isn’t it always the same things acted over again, and still you are not disgusted? How do you dare complain about ‘the same things’? You don’t even know the names of the

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<sup>68</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *The Duties of the Clergy*, I, xxxii, 165.

<sup>69</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XIX, vv. 26-27.

Prophets whose writings are read! Aren't you ashamed to say that this is why you don't listen, because it is 'the same things over again', while you do not even know the names of those who are read, and this, though always hearing the same things? Do not you exhort your son? If he should say, 'Always the same things!' wouldn't you count it an insult? It would be good to talk of 'the same things', when we both knew them, and incorporated them into our life. Even then, these Readings would not be superfluous. Paul wrote to the Apostle Timothy, 'Give attention to Reading, to exhortation' (1 Timothy 4:13). It is not possible, ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well that has no bottom. 'I said', said the Preacher, 'I have become wise and then it departed from me' (Ecclesiastes 7:23). How many persons have preached on the Gospels? All have spoken in a way, which was new and fresh. For the more one dwells on them, the more insight one gets, the more he beholds the pure light."

John Cassian wrote<sup>70</sup> of a monk, Abbot Theodore, who was very astute in understanding the Scriptures, yet he could barely read. Theodore's secret was in acquiring purity of heart in order to understand the mind of the Scriptures. He would obtain understanding by revelation after prolonged prayer and fasting. Theodore's advice to others was to first seek to purify one's mind and heart from carnal vices before trying to gaze on the mysteries of Scripture.

"Abbot Theodore was a man gifted with utmost holiness and with perfect knowledge not only in practical life, but also in understanding the Scriptures. He had not acquired so much by study and reading, or worldly education, as by purity of heart alone. He could with difficulty understand and speak only a few words of the Greek language. One time when he was seeking an explanation of some most difficult question, he continued without ceasing for seven days and nights in prayer until he discovered by a revelation from the Lord the solution of the question that he sought an answer for."

"When some of the brethren were wondering at the splendid light of his knowledge and were asking of him some meanings of Scripture, he said that a monk who wanted to acquire a knowledge of the Scriptures ought not to spend his labor on the works of commentators, but rather to keep all the efforts of his mind and the intentions of his heart set on purifying himself from carnal vices. When these are driven out, at once the eyes of the heart, as if the veil of the passions were removed, will begin as it were naturally to gaze on the mysteries of Scripture. These mysteries are not declared to us by the grace of the Holy Spirit in order that they should remain unknown and obscure; but they are rendered obscure by our fault, as the veil of our sins covers the eyes of the heart. When these are restored to their natural state of health, the mere reading of Holy Scripture is by itself amply sufficient for beholding the true knowledge. We don't need the aid of commentators, just as these eyes of flesh need no man's teaching how to see, provided that they are free from dimness or the darkness of blindness. For this reason great differences and mistakes have arisen among commentators because most of them, paying no sort of attention towards purifying the mind, rush into the work of interpreting the Scriptures. In proportion to the density or impurity of their heart, they form opinions that are at variance with and contrary

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<sup>70</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, V, 33-35.

to each other's and to the Faith, and so they are unable to take in the light of truth."

John Chrysostom stated<sup>71</sup> that the Scriptures give us a practical wisdom, but also lets us know the limits of man's ability to know. God dispenses all things, but He does not will evil to be done; evil comes from us. Righteous men are afflicted in order that they may be crowned; the wicked are afflicted as punishment for their sins.

"Speaking of the Holy Scriptures, Paul added, 'Which are able to make you wise' (2 Timothy 3:15), that is, they will not allow you to be foolish, like most men. For he who knows the Scriptures, as he ought, is not offended at anything that happens; he endures all things manfully, referring them partly to faith, partly to the incomprehensible nature of the divine dispensation, and partly knowing reasons for them, finding examples in the Scriptures. It is a great sign of knowledge not to be curious about everything, nor to wish to know all things. I will explain myself by an example. Consider rivers; all are not of the same depth. Some have a shallow bed; others are deep enough to drown someone unacquainted with it. In one part there are whirlpools, and not in another. It is good therefore to refrain from exploring all of them, and it is no small proof of knowledge not to wish to explore all the depths. He that wants to venture onto every part of the river is really most ignorant of the peculiar nature of rivers and will often be in danger of perishing from venturing into the deeper parts with the same boldness with which he crossed the shallows. So it is in the things of God. He that desires to know all things, and ventures to intrude into everything, is most ignorant of what God is. The greater part of rivers is safe, and the depths and whirlpools are few; but with respect to the things of God, the greater part is hidden, and it is not possible to trace out His works. Why then are you bent on drowning yourself in those depths? Know this, however, that God dispenses all things, that He provides for all, that we are free agents, that some things He works, and some things He permits. He wills nothing evil to be done; all things are not done by His will, but some are done by our will. All evil things are done by our will alone; all good things are done by our will jointly with His influence; and nothing is done without His knowledge. Therefore He works all things. Knowing this we can reckon what things are good, what are evil, and what are indifferent. Virtue is good, vice is evil; but riches and poverty, life and death, are indifferent things. If you know this, you will know that the righteous are afflicted in order that they may be crowned; the wicked are afflicted, that they may receive the punishment of their sins. But all sinners are not punished here, lest people should generally disbelieve the Resurrection; not all the righteous are afflicted, lest men should think that vice, and not virtue, is approved."

### **Study of the Scriptures**

The Early Church had a different outlook on studying the Scriptures than is common today. The emphasis was on holiness of life as a prelude to the study of the Scripture. This represents a contrast to common practice today where anyone is encouraged to dive into the Scriptures as if the Scriptures were self-interpreting and easily understood. The Scriptures were

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<sup>71</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 14.

read in Churches every Sunday according to a pattern, called a lectionary, which emphasized the basics that everyone would need to know. In this vein, Cyril of Jerusalem stated,

“In learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to you by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. Everyone cannot read the Scriptures; some are hindered by lack of learning, and others by a lack of leisure. In order that the soul may not perish from ignorance, we have condensed the whole doctrine of the Faith in a few lines<sup>72</sup>. This summary I want you to commit to memory.

Jerome warned<sup>73</sup> that we are able to make no progress in the Scriptures unless we have a guide to show us the way. This does not refer to grammarians, philosophers, logicians or musicians. All men everywhere claim to be masters in the art of interpreting the Scriptures. Most take the Scriptures in hand, but tear them in pieces and teach them before they have learned them.

To illustrate this, Gregory of Nazianzen, like the other Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, lived<sup>74</sup> an ascetic life in solitude. They tried to tame the passions, like wild beasts, by gentle treatment, to lull them to sleep, to disarm them. By turning away the soul from the enticements of sense, and withdrawing into one’s self for the contemplation of God and of Eternal Beauty, they thought that it is possible to raise man to a forgetfulness of natural wants, and to a spiritual freedom from care. The means to this spiritual elevation were the reading of Scripture, which sets before us rules of life, but especially the pictures of the lives of godly men. They gave themselves especially to the study of Scripture, and to the practice of devotional exercises. In their study their great principle was to interpret the holy writings not by their own individual judgment, but on the lines laid down for them by the authority of ancient interpreters.

John Cassian had much to say about studying the Scriptures. Another aspect of the Early Church’s use of the Scriptures is illustrated by Cassian, who cautioned<sup>75</sup> his people not to concentrate on oratory and public speaking in the understanding of the Scriptures. True understanding can only be attained by purity of soul and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Humility of heart is very important to avoid being puffed up by enlightenment; otherwise vain arrogance leads to our destruction. As we study the Scriptures in holiness, we become like the Ark of the Testimony, guarded by two Cherubim, who protect the mercy seat of God, Who dwells there. We become like the Old Testament priests, dwelling in the Tabernacle, unable to be taken captive by the snares of bad thoughts. Some things that we don’t understand will be revealed to us, even in our sleep, when we don’t expect it. Scripture thus takes on a new face that cannot be comprehended by carnal people.

“Take care that you do not rush into teaching before doing, and so be reckoned among the Pharisees. Jesus warned the people concerning the Pharisees, ‘whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do. They bind heavy burdens,

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<sup>72</sup> That is, the Nicene Creed.

<sup>73</sup> Jerome, Letter to Paulinus, LIII, 6-7.

<sup>74</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., “Prolegomena of St Gregory Nazianzen”, Division 1, The Life, in Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 7.

<sup>75</sup> John Cassian, 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 9-11.

hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers' (Matthew 23:3-4). If he who 'breaks one of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:19), it follows that one who has dared to despise many great commands and to teach men so, shall be considered greatest in the punishment of hell. Therefore we must be careful not to be led on to teach by the example of those who have attained some skill in discussion and readiness in speech. They can discourse on what they please elegantly and fully, and those who do not know how to distinguish its real character imagine them to possess spiritual knowledge. It is one thing to have a ready tongue and elegant language, and quite another to penetrate into the very heart and marrow of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries. This can be gained by no learning of man's, nor condition of this world, only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Spirit."

"If we want to get at the true knowledge of the Scriptures, we must endeavor first to secure steadfast humility of heart, and to be carried on by the perfection of love, not to the knowledge which puffs up, but to that which enlightens. For it is impossible for an impure mind to gain the gift of spiritual knowledge. We need to avoid this, lest through our zeal for reading there arise in us, not the light of knowledge nor the lasting glory, which is promised through the light that comes from learning, but only the instruments of our destruction from vain arrogance. Next we must strive to get rid of all anxiety and worldly thoughts, and give ourselves continuously to sacred reading, until continual meditation fills our heart."

"This fashions us to speak after the likeness of the Scriptures, making of it an ark of the testimony, which has within it (1) two tables of stone, i.e., the constant assurance of the Old and New Testaments; (2) a golden pot, i.e., a pure and undefiled memory which preserves by a constant tenacity the manna stored up in it, i.e., the enduring and heavenly sweetness of the spiritual sense and the bread of angels; (3) the rod of Aaron, i.e., the saving standard of Jesus Christ our true High Priest, that buds with the freshness of immortal memory (Hebrews 9:4). This is the rod, which after it had been cut from the root of Jesse, died and flourished again with a more vigorous life. Two Cherubim, the fullness of historical and spiritual knowledge, guard these three. These continually protect the mercy seat of God, i.e., the peace of your heart, and overshadow it from all the assaults of spiritual wickedness. By this your soul will be carried forward not only to the ark of the Divine Covenant, but also to the priestly kingdom. Owing to its unbroken love of purity, being engaged in spiritual studies, we will fulfill the command given to the priests, by the giver of the Law. 'And he shall not go out from the sanctuary; he shall not profane the Sanctuary of his God' (Leviticus 21:12 LXX), which is his heart, in which the Lord promised that he would always dwell, saying, 'I will dwell in them and will walk among them' (2 Corinthians 6:16). The whole series of the Scriptures should be committed to memory and ceaselessly repeated. Continual meditation will bring us a twofold fruit. (1) While the attention of the mind is taken up in reading and preparing the lessons it cannot possibly be taken captive in any snares of bad thoughts. (2) Some things, which we studied while we were trying to commit them to memory, we could not

understand as the mind was at that time consumed. But we can afterward see them more clearly, when we are free from distraction, and especially when we reflect on them in silence in our meditation by night. When we are at rest, and sleeping, the understanding of the most secret meaning is revealed to us, of which in our waking hours we had not the remotest conception.”

“The renewal of our soul grows by means of this study, and Scripture will begin to put on a new face; the beauty of the holier meanings will somehow grow with our growth. Their form is adapted to the capacity of man’s understanding, and will appear earthly to carnal people, and divine to spiritual ones. Those with no understanding, to whom it formerly appeared to be involved in thick clouds (Exodus 19:16), cannot apprehend its subtleties nor endure its light.”

The study of the Scriptures can be very helpful in controlling evil thoughts. Delving into the dynamics of our thoughts, John Cassian asked<sup>76</sup> how is it that thoughts can come to us so subtly and secretly that it is hard to even grasp them, never mind to drive them away. Frequent reading and meditation on the Scriptures can help, and it is in the power of every man to either accept these thoughts or to reject them. In this way, the heart can be compared to a mill wheel driven by the rush of water. We can’t stop the wheel from turning, but we can decide what it will grind, whether good or bad. The origins of our thoughts come from three sources: God, the devil and ourselves. We need to be able to analyze our thoughts to track their origin, and thus deal with them appropriately.

“It is impossible for the mind not to be approached by thoughts, but it is in the power of every man either to admit them or to reject them. Their rising up does not entirely depend on us, so the rejection or admission of them lies in our own power. We must not blame everything on the assault, or on those spirits who try to instill them into us, or else there wouldn’t remain any free will in man, and efforts for our improvement wouldn’t be in our power. It is to a great extent in our power to improve the character of our thoughts and to let either holy spiritual thoughts or earthly ones grow up in our hearts. For this purpose we employ frequent reading and continual meditation on the Scriptures that an opportunity for spiritual recollection may be given to us. We use the frequent singing of Psalms, that we might have constant feelings of awareness; we use vigils, fasts and prayers also, that the mind may be brought low, not minding earthly things, but contemplating celestial things. If we drop these things and carelessness creeps in on us, the mind can become hardened with the foulness of sin and incline us in a carnal direction and fall away.”

“This movement of the heart can be compared to a mill wheel, which the headlong rush of water whirls around, and which can never stop its work so long as it is driven around by the action of the water. But it is in the power of the man who directs it to decide whether he will have wheat, barley or darnel<sup>77</sup> ground by it. The mill wheel will certainly crush everything put under it by the man who has charge of that business. Similarly the mind, through the trials of the present life, is driven around by the torrents of temptations pouring in upon it from all sides, and cannot be free from the flow of thoughts. But the character of the thoughts,

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<sup>76</sup> John Cassian, *1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Abbot Moses*, I, i, 17-20.

<sup>77</sup> Darnel is a weedy grass that is not used for human consumption.



which it either throws off or admits for itself, will be provided by the efforts of its own earnestness and diligence. If we constantly meditate on the Holy Scriptures and raise our memory towards the recollection of spiritual things, the desire for perfection and the hope of future bliss, spiritual thoughts are sure to rise from this, and cause the mind to dwell on those things. But if we are overcome by sloth or carelessness and spend our time in idle gossip, or are entangled in the cares of this world and unnecessary anxieties, then a species of tares will spring up, and injure our hearts. As our Lord says, wherever the treasure of our works or purpose may be, there our heart is sure to continue” (Matthew 6:21).

We ought to know that there are three origins of our thoughts: from God, from the devil, and from ourselves.

1. **From God.** “Our thoughts come from God when He grants us the illumination of the Holy Spirit, lifting us up. Where we have made little progress or act slothfully, He chastens us with guilt. Sometimes He discloses heavenly mysteries to us, or turns our purpose to better actions. An example is the case where the King Ahasuerus, chastened by the Lord, was prompted to ask for the books of the records. By doing this he was reminded of the good deeds of Mordecai, and promoted him to highest honor, recalling his cruel sentence concerning the slaughter of the Jews (Esther 6:1-10). Other examples are when the prophet says, ‘I will hear what the Lord God will say concerning me’ (Psalm 85:8). Another tells us, ‘the angel who spoke with me said to me’ (Zechariah 1:14); or when the Son of God promised that He would come with His Father, and make His home in us (John 14:23); and ‘It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you’” (Matthew 10:20).
2. **From the Devil.** “Also a whole range of thoughts spring from the devil, when he endeavors to destroy us either by the pleasures of sin or by secret attacks. In his crafty wiles he deceitfully shows us evil as good, and transforms himself into an angel of light to us (2 Corinthians 11:14). An example is the Apostle Judas, ‘When supper was ended, when the devil put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray the Lord’; again ‘after the sop, Satan entered him’ (John 13:2, 27). Peter also said to Ananias, ‘Why has Satan tempted your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?’ (Acts 5:3). Another was said to God against Ahab in the character of an unclean spirit, ‘I will go and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets’” (1 Kings 22:22).
3. **From Ourselves.** “But they arise also from ourselves, when in the course of life we recollect what we are doing, what we have done or what we have heard. David spoke, ‘I considered the days of old, and remembered ancient years. And I meditated; I communed with my heart by night, and diligently searched my spirit’ (Psalm 77:5-6 LXX). Again ‘the Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vain’ (Psalm 94:11 LXX), and ‘the thoughts of the righteous are true judgments’ (Proverbs 12:5 LXX). Also the Lord said to the Pharisees, ‘why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (Matthew 9:4)

“We ought to notice this threefold order and, with a wise discretion, analyze the thoughts that arise in our hearts, tracking their origin, cause and author, that we may be able to consider whether we ought to yield ourselves to them. We need to become good moneychangers, whose highest skill and whose

training is to test what is perfectly pure gold versus what is not sufficiently purified in the fire. With our skill we aim to avoid being duped by a common brass denarius that is colored with bright gold to look like some coin of great value. We need to shrewdly recognize coins stamped with the heads of usurpers. But with a still shrewder skill we need to detect those coins, which have the image of the right king, but are not properly made. Finally we need to be careful by the test of the balance to see that the coins are of proper weight. All this the Gospel shows us that we ought to observe spiritually; that whatever has found an entrance into our hearts, and whatever doctrine has been received by us, should be most carefully examined to see (1) whether it has been purified by the divine and heavenly fire of the Holy Spirit, (2) whether it belongs to Jewish superstition, or (3) whether it comes from the pride of a worldly philosophy and only externally makes a show of faith. And this we can do, if we carry out Paul's advice, 'Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God'" (1 John 4:1)

John Cassian also stated<sup>78</sup> that there is a way for the Holy Scriptures to lie open to us with greater clearness as if their veins and marrow were exposed. Hindering us is a wandering mind that prevents us from fully considering each part of Scripture. We become one who touches and tastes spiritual meanings but does not possess them. Watching, meditation and prayer can correct this, and no one is kept away by not being able to read. While Cassian was addressing those living in a monastery, his words are applicable to everyone.

"When our experience not only perceives but actually anticipates the meaning of the Scriptures, the sense of the words is revealed to us not by talking about them but by practical proof. As an example of this, consider, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). What greater or holier poverty can there be than one who knows that he has no defense and no strength of his own, and asks for daily help from another's bounty? He is aware that every single moment of his life and substance depend on Divine assistance, and cries to Him daily in prayer for others, 'But I am poor and needy; the Lord will take care of me' (Psalm 40:17 LXX). By the illumination of God Himself he mounts to that clear knowledge of Him and begins to be nourished on still more sacred mysteries. He will take in to himself all the thoughts of the Psalms and will begin to sing them in such a way that he will utter them with the deepest emotion of heart not as if they were the compositions of the Psalmist, but rather as if they were his own utterances and his very own prayer. He will certainly take them as aimed at himself, and will recognize that their words were not only fulfilled in the person of the prophet, but that they are fulfilled and carried out daily in his own case. If we have experience of the state of mind in which each Psalm was sung and written, we become like their authors and anticipate the meaning rather than follow it."

"A difficulty we have is that our mind wanders. As we consider the meaning of any Psalm, our mind thoughtlessly passes on to a text of some other Scripture. When it begins to consider this, the recollection of some other passage springs up, and shuts out consideration of the former subject. From this it is transferred to some other, and the soul always turns about from Psalm to Psalm,

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<sup>78</sup> John Cassian, 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Abbot Isaac, I, x, 11-14.

from a passage in the Gospels to read one in the Epistles, and from this on to the prophetic writings, and so it wanders about vaguely and uncertainly through the whole body of the Scriptures, unable, either to reject or keep hold of anything, or to finish anything by fully considering and examining it. So it becomes only one who touches or tastes of spiritual meanings, not an author and possessor of them.”

“Regarding steadfastness of heart, there are three things which make a shifting heart steadfast: watching, meditation, and prayer. Diligence in these and constant attention will produce steadfast firmness of mind. But this cannot be secured in any other way unless all cares and anxieties of this present life have been first gotten rid of by persistence in work dedicated not to covetousness but to the sacred uses of the monastery, that we may thus be able to fulfill the Apostle’s command, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). For he prays too little, who is accustomed only to pray at the times when he bends his knees. But he never prays, who even while on his bended knees is distracted by all kinds of wanderings of heart. Therefore the condition at which we want to be found when at our prayers, that we ought to be before the time of prayer. For at the time of its prayers the mind cannot help being affected by its previous condition, and while it is praying, will be either transported to things heavenly or dragged down to earthly things by those thoughts in which it had been lingering before prayer.”

“It is then certain that no one is kept away from perfection of heart by not being able to read, nor is simplicity any hindrance to the possession of purity of heart and mind.”

### **Ignorance of the Scriptures**

John Chrysostom had a great deal to say about the dangers of ignorance of the Scriptures. They are like daylight to our lives, being the Oracles of God. Not knowing them is like going to war without any weapons. We need to take care of our souls with the Scriptures; without them we are unarmed and naked. Those who don’t read the Scriptures are poverty-stricken and open to being ripped off by heretics. Consider some details:

Chrysostom stated<sup>79</sup> that ignorance of the Scriptures is like ignoring the daylight and always walking in the dark, resulting in constant sin, a plague of heresy and useless labor.

“Our countless evils have arisen from ignorance of the Scriptures; from this also has the plague of heresies broken out. Also resulting from this are negligent lives and labors without advantage. Just as men deprived of the daylight would not walk right, so they that don’t look to the gleaming of the Scriptures will be frequently and constantly sinning, in that they are walking in the worst darkness. That this may not happen, let us hold our eyes open to the bright shining of Paul’s words; for this man’s tongue shone like the sun, and abounded more than all the rest in the word of doctrine. Since he labored more abundantly than they (1 Corinthians 15:10), he also drew upon himself a large measure of the Spirit’s grace”.

Chrysostom also encouraged<sup>80</sup> everyone to read the Scriptures with great earnestness, since they are the oracles of God. If we don’t buy any other books, we should buy the New

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<sup>79</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, The Argument Before Homily 1.

Testament. Not knowing the Scriptures is the cause of all evils; not having them is like going to battle without any weapons.

“Paul said, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you’ (Colossians 3:16), that is, the teaching, doctrines, exhortation, where the present life is nothing, even with its good things. If we know this, we shall succumb to no hardships whatever (Matthew 6:25-32). Listen, as many as are worldly, and support a wife and children; to you Paul commits especially the reading of the Scriptures. This is not to be done lightly, nor in any sort of way, but with much earnestness. Just as the rich can tolerate fines and damages, so he that is rich in the Faith will bear not only poverty, but even calamities also.”

“Paul refers to ‘Virtue’ as wisdom, lowliness of mind, and almsgiving, and other such things, just as the contraries are folly, for cruelty too comes from folly. In many places the Scriptures call the whole of sin folly. ‘The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God”’ (Psalm 14:1); and again, ‘My wounds are foul *and* festering because of my foolishness’ (Psalm 38:5). What is more foolish than one who wraps himself in his own clothes, but doesn’t notice his brethren that are naked; who feeds dogs, and doesn’t care that the image of God is starving; who is persuaded that human things are nothing, and yet clings to them as if they were immortal. No one is more foolish than such a person, and no one is wiser than one who achieves virtue.”

“You have the oracles of God; no man teaches you as they do. Listen, I entreat you, all you that are careful for this life, and buy books that will be medicine for the soul. If you will not buy any other, at least get the New Testament<sup>81</sup>: the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts and the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If you encounter grief, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take comfort from them for your trouble, whether it is loss, death, or bereavement. Or rather don’t just dive into them, but take them wholly to yourself; keep them in your mind.”

“This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without weapons, and how do we expect to come home safe? We should be content if we come home safe with them, let alone without them. You are rational sheep; Paul has committed much to you. Those that are under childlike instruction do not stay there forever; if you are forever being instructed in the same things, you have learned nothing. Finish learning, then begin to teach others, just as people study for set times in the sciences and in the arts to get their degrees.”

“This reproach God spoke against the Jews: ‘I have carried you from the womb; even to *your* old age, I will carry and I deliver *you*’ (Isaiah 46:3-4 LXX). If some of you had finished learning, and others were about to have finished, our work could have continued; you would have advanced, others would have taken your place, and you would have been able to help us. Tell me, if some were to go to a grammarian and continue always learning punctuation, would not this bother

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<sup>80</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, IX.

<sup>81</sup> John Chrysostom gave his Homilies on Colossians either just before or just after the Canon of the New Testament had been ratified in the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century. Since Chrysostom didn’t mention the Book of Revelation, which was the last Book to be ratified, the date of his comments here may have been just before the New Testament Canon was ratified.

their teacher? In the Apostles' times it was not like this; they continually leaped from place to place, appointing those who first learned to be the teachers of others. Thus they were able to circle the world, not being bound to one place."

Chrysostom continued<sup>82</sup> that it is a great evil to be ignorant of the Scriptures. We take care of our houses and our horses, but we often neglect our souls.

"Let us learn and be taught by the Scriptures; for they were not written without a purpose. It is a great evil to be ignorant of the Scriptures; the things we ought to get good from, we get evil. Medicines of healing, from the ignorance of those who use them, can ruin and destroy. Weapons, which are meant to protect, are themselves the cause of death unless one knows how to use them. The reason for this is that we seek everything rather than what is good for ourselves. In the case of our houses, we seek what is good for it, and we would not endure to see it decaying with age, broken down, or hurt by storms. But for our soul we don't pay attention, even if we see its foundations rotting. Again, if we possess horses, we seek what is good for them; we call in both horse-feeders and horse-doctors. We pay attention to their housing, and charge those who are entrusted with them, that they may not drive them carelessly, nor take them out at night at unreasonable hours or sell away their feed. There are many laws we lay down for the good of the creatures; but for that of our soul, we don't pay attention."

Chrysostom also said<sup>83</sup> that a man who doesn't know the Scriptures is unarmed and naked; though he fall among the weak, though he is the stronger, he will easily be beaten. If we had paid attention to the Scriptures, if we had sharpened ourselves each day, I would not have advised you to flee the combat with them, but would have counseled you to grapple with them; for the truth is strong. But since we don't know how to use the Scriptures, I fear the struggle, lest they take us unarmed and cast us down. For there is nothing weaker than those who are bereft of the aid of the Spirit

Chrysostom stated<sup>84</sup> that someone who reads the Scriptures is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. Those who don't read the Scriptures subject themselves to great harm and extreme poverty.

"Jesus praised His disciples because they understood what He said, 'Therefore every Scribe, which is instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, is like a householder, who brings out of his treasure things new and old' (Matthew 13:52). Elsewhere He said, 'I will send you prophets, wise men and scribes' (Matthew 23:34). Do you see how He doesn't exclude the Old Testament, but He commends it, and speaks publicly in favor of it, calling it 'a treasure'?"

"As many as are ignorant of the Scriptures cannot be 'householders'; they neither have of themselves, nor do they receive from others, but neglect their own case, perishing with famine. Not these only, but the heretics also, are excluded from this blessing. They don't bring out things new and old. They don't have the

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<sup>82</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXIV, v. 41.

<sup>83</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVI, 3.

<sup>84</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XLVIII, 4.

old things, and neither do they have the new; they are deprived of both. For these are bound up and interwoven one with another.”

“Let us then listen, as many of us as neglect the reading of the Scriptures, to what harm we are subjecting ourselves, to what poverty. When are we to apply ourselves to the real practice of virtue, when we do not so much as know the Laws according to which our practice should be guided? The rich, those who are mad about wealth, are constantly shaking out their clothes, that they may not become moth-eaten. Our neglect to open the Books is worse than any moth and wastes our soul.”

Chrysostom stated<sup>85</sup> that the Scriptures are very important in discerning the errors of heretics, and we need to exercise our senses to discern this. The Church has set the standard by which heretics are measured.

“When you hear that a man is not a Heathen or a Jew, do you immediately believe that he is a Christian? Examine all the other points; for Manichaeans<sup>86</sup>, and all the heresies, have put on this mask in order to deceive the simple. If we ‘have the senses’ of the soul ‘exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Hebrews 5:14), we will be able to discern such teachers. Our ‘senses’ become ‘exercised’ by continual hearing; by experience with the Scriptures. When we document the error of those heretics, and prove that it is not right, we have learned a lot; even if we don’t understand today, we will understand tomorrow.”

“We need to exercise our hearing by divine studies, so that the Words of God may not sound strange. We exercise our senses for discerning; that is, to be skillful.”

“One man says that there is no Resurrection; and another looks for none of the things to come; another says there is a different God; another says that Christ has His beginning from Mary. They have all fallen away from lack of moderation, either by excess or by defect. A major heresy was that of Marcion<sup>87</sup> (110 to 160 AD), who introduced another God, who has no existence. After this came Sabellius<sup>88</sup>, saying that the Son, the Spirit and the Father are one. After that Marcellus<sup>89</sup> and Photinus<sup>90</sup> said the same things. Paul of Samosata<sup>91</sup> said that

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<sup>85</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, VIII, 8, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Mani was a cult leader in the mid to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century who claimed to have been born of a virgin, tempted by the devil, heal the sick and who chose twelve disciples. Augustine of Hippo was a Manichaean before he converted, and Augustine got his teaching on original sin from Mani. Manichaean churches were at one time a major force in the East from Syria to China, and they were strongly opposed by the Orthodox Church. The Manichaeans largely died out prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For more information see the article by Alan G. Hefner, “The Mystica” at <http://www.themystica.com>.

<sup>87</sup> Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament was not the true God but rather that the true and higher God had been revealed only with Jesus Christ. Marcion was excommunicated from the Church in Rome c. 144 AD, but he succeeded in establishing churches of his own to rival the Church for the next two centuries. Marcion’s canon consisted of a portion of the Gospel of Luke and ten Epistles of Paul, where he rejected Matthew, Mark and John. Marcion was condemned by contemporary apologist Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons. For more information, see the site <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/marcion.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Sabellius lived in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century and was excommunicated for heresy in 220 AD.

<sup>89</sup> Marcellus was Bishop of Ancyra in Galatia in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century and taught that Christ was not God.

<sup>90</sup> Photinus was Bishop of Sirmium in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century and claimed that Jesus was a mere man.

<sup>91</sup> Paul of Samosata (200 to 275 AD) was bishop of Antioch from 260 to 268 AD. He taught that Jesus was a mere man who was infused with the Divine Logos at His baptism.

He had His beginning from Mary. After these came the heresy of Arius<sup>92</sup>. There are others too. We have received the Faith that we might not be compelled to attack innumerable heresies, whatever any man might have endeavored either to add or take away from the Faith. Just like those who keep standards<sup>93</sup> do not oblige people to use innumerable kinds of measurement, but only ask them keep to what is standardized; so also the case with our doctrines.”

“If anyone wants to learn military affairs, of necessity he must learn the military laws. If anyone wanted to learn navigation or carpentry, of necessity he must learn the principles of the art. But in the case of the Christian Faith, people will not do anything of the kind, although this is a science that needs much attention. It also is an art that needs teaching; hear the prophet saying, ‘Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord’ (Psalm 34:11). It follows therefore that the fear of God needs teaching.”

### **The Application of the Scriptures**

The Church Fathers have applied the Scriptures for many uses. Some of the major ones are:

- For teaching children
- As examples for teaching the control of the passions
- For teaching piety
- To confirm what God has said
- To refute heretics

### **For Teaching Children**

Paul counseled parents to bring up their children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Ignatius of Antioch advised<sup>94</sup> fathers to do two things additionally for their children: (1) teach them the Scriptures; and (2) teach them a trade. Learning a trade was part of Hebrew tradition, where all Hebrew boys had to learn a trade<sup>95</sup>, no matter how smart they were or how much their education was on a fast track for the University. For example, Paul excelled his classmates in his education (Galatians 1:14), yet he still learned the trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3).

The Scriptures teach many good examples about how it is necessary to control our passions in order to be godly. As the Lord was instructing the Twelve on how to proceed after He left, He said, “By your patience possess your souls” (Luke 21:19). They had already given up all the things of this life, and He was preparing them to take what they had learned to the rest of the inhabited world. The lives of the saints (e.g. Hebrews 11) demonstrate to us the reward of patience and long suffering often in the face of great injustice and contempt from the rest of the world. Possessing our souls is a concentration on what is really important.

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<sup>92</sup> Arius (250 to 336 AD) was a priest in Alexandria who claimed that the Son was not consubstantial with the Father. Arius’ heresy was the main subject matter for the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council in 325 AD.

<sup>93</sup> For example, at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, there are standards for a length of 1 meter and a volume of 1 gallon.

<sup>94</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ralph Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 79.

Piety or devoutness is something that the Scriptures teach throughout the Old and New Testaments. This begins with our deep respect for God and the things God has told us about Himself and the things that He would have us do. Ambrose of Milan summarized<sup>96</sup> this by saying, “Our first duty is to have a measured respect in our speech. In this way we offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, and we show a godly fear when the Scriptures are read.”

The Church has always used the Scriptures as a measure of things. While the Scriptures are not the only source of direction for the Church, they are a very important source.

Some people take offense at the mere mention of heretics, preferring to treat everyone equally and kindly. John Chrysostom noted<sup>97</sup> that heretics had been around from the beginning of time, and they have always been singled out and separated from the flock as a shepherd separates a wolf from the sheep.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>98</sup> that children can be led to the Lord by becoming a diligent hearer of the Scriptures. Their age is full of foolishness, and the heathen amplify more foolishness. Hannah dedicated her son, the Prophet Samuel, to God and to live in the Temple. Because of her faith, other children were granted to her. Everything else about the raising of our children is secondary to teaching them to despise the glory that belongs to this life.

“Paul stated, ‘Do not provoke your children to wrath’ (Ephesians 6:4), as many do by treating them overbearingly, not as free, but as slaves. Paul shows how they will be led to obedience, referring the whole source of it to the head and chief authority. And in the same way as he has shown the husband to be the cause of the wife’s obedience, where he addresses the greater part of his arguments to the husband, advising him to attach her to himself by the power of love (Ephesians 5:25-30). Where there are spiritual ties, the natural ties will follow. Do you wish your son to be obedient? From the very first, ‘Bring him up in the training and admonition of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). It is absolutely necessary that he should be a diligent hearer of the Scriptures. For there the first thing he hears will be this, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ (Deuteronomy 5:16). It is necessary for laymen to be acquainted with the lessons derived from this source; but especially for children. Theirs is an age full of foolishness; and to this foolishness are added the bad examples derived from the heathen, where they are acquainted with those heroes, slaves of their passions, and cowards regarding death. It is absurd to send children out to school and to learn trades, and yet, not to ‘bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord’. For this reason we are the first to reap the fruits, because we bring up our children to be insolent, spendthrifts, disobedient, and indecent. Let us listen to Paul’s admonition; let us give them a pattern; let us make them apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures from the earliest age. So constantly as I repeat this, I am looked upon as trifling! Still, I shall not cease to do my duty.”

“You women, especially, emulate Hannah’s example (1 Samuel 1:22-28); look at what she did. She brought him up at once to the temple. Who wouldn’t

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<sup>96</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, x, 35.

<sup>97</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy*, VIII, vv. 1-4.

<sup>98</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XXI, v. 4.



rather prefer his son to become a Samuel than that he should be king of the whole world ten thousand times over? 'How', you will say, 'is it possible he should become like this?' We do not choose to commit him to the care of those who are able to make him such. Hannah put him into the hands of God, for not even Eli himself was one of those in any great degree qualified to form him. How could he be; he was not able to form even his own children. It was the faith of the mother and her earnest zeal that brought about the whole thing. He was her first child, and her only one, and she didn't know whether she would ever have any others. Yet she did not say, 'I will wait till the child is grown up, that he may have a taste of the things of this life in his childish years'. No, all these thoughts she repudiated; she was absorbed in one object, how from the very beginning she might dedicate the spiritual image to God. She offered him up to God, and there she left him. Therefore her married state was more glorious, in that she had made spiritual objects her first care, in that she dedicated the first fruits to God. Therefore her womb was fruitful, and she obtained other children besides (1 Samuel 2:20-21). Therefore she saw Samuel honorable even in the world. If men, when they are honored, render honor in return, will not God much more do this, since He does this even without being honored at all?"

"The care of our children should be a priority for us, with everything else secondary, 'bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord'. If from the very first he is taught to be a lover of true wisdom, then wealth greater than all wealth has he acquired and a more imposing name. You will affect nothing so great as if you teach him the art of despising riches. If you desire to make him rich, do this. The rich man is not he who is encircled with great riches; but the man who has need of nothing. Discipline your son in this; teach him this; this is the greatest riches. Do not seek how to give him reputation and high character in outward learning, but consider deeply how you shall teach him to despise the glory that belongs to this present life. By this means he will become more distinguished and more truly glorious. This it is possible for the poor man and the rich man alike to accomplish. These are lessons which a man does not learn from a master, nor by art, but by means of the divine oracles."

## As Examples for Teaching the Control of the Passions

The Scriptures teach many good examples about how it is necessary to control our passions in order to be godly. As the Lord was instructing the Twelve on how to proceed after He left, He said, “By your patience possess your souls” (Luke 21:19). They had already given up all the things of this life, and He was preparing them to take what they had learned to the rest of the inhabited world. The lives of the saints (e.g. Hebrews 11) demonstrate to us the reward of patience and long suffering often in the face of great injustice and contempt from the rest of the world. Possessing our souls is a concentration on what is really important.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>99</sup> that the memory of good men in the Scriptures, even looking at their lives just once, is enough to set us free from the deformity in our soul that is caused by the passions, especially by wrath. Wrath is like a monster that turns us into animals, driven by the passions for the things of this life. We can tame wild animals, but we need the help of the Scriptures to tame the passions.

“Sometimes we have no idea whatever of the deformity of our own soul, and we can’t discern its hideousness. On the other hand, when we are sitting at a hairdresser’s, we take a mirror and examine with care the arrangement of our hair; we ask those nearby, and the haircutter himself, if everything looks good. With regard for our own soul, however, we don’t have the slightest idea that it is not only deformed, even if it is transformed into a wild beast, and made a sort of Scylla<sup>100</sup> or Chimaera<sup>101</sup>, according to the heathen fable. In this case, there is also a mirror, a spiritual one, far more excellent, and serviceable. It not only shows our deformity, but also transforms it into surpassing beauty. This mirror is the memory of good men, and the history of their blessed lives; the reading of the Scriptures; the Laws given by God. If we are willing only once to look at the portrait of those holy men, we will both see the foulness of our own mind, and having seen this, we will need nothing else to be set free from that deformity. The mirror is useful for this purpose also, and makes the change easy.

“Let no man therefore continue to be like the irrational creatures. If the slave does not enter into the father’s house, how will we, having become like a wild beast, be able to set our foot therein? When wild beasts are taken care of by man, they often grow tame; but what sort of plea will we have, when we have trained our own natural meekness into unnatural savageness? The lion we can tame, but our own wrath sometimes grows wilder than any lion. While the beast is deprived of reason and is the most wrathful of all things; nevertheless by the excellence of the wisdom given to us by God, we can overcome this nature and tame wild animals.

“What excuse will we have, if we can tame a lion, yet we become as wild as a lion ourselves; granting to the beast what is beyond nature by taming him, but for ourselves not even preserving what is natural? We display as much zeal with our wrath as others have displayed about lions, including grievous teeth and

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<sup>99</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, IV, 16-17.

<sup>100</sup> In Greek mythology, mentioned by Homer, Scylla was a sea monster who lived underneath a dangerous rock at one side of the Strait of Messina, opposite the whirlpool [Charybdis](#). She threatened passing ships and in the *Odyssey* ate six of the companions of Odysseus.

<sup>101</sup> In Greek mythology, mentioned by Homer, Chimaera was a monster that was part lion (head), goat (middle) and serpent (hind), and which was capable of breathing fire.

claws. Not even a lion has such power to tear things up as wrath, even with its claws continually doing so. The health of the soul is corrupted by wrath, devouring, tearing to pieces with all its strength, and making it useless for everything. If a man nourished worms in his gut, such that all his inner parts wasted away, how shall we have so large a beast as wrath eating up everything within us, and be able to produce anything noble?

“How then are we to be freed from this pest? To kill worms within us, we can drink a potion that is able to kill them. The precious Blood of Christ, received with full assurance, will have power to extinguish every disease. Together with this, listening carefully to the Scriptures, along with almsgiving can deaden the affections that damage our soul. While those passions live, we are in no better state than the dead. Unless we first kill them here, they will be sure to kill us in the next life; or rather before that death, they will take a great toll on us. Every such passion is cruel, tyrannical and insatiable, and never ceases to devour us every day. ‘Their teeth are the teeth of a lion’ (Psalm 57:4). The lion, as soon as he is satisfied, leaves the carcass that has fallen his way; but these passions neither are satisfied, nor do they leave the man whom they have seized. So great is their power that they serve the opposite of what Paul demonstrated by his life. Whether it is the love of women, riches, or glory that anyone is entangled with, he laughs at hell and despises the kingdom, that he may work the will of these passions.”

### **For Teaching Piety or Holiness**

Piety or devoutness is something that the Scriptures teach throughout the Old and New Testaments. This begins with our deep respect for God and the things God has told us about Himself and the things that He would have us do. Ambrose of Milan summarized<sup>102</sup> this by saying, “Our first duty is to have a measured respect in our speech. In this way we offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, and we show a godly fear when the Scriptures are read.”

Hippolytus added<sup>103</sup> that anyone who wishes to practice piety will need to learn the Scriptures, just as one learns worldly wisdom from philosophers.

“There is one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source. Just as a man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to obtain it in any other way than by mastering the teachings of philosophers. So all of us who wish to practice piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other source than the oracles of God. Whatever things the Scriptures declare, these let us take; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn. As the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as He wills the Holy Spirit to be given, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, or according to our own mind, let us discern them just as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures.”

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<sup>102</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, x, 35.

<sup>103</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, “Against the Heresy of Noetus”, *Extant Works and Fragments*, Part 2, Chapter 9.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>104</sup> that piety for us is similar to what it was from the beginning, such as for Abraham and David.

“As the prophet David exhorted, ‘Be not envious against the workers of iniquity’ (Psalm 37:1) so Paul exhorts, ‘Continue in the things which you have learned’, and not simply learned, but ‘have been assured of’ (2 Timothy 3:14), that is, have believed. And what have I believed? That this is the Life! And if you see things happening contrary to your belief, don’t be bothered. Abraham had heard, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called’ (Genesis 21:12); he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac yet he was not dismayed. Let no one be offended because of the wicked. This the Scripture taught from the beginning.”

Chrysostom also noted<sup>105</sup> how Paul was so dedicated to informing the people of Thessalonica about what had happened with Christ that he worked six days per week to support himself and his companions, and then reasoned in the synagogues on the Sabbath. Paul’s piety resulted in a separation between those who desired to know the Scriptures and those who didn’t care.

“Paul’s primary message is the Passion of Christ. ‘Some of them believed, and stayed with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few’ (Acts 17:4). Luke only mentioned the sum and substance of what Paul did, and did not report on every occasion what Paul said. ‘The Jews who didn’t believe, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king named Jesus”’ (Acts 17:5-7). ‘When they had taken a security deposit from Jason and the rest, they let them go’ (Acts 17:9). Jason was a man worthy to be admired, in that he put himself in danger, and sent Paul and Silas away from it. The brethren sent Paul and Silas by night to Berea; when they got there, they went into the local synagogue. ‘These were more fair-minded than those of Thessalonica’; that is, more gentle ‘in that they received the word with all readiness’. They were considerate, but with a strictness that was devoid of passion, ‘searching the Scriptures daily whether these things were so’ (Acts 17:10-11). ‘Therefore many of them believed; including many honorable Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the people. Then the brethren sent Paul away to go toward the sea; but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea’ (Acts 17:12-14). At one time Paul gives in, at another time he presses on, and in many things considers human recommendations. ‘Those that accompanied Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him immediately, they departed’ (Acts 17:15). But let us review these things in more detail.”

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<sup>104</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 14.

<sup>105</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXVII, vv. 1-3.

“‘Three Sabbath days’, was the only time when they had leisure from work, where Paul ‘reasoned with the Thessalonians, out of the Scriptures’ (Acts 17:2). Christ used to do this also; on many occasions we find Him reasoning from the Scriptures, and not on all occasions urging men by miracles. Their adversaries were hostile to miracles and called them deceivers and magicians; but he that persuades men from the Scriptures, is not liable to this implication. On many occasions we find Paul convincing men simply by force of teaching. In Antioch ‘the whole city was gathered together’ (Acts 13:44); which itself is no small miracle, and in fact, it is even a very great one. That they might not think that the Apostles did it all by their own strength, but rather that God permitted it, two things resulted in Thessalonica. ‘Some of them were persuaded’, and ‘of devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few’” (Acts 17:4, 12).

Chrysostom further noted<sup>106</sup> that some people receive punishment in this life while others don’t. In both cases it is beneficial for us and is aimed at increasing our piety.

“If no wicked man was ever punished, no one would believe that God presides over human affairs. If all were punished, no one would expect a future resurrection, since all had received their due here. On this account He both punishes, and refrains from punishing. On this account the righteous suffer tribulation here, because they are travelers, and strangers, and are in a foreign country. The just therefore endure these things for the purpose of trial. Under all circumstances, therefore, whether affliction or otherwise, let us give thanks to God. For both are beneficial. He does nothing in hatred or enmity to us, but all things from care and consideration for us.”

### **The Scriptures Confirm What God Has Said**

The Church has always used the Scriptures as a measure of things. While the Scriptures are not the only source of direction for the Church, they are a very important source.

Gregory of Nyssa described<sup>107</sup> the use of the Scriptural tradition as the rule and measure of every aspect of the Faith. Gentile philosophers, on the other hand, drift off into whatever the philosopher pleases. In describing the soul, Christians fix on the Scriptural terms of the soul created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 5:1). Gentile philosophers have difficulty separating desire and anger from the soul, and conclude that man is like a reasoning animal.

“Gentile philosophy is not adequate for a discussion on the soul with all its speculations. Philosophers speak on the subject of the soul, in whatever direction of supposed consequences that the thinker pleases; however, we Christians are not entitled to such license. We make the Scriptures the rule and the measure of every aspect; we necessarily fix our eyes on that, and approve that alone, which may be made to harmonize with the intention of those writings. We therefore neglect the Platonic illustrations, where the philosopher allegorizes these facts about the soul. We neglect also all that is said by philosophers who succeeded

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<sup>106</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 14.

<sup>107</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection.

him and who investigated this question, and who declared that the soul was mortal by reason of these principles. We neglect everything before and since their time, and we will adopt, as the guide of our reasoning, the Scripture, which lays it down as an axiom that there is no excellence in the soul, which is not a property as well of the Divine nature. He who declares the soul to be God's likeness states that anything foreign to Him is outside the limits of the soul. Since nothing of the kind we are considering is included in the conception of the Divine nature, one can reasonably surmise that such things are not consubstantial with the soul either."

"We will speak on these points by following the chain of Scriptural tradition. Man, as a reasoning animal, is capable of understanding and knowing; this is attested even by those outside our Faith. This would never be the conclusion if we had viewed anger and desire and all such emotions as consubstantial with our nature, like the philosophers do. The principles of desire and anger are observed equally in rational and irrational natures (man and animals), and thus these emotions cannot define a nature. Every definition of an essence looks to the specific quality of the subject; and whatever is outside is set aside as having nothing to do with the required definition. Yet, beyond question, anger and desire are allowed to be common to all reasoning and brute natures and it is imperative therefore that we should not consider these faculties among those whereby humanity is exclusively meant. One may perceive the principle of sensation, and that of nutrition and growth in man; yet these do not affect the definition of his soul."

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>108</sup> how Jesus used the Scriptures to confirm everything. The Scribes and Pharisees had heard the Father's voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism, but they didn't pay attention to it. They claimed that they were following what Moses said, but they didn't receive or keep Moses' Commandments.

"Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, 'The Father Himself, who has sent Me, has borne witness of Me' (John 5:37). This occurred publicly at the Jordan, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him' (Matthew 3:17). The testimony of John the Baptist was clear, for the Jewish leaders themselves had gone to John, and could not deny it. The testimony from Jesus' miracles was clear also, for they had seen them done, and had heard from those who were healed; from these occasions they accused Jesus of breaking the Law because He often healed on the Sabbath. Jesus concluded, 'You have not heard His voice at any time'" (John 5:37).

"While Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, are said to have seen Him, Jesus was guiding them by degrees to understand that God has neither voice nor shape, but that He is higher than forms or sounds. When He said, 'You have not heard His voice', He does not mean that God uttered a voice, but that He speaks with us in a way that cannot be heard with the ears. When He said, 'Nor seen His shape', He does not mean that God has a shape, even an invisible one. Neither of these things belongs to God. In order that they might not say, 'God spoke only to

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<sup>108</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XL, 3.

Moses' (John 9:29), He spoke as He did, to show that there is neither voice nor shape with God. In their case, they 'neither heard His voice nor saw His shape', nor did they even receive and keep His commandments."

"Therefore Jesus added, 'you don't have His word abiding in you' (John 5:38); that is, the ordinances, the commandments, the Law, and the Prophets. Even if God ordained these, still they are not with you, since you do not believe in Me. If the Scriptures everywhere say that it is necessary to pay attention to Me, and yet you don't, it is quite clear that His word is removed from you. Therefore He adds, 'For the One He sent, you won't believe Him'" (John 5:43-47).

"They could argue, 'If we have not heard His voice, how has He testified to you?' He said, 'Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me' (John 5:39). By these the Father gave His testimony, both by the Jordan and also on the mountain of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Christ did not bring forward these voices; they did not hear the Father's voice on the mountain of transfiguration, and they didn't pay attention to the Father speaking at Christ's Baptism. For this reason He referred them to the Scriptures, showing that from them comes the Father's testimony."

John Chrysostom also referred<sup>109</sup> to the Scriptures as a door leading to God and opening to us the knowledge of God. The Scriptures help to define the sheep from the wolves, and bars entry to the heretics.

"Jesus proved that He was not a deceiver, but a Shepherd by laying down the distinguishing marks both of the shepherd, and of the deceiver and spoiler; from these anyone has the opportunity to search into the truth of the matter. First He shows who is a deceiver and a spoiler, calling him so from the Scriptures, and saying, 'He that doesn't enter by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber'" (John 10:1).

"Observe the marks of a robber: first, he does not enter openly; second, he does not enter according to the Scriptures, for this is 'not by the door'. Here He referred to those who had been before, and to those who should come after Him: Antichrist, the false Christs, Judas and Theudas (Acts 5:36-37), and whatever others there have been of the same kind. With good cause He called the Scriptures 'a door', for they bring us to God and open to us the knowledge of God; they make the sheep, they guard the sheep, and don't allow the wolves to come in after them. For Scripture, like some solid door, bars the entry to the heretics, places us in a state of safety to all that we desire, and doesn't allow us to wander. If we maintain it, we shall not be easily conquered by our enemies. By it we can know everyone, both those who are, and those who are not, shepherds. What does He mean by, 'into the fold?' It refers to the sheep, and the care of them. He that doesn't use the Scriptures, but 'climbs up some other way'; that is, who cuts out for himself another and an unusual way, 'is a thief'. Do you see from this that Christ agrees with the Father, in that He brings forward the Scriptures? Because of this He said to the Jewish leaders, 'Search the Scriptures' (John 5:39). He also brought forward Moses, and called him and all the Prophets witnesses, for 'all who hear the Prophets shall come to Me'; and, 'Had you

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<sup>109</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LIX, 2.

believed Moses, you would have believed Me' (John 5:46). He put the same thing metaphorically by saying, 'climbs up some other way'; He alluded to the Scribes, because they taught for commandments the teachings of men, and transgressed the Law (Matthew 15:9). He criticized them for this, saying, 'None of you keeps the Law' (John 7:19). Well did He say, 'climbs up', not 'enters in', since to climb is the act of a thief intending to leap over a wall, and who does so with danger."

Chrysostom further stated that just as someone sitting in an ointment-maker's shop begins to smell like the ointment, even against his will, so someone who comes to Church will become attached to the things of God, even if he is covered with sins. Hearing the reading of the Scriptures is very therapeutic.

"If we search the Scriptures, exactly and not carelessly, we shall be able to attain our salvation; if we continually dwell on them, we shall learn right teaching and a perfect life. Although a man is very hard, stubborn, proud, and unprofitable at other times, yet he shall gain fruit from this time spent. If a man who passes by an ointment-maker's shop, or sits in one, is impregnated with the perfume even against his will, much more is this the case with one who comes to Church. As idleness is born of idleness, so too from working is generated a ready mind. Although you are full of ten thousand sins, although you are impure, don't hold back from coming to Church. It is no small profit to consider oneself wretched; this fear is not useless, this dread is OK. If only you groan that, "I don't listen," you will certainly come to doing it at some time. Everyone who speaks with God, and hears God speak, will profit. We compose ourselves and wash our hands when we desire to pick up the Bible. Do you notice even before the Reading what reverence there is here? We would not have washed our hands, unless it served to place the soul in reverence; and a woman who puts on her veil, gives proof of internal reverence. The outward behavior proclaims the inward reverence. He that sits to listen, groans often, and condemns his present life."

"Let us then, beloved, pay attention to the Scriptures, and if to no other part, let the Gospels at least be the subjects of our earnest care; let us keep them in our hands."

### **For Refuting Heretics**

Some people take offense at the mere mention of heretics, preferring to treat everyone equally and kindly. John Chrysostom noted<sup>110</sup> that heretics had been around from the beginning of time, and they have always been singled out and separated from the flock as a shepherd separates a wolf from the sheep.

"If anyone takes offense at the existence of heretics, let him remember that it was so from the beginning; the devil always set up error alongside of truth. God from the beginning promised good, the devil came with a false promise. God planted Paradise; the devil deceived, saying, 'You shall be like gods' (Genesis 3:5). Since he could show nothing with actions, he made many promises in words. Such is the character of deceivers. After this were Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12), then the sons of Seth and the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1-5);

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<sup>110</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, vv. 1-4.



afterwards Ham and Japheth (Genesis 9:20-24), Abraham and Pharaoh, Jacob and Esau. So it is even to the end, Moses and the magicians (Exodus 7:9-12), the Prophets and the false prophets, the Apostles and the false apostles, Christ and Antichrist. Thus it was then, both before and at that time. Then there was Theudas (Acts 5:36), then Simon (Acts 8:9-21), then the Apostles, then this party of Hermogenes<sup>111</sup> and Phygellus (2 Timothy 1:15). There was no time when falsehood was not set up in opposition to truth. Don't be distressed! That it would be so was foretold from the beginning. Therefore Paul says, 'Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection'" (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

Heretics generally don't use the Scriptures as the foundation of their beliefs. If they did, they would open themselves up to embarrassment when their practices came into conflict with the Scriptures. Some heretics may "use" the Scriptures but edit them according to their own opinions. For example, the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century heretic Marcion rejected the Old Testament plus the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. He edited the Gospel of Luke down to what he believed and concentrated on some of Paul's Epistles. By understanding the Scriptures, we have a measure to use against heretics to see where they depart from the truth.

Athanasius of Alexandria addressed<sup>112</sup> the heretical aspects of the teaching of Marcion, Manichaeus, Paul of Samosata and Arius. Each had a different twist, and they are all opposed to the Scriptures. Their use of the Scriptures is primarily to deceive the simple into thinking that their words are right.

"Each of these heresies, with respect to the peculiar impiety of its invention, has nothing in common with the Scriptures. Their advocates are aware of this, that the Scriptures are altogether opposed to the teachings of every one of them. For the sake of deceiving the simple, such as, 'The simple believes every word' (Proverbs 14:15), they pretend like their 'father the devil' (John 8:44) to study and quote the language of Scripture. In this manner they appear by their words to have a right belief, and so persuade their followers to believe what is contrary to the Scriptures. Assuredly in every one of these heresies the devil has thus disguised himself, and has suggested to them words full of craftiness. The Lord spoke concerning them, that 'false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect' (Matthew 24:24). Accordingly the devil has come, speaking by each, saying, 'I am Christ, and the truth is with me'; and he has made them, one and all, to be liars like himself. Strange it is, that while all heresies are at variance with one another concerning the inventions, which each has framed, they are united together only by the common purpose of lying. For they have one and the same father that has sown in them all the seeds of falsehood. The faithful Christian and true disciple of the Gospel, having grace to discern spiritual things, and having built the house of his faith on a rock, stands firm and secure from their deceits. But the simple

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<sup>111</sup> Hermogenes and Phygellus were two of the original Seventy Apostles, but they apostatized to follow the Heresiarch Simon Magus. See Mark Kern, Simon Magus Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, To the Bishops of Egypt, 4.

person that is not thoroughly grounded in knowledge, considering only the words that are spoken and not perceiving their meaning, gets drawn away by their craftiness. Therefore it is good for us to pray that we may receive the gift of discerning spirits, so that everyone may know whom he ought to reject, and whom to receive as friends and of the same faith (1 John 4:1-3). One might write at great length concerning these things. The heretics are perverse and their deceit is extreme. But since the Scripture is sufficient for us, I recommend to those who desire to know more of these matters, that they read the Divine word.”

John Chrysostom noted<sup>113</sup> that while the Scriptures are spiritual weapons, they do us no good if we don't know how to use them.

“We must explore everything carefully. The words of the Scriptures are our spiritual weapons; but if we don't know how to use those weapons and to arm our scholars properly, they keep their power, but they can't help those who receive them. Let us suppose strong body armor, a helmet, a shield, and a spear are available. Suppose one takes this armor and puts the body armor on his feet, the helmet over his eyes instead of on his head, and ties the shield to his legs. Will he be able to gain any advantage from the armor? Will he not rather be harmed? It is plain to anyone that he will; not on account of the weakness of the weapons, but on account of the man who doesn't know how to use them. So with the Scriptures, if we confuse their order; they will retain their proper force, yet they will do us no good.”

Gregory of Nyssa stated<sup>114</sup> that faith is conceived as the foundation whereby wisdom is begotten in the faithful. The life of the man, thus established, is truly blessed, for Wisdom is at all times in agreement with him, and rejoices with him. To obtain understanding, we need to fit our reflections and thoughts into the context of the Scriptures. An example of mistaken understanding is that the Son of God could be a created being rather than God begotten of God.

“Let the careful man read the original text of the Scriptures, and fit its obscure sayings to our reflections, testing whether it is not far better to consider that the meaning of these obscure sayings has this reference and not that which is attributed to it at first sight. For it is not possible that the theology of the Apostle John should be considered true, which recites that all created things are the work of the Word, if in this passage, He Who created Wisdom is believed to have made all other things<sup>115</sup> at the same time.”

“This is the reference of the saying, ‘Listen to me, my son; blessed is the man who shall listen to me, and keep my ways’ (Proverbs 8:32 LXX). The meaning of ‘ways’ is the approach to virtue, the beginning of which is the possession of Wisdom. He who looks to the Scripture, will agree that the enemies of the truth are impious and slanderous. They are impious because they degrade the unspeakable glory of the Only-begotten God, and unite it with the creation, striving to show that the Lord is one of the things that were made by Him. They are slanderous because, though Scripture itself gives them no ground for such

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<sup>113</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, XXX, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, III, 2.

<sup>115</sup> That is, if the Son of God was created along with all other things at the Creation described in Genesis, then the Apostle John's theology is wrong.

opinions, they arm themselves against piety as though they drew their evidence from piety. They cannot show any passage of the Scriptures which leads us to look upon the pre-temporal glory of the Only-begotten God as part of the creation. They make the creature equal to the creator; the Gospel from heaven teaches us that the Son is neither a bastard nor a counterfeit. We say that He, Who is Very God of Very God, is all that we behold in the Father. They are One, and in the one is conceived the other, not over shadowing Him, not inferior to Him, not altered or subject to change in any Divine or excellent property.”

### **Living Godly in Christ**

Another antidote to deception is living godly in Christ. Paul stated, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Why is this so? If Christians desire to live godly apart from other men, and don’t bother anyone, why would the people of this world or the demons care? What is the big deal here? The answer is that there is no such thing as “apart from other men”; we are at war continually against the demonic powers, and other men are brought into the conflict through deception without their knowledge.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>116</sup> that living godly will draw persecution in some way, either from men or from evil spirits. Sometimes the worst persecution comes during times of ease and peace. At times of peace, we are not on guard and the evil spirits are able to stir up passions such as pride, pleasure, envy, etc. During times of persecution, while Christians were hiding among the tombs, these passions did not make much headway, and our worth as Christians was much greater.

“Great are the medicinal virtues of repentance. That man truly deserves despair, who despairs of himself; that man has no hope or salvation. It is not the falling into a depth of evils, it is the lying there when fallen, that is dreadful; it is not the coming into such a condition, it is the making light of it that is impious. There is no incurable wound of the soul, anything can be healed; for the body, there are many incurable wounds, but none for the soul. Yet for the body we don’t cease in our efforts to obtain cures, while for the soul we are apathetic. Notice the thief on the cross, in how short a time he achieved his salvation! There are contests available, if we have the mind. ‘They that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). They that live godly are always undergoing persecution, if not from men, at any rate from evil spirits, which is a more grievous persecution.”

“It is because of ease and comfort, first and foremost, that those who are not vigilant undergo this. Do you think it is a trifling persecution to be living at ease? This can be the worst persecution! Like a bloody discharge, ease makes the soul sluggish; persecution and ease are like summer and winter respectively. Ease is the worst persecution because it induces sleep in the soul, an excessive yawning and drowsiness; it stirs up the passions on every side; it arms pride, pleasure, anger, envy, vainglory and jealousy. But in a time of persecution none of these is able to make a disturbance; but fear, using the lash vigorously, as one does to a barking dog, will not let any of these passions attempt to talk back to us. Who shall be able in a time of persecution to indulge in vainglory? Who will live

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<sup>116</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXIV, vv. 44-46.

in pleasure? No one! There is much trembling and fear, making a great calm, filling the soul with awe. I have heard from our fathers, that in the persecution of old one might see men who were truly Christian. None of them cared for money, wife, children, home or country; the one great concern with everyone was to save their souls. They were hiding, some in tombs and sepulchers, some in deserts; even tender and dainty women, fighting all the while with constant hunger. There was no longing for sumptuous and dainty living in the minds of women, while hiding next to a coffin, waiting for her maidservant to bring her meal, and trembling lest she should be taken captive, lying in her terror as in a furnace. Was she even aware that there was such a thing as dainty living that such things as dress and ornaments exist at all? Do you see that now, in times of ease, is the persecution, with our passions, like wild beasts, attacking us on every side? Now is the persecution, especially since it is not even thought to be persecution at all. This persecution has evil in it; being war, it is thought to be peace, so that we do not arm ourselves against it; no one fears, no one trembles.”

“If you do not believe me, ask the heathen, the persecutors, at what time was the conduct of Christians stricter. They had then become few in number, but rich in virtue. What profit is it if there were plenty of straw, when there might be precious stones? (1 Corinthians 3:12) The amount does not consist in the sum of numbers, but in the proven worth. Elijah was just one man; yet the whole world was not worth so much as him. ‘Better is one man who is just, than a thousand who are transgressors’. ‘Don’t desire a multitude of unprofitable children’ (Ecclesiasticus 16:1-3). Such bring more blasphemy against God, than if they were not Christians. What need do I have of a multitude? It is only more food for the fire.”

Athanasius of Alexandria noted<sup>117</sup> that it is not everyone who is persecuted for the Faith, but just those who desire to live godly.

“Let us rejoice as we keep the Paschal Feast, my brethren, knowing that our salvation is ordered in the time of affliction. Our Savior did not redeem us by inactivity, but by suffering for us, He abolished death. Regarding this, He intimated to us before, saying, ‘In the world you shall have tribulation’ (John 16:33). He did not say this to every man, but to those who diligently and faithfully perform good service to Him, knowing beforehand, that they should be persecuted who would live godly toward Him.”

Gregory the Great, writing to the monk Narses, likened<sup>118</sup> the persecution Narses was going through to Israel at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20:24); this was merely a means for increasing Narses’ godliness.

“Romanus told me of your afflictions, and made known your opposition by bad men. In all this recall what I believe that you never forgot, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). With regard to this I confidently say that you would live less godly if you suffered persecution less. Let us hear what Paul says to his disciples, ‘You yourselves

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<sup>117</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XIII, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Epistles, VII, 30.

know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. For we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi' (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2, Acts 16:16-34). He declared that his entrance would have been of no effect, if he had not been shamefully treated. You wish to say good things, and refuse to endure evil things. Therefore you need to prepare yourself better in the midst of adverse circumstances, that adversity may increase your desire for the love of God and your earnestness in good works. The seeds of harvest germinate the more fruitfully after being covered over with frost; similarly fire is kept down by a high wind, that it may grow greater. I know that from the perverse speech of so many evil tongues you endure a violent storm, and bear in your soul billows of contradictions. But remember what the Lord says, 'I heard you in the secret place of storm; I proved you at the waters<sup>119</sup> of Meribah' (Psalm 81:7, Numbers 20:24). If in the midst of those that contradict you, you do the things that are of God, then you are proven to be a true worker."

John Chrysostom had some advice<sup>120</sup> for how to live godly in Christ. Our whole life is a wrestling match, where we don't wrestle with flesh and blood, but with the demonic powers (Ephesians 6:12). We should bear everything nobly, but yet not throw ourselves into danger needlessly, which is rashness. If persecution comes, we are not called as cowards to avoid it. But if there is no threat to godliness and no challenge to the Faith, we are not called to compete.

"Let us not seek relaxation, for Christ promised tribulation to His disciples; Paul says, 'All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). No noble-spirited wrestler, during competition, seeks baths, and a table full of food and wine. This is not for a wrestler, but for a sluggard. For the wrestler contends with dust, with oil, with the heat of the sun's ray, with much sweat, with pressure and constraint. This is the time for contest, for fighting, for being wounded, and for being bloody and in pain. Hear what Paul says, 'So I fight, not as one that beats the air' (1 Corinthians 9:26). Let us consider that our whole life is in combat, and then we shall never seek rest. We shall never feel it strange when we are afflicted, any more than a boxer feels it strange, when he is in combat. There is another season for repose; by tribulation we must be made perfect."

"Even if there is no persecution or tribulation, yet there are other afflictions which come upon us every day. If we don't bear these, we won't endure the others. 'No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man' (1 Corinthians 10:13). Let us pray to God that we may not come into temptation; but if we come into it, let us bear it nobly. It is the part of prudent men not to throw ourselves into dangers, for that is rashness. If led into them, and called by circumstances, let us not give in, for that is cowardice. But if the Gospel calls us, let us not refuse. In a simple case, when there is no reason, need or necessity which calls us in 'the fear of God', let us not rush in, for this is mere display, and useless ambition. But should any of those things which are injurious to the Faith occur, then though it is necessary to endure ten thousand deaths, let us

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<sup>119</sup> Meribah means strife or contention.

<sup>120</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, V, 7.

refuse nothing. When you find the things that concern godliness prosper as you desire, why draw down needless dangers that bring no gain?"

"These things I say, because I wish you to observe the laws of Christ who commands us to 'pray that we enter not into temptation' (Matthew 26:41), and commands us to 'take up the cross and follow Him' (Matthew 16:24). These things are not contradictory; they are rather in harmony. Be so prepared as is a valiant soldier, continually in your armor, sober, watchful, and always looking for the enemy. Do not breed wars, for this is not the duties of a soldier but of a mover of sedition. If on the other hand the trumpet of godliness calls you, go immediately, and make no account of your life. Enter with great eagerness into the contest, break the phalanx of the adversaries, and bruise the face of the devil, set up your trophy. If godliness is not harmed, and no one lays waste to our teachings (those I mean which relate to the soul), or compels us to do anything displeasing to God, do not be overly eager."

John Chrysostom also noted<sup>121</sup> that soldiers train for battle even in times of peace so that they keep up their skills for when it is needed. Christians need to do this also, where our battle is continually against the demonic powers.

"It may not be the season of war, but if it was, who would contend? Who would break through the phalanx? Perhaps no one! When I see that you do not despise riches for the sake of Christ, how shall I believe that you will despise beatings? Do you manfully put up with those who insult you, and do you bless them? Anything dangerous you avoid; how will you fare if there is much pain and suffering? Don't you know that it is proper in times of peace to keep up the exercises of war? Have you ever seen soldiers, at times of profound peace, brightening up their arms, and going out on maneuvers to learn tactics every day to keep up their skill in the exercises of war? Of our spiritual soldiers, who has done this? No one! For this reason we become weak in war, and easily led captive by anyone."

"What stupidity is this, not to think that the present time is a season of war, when Paul cries out, 'All that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). Christ says, 'In the world you shall have tribulation' (John 16:33). And again Paul says, 'Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood', and again, 'Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth' (Ephesians 6:12, 14). He who in peace and considers the business of battle will be formidable in the season of battle; but he who is without experience in the things of war, will be more troubled even in peace. He will weep for the things which he possesses and, not being able to fight for them, will be in anguish. For the possessions of the cowardly and inexperienced in war, become the property of all who are brave and warlike. The whole time of our life is the season of war. The devil is always on hand; 'As a roaring lion, he walks about, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5:8). Bodily affections attack us, such as riches, beauty, pleasure, power, authority, envy, glory, pride. Our own glory wars against us, forbidding us to descend to humility; the glory of others leads us to envy. What took Adam captive? Pleasure, eating, and the love of dominion! What took his

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<sup>121</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, III, Moral.

son (Cain) captive? Grudging and envy! What took captive those in the time of Noah? Fleshly pleasures and the evils that resulted from them! What about Noah's son Ham? Insolence and irreverence! Like Solomon, we must 'Acknowledge that we pass through the midst of snares'" (Ecclesiasticus 9:13).

Athanasius of Alexandria wrote<sup>122</sup> to the Bishops of Egypt to confirm that opposing evil men and making a stand for the Faith is equivalent to martyrdom; one receives the same reward for each.

"We know that, 'in the latter times some shall depart from the sound faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, that turn from the truth' (1 Timothy 4:1) and, 'as many as will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived' (2 Timothy 3:12-13). None of these things shall prevail over us, nor 'separate us from the love of Christ' (Romans 8:35) though the heretics threaten us with death. For we are Christians, not Arians! We have not received 'the spirit of bondage again to fear' (Romans 8:15), but God has called us 'to liberty' (Galatians 5:13). It would have been disgraceful to us, were we on account of Arius, to destroy the faith which we have received from our Savior through His Apostles. Many in these parts recognize the craftiness of the Arians and are ready even to blood to oppose their wiles, especially since they have heard of your firmness. They see that the refutation of the heresy has come from you, and that the heresy has been drawn out of its concealment, like a serpent from his hole."

"I exhort you to keep in your hands the confession which was framed by the Fathers at Nicaea, and defend it with great zeal and confidence in the Lord, as examples to the brethren everywhere. Show them that we now have a struggle in support of the Truth against heresy, and that the wiles of the enemy are substantial. For the proof of a martyr lies not only in refusing to burn incense to idols; but also in refusing to deny the Faith as a testimony of a good conscience. Not only were those, who turned aside to idols, condemned, but also those who betrayed the Truth. Judas was degraded from the Apostolic office, not because he sacrificed to idols, but because he proved a traitor. Hymenaeus and Alexander fell away not by joining the service of idols, but because they 'made shipwreck concerning the faith' (1 Timothy 1:19). On the other hand, the Patriarch Abraham received the crown, not because he suffered death, but because he was faithful to God. The other Saints (Hebrews 11:20-40) were not made perfect by the shedding of their blood, but were justified by faith. To this day they are the objects of our admiration, as being ready to suffer death for piety towards the Lord."

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote<sup>123</sup> to Bishop Rusticus, who was having difficulties with some fellow Bishops. They would rather resign their offices and go back to their monastery than put up with some rebellious presbyters. Leo counseled Rusticus that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecution, and the worst persecution is often from within the Church. The

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<sup>122</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, To the Bishops of Egypt, 20-21.

<sup>123</sup> Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Letters, 167, 2.

helmsman needs to continue to steer the ship during stormy seas; the shepherd needs to continue to watch the flock when wolves are around.

“The Lord says, ‘Blessed is he who shall persevere to the end’ (Matthew 24:13); where shall this blessed perseverance come from, except from the strength of patience? Paul proclaims, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). Persecution is not only when sword or fire or other active means are used against the Christian Faith. The direst persecution is often inflicted by nonconformity of practice, persistent disobedience and the barbs of ill-natured tongues. Since all the members of the Church are always liable to these attacks, and no portion of the faithful are free from temptation, a life of ease without labor is still susceptible to danger. Who shall guide the ship amid the waves of the sea, if the helmsman quits his post? Who shall guard the sheep from the treachery of wolves, if the shepherd himself is not on the watch? Who shall resist the thieves and robbers, if the love of quietness draws away the watchman that is set to keep the watch? One must stay in the office committed to him and in the task undertaken. Justice must be steadfastly upheld and mercy must be lovingly extended. One must not hate men, but only their sins. The proud must be rebuked; the weak must be put up with. Those sins which require severe chastisement must be dealt with in the spirit not of vindictiveness but of desire to heal. If a fierce storm of tribulation falls upon us, let us not be terror-stricken as if we had to overcome the disaster in our own strength. Both our Counsel and our Strength is Christ, and through Him we can do all things. Without Him we can do nothing; He confirmed the preachers of the Gospel and the ministers of the mysteries, saying, ‘I am with you always even to the consummation of the age’ (Matthew 28:20). Again He says, ‘these things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). The promises should not be weakened by any causes of offense, lest we should seem ungrateful to God for making us His chosen vessels, since His assistance is as powerful as His promises are true.”

Athanasius also noted<sup>124</sup> that faith and godliness are related like sisters. In order to avoid renouncing godliness during persecution, it is necessary to preserve the Faith. He who is practiced in one will be strengthened by the other, where the hope of both is the same: eternal life. Not so such 1<sup>st</sup> century heretics like Hymenaeus and Philetus, who didn’t depart from wickedness. Similarly Israel in Egypt had to leave Egypt in order to offer a proper sacrifice to God.

“Faith and godliness are allied to each other like sisters; he who believes in Christ is godly, and he who is godly, believes the more (John 7:17). He, who is in a state of wickedness, wanders from the faith; and he who fails in godliness, falls from the true Faith. Paul advises Timothy saying, ‘Shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort’ (2 Timothy 2:16-17). Paul declared what their wickedness consisted of saying, ‘They have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past’ (2 Timothy

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<sup>124</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XI, 9-10.



2:18). But again, desirous of showing that faith is yoked with godliness, Paul says, ‘All those who desire to live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). In order that no man should renounce godliness through persecution, he advised them to preserve the faith, adding, ‘You, therefore, continue in the things you have learned, and have been assured of’ (2 Timothy 3:14). As when brother is helped by brother, they become as a wall to each other; so faith and godliness, like brothers, hang together, and he who is practiced in the one, of necessity is strengthened by the other. Therefore, wishing everyone to be exercised in godliness to the end, and to contend for the Faith, he advised them, ‘Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold of eternal life’ (1 Timothy 6:12). For if a man first puts away the wickedness of idols, and rightly confesses Him, Who is truly God, he next fights by faith with those who war against Him.”

“Of faith and godliness, the hope is the same: everlasting life. Also, ‘exercise yourself toward godliness, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come’ (1 Timothy 4:7-8). The Arians, who now have gone out from the Church, being opponents of Christ, dug a pit of unbelief, into which they themselves have been thrust. Since they have advanced in ungodliness, they ‘deceive the hearts of the simple’ (Romans 16:18); blaspheming the Son of God, they say that He is a creature. Just like the followers of Philetus and Hymenaeus, so now Paul warns all men against ungodliness like theirs, saying, ‘The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal. The Lord knows those who are His; and let everyone that names the Name of Christ depart from iniquity’ (2 Timothy 2:19). For it is good that a man should depart from wickedness, that he may be able properly to celebrate the Paschal Feast; for he who is defiled with the pollutions of the wicked is not able to sacrifice the Passover to the Lord our God. Because of this, the people, who were then in Egypt, said that they could not sacrifice the Passover in Egypt to the Lord our God (Exodus 8:26). For God, Who is over all, willed that they should go far away from the servants of Pharaoh, and from the furnace of iron (Deuteronomy 4:20). Being set free from wickedness, and having carefully put away all strange gods, they might receive the knowledge of God and of virtuous actions. For He said, ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean’ (2 Corinthians 6:17). A man will not otherwise depart from sin, than by meditation on his own actions; when he has begun exercising godliness, he will lay hold on the confession of faith. Just like Paul, after he had fought the fight, possessed the crown of righteousness which was laid up; which the righteous Judge will give, not to him alone, but to all who are like him.”

### **Being Wise for Salvation**

Another antidote to deception is being wise for salvation. Paul stated, “You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). “Wise for salvation” means an understanding of what is really happening all around us. If we can’t see and have no knowledge of the presence of the angels we are struggling with and the demons we are struggling against, we cannot have any wisdom to address the situation.

Knowing their presence is a first step. The Scriptures are able to give us wisdom on how to deal with sin in an unseen warfare.

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>125</sup> that those, who neglect God's gracious calling, sin in a very grave manner. Godliness, on the other hand, makes us like God, and the Scriptures help in that direction to make us wise.

“Godliness, that makes man as far as can be like God, designates God as our suitable teacher, who alone can worthily assimilate man to God. This teaching Paul knows as truly divine. ‘You, O Timothy’, he says, ‘from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus’ (2 Timothy 3:15). For truly holy are those letters that sanctify and deify; and the writings or volumes that consist of those holy letters and syllables, Paul consequently calls ‘inspired of God, being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Timothy 3:16-17). No one will be so impressed by the exhortations of any of the saints, as he is by the words of the Lord Himself, the lover of man. For this, and nothing but this, is His only work — the salvation of man. Therefore He Himself, urging them on to salvation, cries, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 4:17). Those men that draw near through fear, He converts. Thus Paul, imploring the Macedonians, becomes the interpreter of the divine voice, when he says, ‘The Lord is at hand; take care that you are not found lacking in your faith’ (Philippians 4:5, 1 Thessalonians 3:10). But are you so devoid of fear, or rather of faith, as not to believe the Lord Himself, or Paul, who in Christ's place entreats, ‘Taste and see that Christ is God?’ (Psalm 34:8) Faith will lead you in; experience will teach you; Scripture will train you, for it says, ‘Come children; listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord’. Then, as to those who already believe, it briefly adds, ‘What man is there that desires life, loving to see good days?’ (Psalm 34:11-12) We are the ones, who are devoted to good, who eagerly desire good things. Hear, then, you who are far off, hear you who are near; the word has not been hidden from anyone; light is common; it shines on all men.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>126</sup> that the term “wise for salvation” applies to everyone, not just priests and bishops. Some had thought that just godliness or living a holy life was enough. Yet teaching and godliness need the help of each other.

“Hear what Paul says to Timothy, ‘Pay attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching’ (1 Timothy 4:13); Paul goes on to show the usefulness of this by adding, ‘In doing this you shall save both yourself and them that hear you’ (1 Timothy 4:16). Again he says, ‘The Lord's servant must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient’ (2 Timothy 2:24); and he proceeds to say, ‘Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation’ (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

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<sup>125</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Heathen, 9.

<sup>126</sup> John Chrysostom, Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood, IV, 8.

Again, 'All Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete' (2 Timothy 3:16-17). He adds further in his directions to Titus about the appointment of bishops. 'The bishop must hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able to convict those who contradict' (Titus 1:7, 9). How shall anyone who is unskillful be able to convict those who deny the Faith and stop their mouths? What need is there to pay attention to reading and to the Holy Scriptures, if being unskillful is welcome among us? Such arguments are makeshifts and pretexts, the marks of idleness and sloth. But someone will say, 'it is to the priests that these charges are given'; certainly, for they are the topic of the discussion."

"But Paul gives the same charge to the laity, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom' (Colossians 3:16); and again, 'Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one' (Colossians 4:6). There is a general charge to all that they 'be ready to give a defense of their faith' (1 Peter 3:15), and, 'Comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing' (1 Thessalonians 5:11). When he speaks of priests he says, 'Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching!' (1 Timothy 5:17). For this is the perfection of teaching when the teachers both by what they do, and by what they say, bring their disciples to that blessed state of life, which Christ appointed for them. Example alone is not enough to instruct others. Nor do I say this of myself; it is Christ's own word. 'Whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great' (Matthew 5:19). Now if doing were the same as teaching, teaching would be unnecessary; and it would have been enough to have said 'whoever shall do'. By distinguishing the two, he shows that practice is one thing, and teaching is another, and that each needs the help of the other in order to complete edification. Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, 'Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears' (Acts 20:31). What need was there for his tears or for admonition by word of mouth, while his life as an Apostle was so illustrious? His holy life might be a great inducement to men to keep the commandments, yet it alone could not accomplish everything."

# ***HUMILITY, CONFESSION and JUSTIFICATION***

**February 1, 2015**

**Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican**

**Revision E**

**GOSPEL: Luke 18:10-14**

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## **Gospel: Luke 18:10-14**

The context of the Gospel lesson was Jesus’ teaching His disciples “that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). He then gave the parable of the unrighteous judge (Luke 18:2-8). Cyril of Alexandria introduced<sup>127</sup> the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (which followed) by saying, “Having then urged them to diligence in constant prayer, if we were to persevere but without discretion, we might anger Him to whom we pray. He very excellently shows us in what way we ought to be diligent in prayer”. The lesson of the Pharisee and the Publican, then, is how we should approach God in prayer.

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<sup>127</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 83, Studion Publishers, 1983. chapter 18.

## Humility

The Gospel lesson is the familiar one of the Pharisee and the Publican praying in the Temple, where the theme is humility. The Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” But the Publican prayed with head bowed, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”. There was a sharp contrast between the two men: the Pharisee was highly respected as a zealous observer of the Mosaic Law; the Publican was despised as a public sinner collaborating with the Romans and cheating the people. Yet it was the Publican who was “justified” (Greek: *atoned for, propitiated*). Each man undoubtedly offered his own animal sacrifice according to the Law to make atonement or propitiation for his sin. These animal sacrifices were intended to illustrate what Jesus would do as the atonement or propitiation for the sins of the people (see Hebrews 2:17, Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, 4:10); however, the sacrifice of the Pharisee was rejected while that of the Publican was accepted. This is reminiscent of how the Lord accepted the offering of righteous Abel but rejected the offering of Cain (Genesis 4:3-5, compare Matthew 23:35). Like Cain, the Pharisee’s problem was that of sin crouching at the door (the sin of pride) and the Pharisee couldn’t master it (Genesis 4:6-7).

The bottom line: if we humble ourselves the Lord will exalt us; if we exalt ourselves we will be humbled (Matthew 23:12). This is a consistent theme throughout the Scriptures. For example, Israel in the desert was arrogant and stiff-necked. As a result, the Lord humbled them by letting them all die there even though they were miraculously provided for - and all the surrounding nations knew it (Deuteronomy 8:1-6). On the other hand, Moses was the most humble man on earth and wouldn’t even defend himself when his brother and sister (Aaron and Miriam) spoke against him. But the Lord defended Moses and, in doing so, exalted him (Numbers 12:1-11).

John Chrysostom addressed<sup>128</sup> humility by saying that we should not promote our own good deeds but instead declare ourselves as unprofitable. The greater our good works are, the less we should promote them. As examples, Chrysostom used the Publican, the Three Young Men in the Furnace, the Centurion, Paul, John the Baptist and Peter.

“Let no one therefore be high-minded on account of these matters, but let him consider the forefathers of the Lord, and put away all his haughtiness, and let good actions be his pride; or rather, not even these. For thus it was that the Pharisee came to be inferior to the Publican. Thus, if you would show the work to be great, have no high thought, and you have proved it so much the greater. Make account that you have done nothing, and then you have done all. For if, being sinners, when we account ourselves to be what we are, we become righteous, as indeed the Publican did; how much more, when being righteous we account ourselves to be sinners. Since if out of sinners men are made righteous by a lowly mind (although this were not to be lowly-minded but to be right-minded); if then to be right-minded avails so much in the case of sinners, consider what will not lowliness of mind do with respect to righteous men.

“Do not then mar your labors, nor cast away from you the fruits of your works, neither run in vain, making frustrate all your labor after the many courses

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<sup>128</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, III, .

you have run. The Lord knows your good works better than you do. Though you give but a cup of cold water, not even this does He overlook; though you contribute only a farthing, though you only utter a sigh, He receives it all with great favor and is mindful thereof, and assigns for it great rewards.

“But why do you search out your own doings, and parade them out before us continually? Do you not know that if you praise yourself, God will no more praise you? Even as if you lament yourself, He will not cease proclaiming you before all. For it is not at all His will that your labors should be disparaged.

“Let us not therefore lift up ourselves, but let us declare ourselves unprofitable, that we may become profitable (Luke 17:10). For if you call yourself approved, you have become unprofitable, though you were approved; but if useless, you have become profitable, even though you were reprobate.

“Don’t be forever parading your good works, lest someone should take them away. In the case with the Pharisee, he boasted about them; therefore the devil took them away. With thanksgiving he made mention of them, and referred the whole to God. But this did not suffice. For it is not thanksgiving to revile others, to be vainglorious before many, to exalt one’s self against them that have offended. Rather, if you are giving thanks to God, be content with Him only, and don’t publish it among men, neither condemn your neighbor; for this is not thanksgiving. Would you learn words of thanksgiving? Listen to the Three Children, saying, as they walked about inside the Babylonian furnace ‘We have sinned, we have transgressed. You art righteous, O Lord, in all that you have done to us, because you have brought all things upon us by a true judgment’ (Song of the Three Children LXX, verses 6, 8, 4). For to confess one’s own sins, this is to give thanks with confession to God: a kind of thing, which implies one to be guilty of numberless offenses, yet not to have the due penalty exacted. This man most of all is the giver of thanks.

“Let us beware therefore of saying anything about ourselves, for this renders us both odious with men and abominable to God. For this reason, the greater the good works we do, the less let us say of ourselves; this being the way to reap the greatest glory both with men and with God. Confess yourself to be saved by grace, that He may profess Himself a debtor to you; and not for your good works only, but also for such rightness of mind.

“It was in this way that the centurion also said, ‘I am not fit that You should enter under my roof (Matthew 8:8); because of this, he became worthy, and was marveled at (Matthew 8:10) above all Jews. In this way Paul says, ‘I am not worthy to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:9); because of this he became even first of all. So likewise John: ‘I am not worthy to loose the strap of His shoe’ (Mark 1:7); because of this he was the ‘friend of the Bridegroom’ (John 3:29); and the hand which he said was unworthy to touch His shoes, this did Christ draw onto<sup>129</sup> His own head (Matthew 3:14, 15). So Peter too said, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man’ (Luke 5:8); because of this he became a foundation of the Church”.

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<sup>129</sup> This alludes to the laying on of hands at baptism.

Cyril of Alexandria pointed out that the Old Testament - which the Pharisee knew very well - had much to say about the Pharisee's prayer. Regarding his boasting: "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2). "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). Regarding his fasting, sacrifices were required to be without blemish to be accepted (Leviticus 22:21). His prayer was therefore not acceptable because of the blemish of his boasting. The fasting that the Lord chooses involves a man humbling himself, loosening the bonds of wickedness and dividing his bread with the hungry (Isaiah 58:6-8).

Regarding his judgment of others, the Lord had said, "Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). James, the Lord's brother, added: "There is One Lawgiver and Judge, who is able to save and destroy. Who are you to judge a neighbor?" (James 4:12)

Cyril added<sup>130</sup>, "The love of self is displeasing to God, and He rejects empty haughtiness and a proud look, puffed up often on account of that which is by no means excellent. And even if a man is good and sober, let him not allow himself to fall away into shameful pride. But rather let him remember Christ who said to His Holy Apostles (Luke 17:10): 'When you have done all these things which you are commanded, say that you are unprofitable slaves and that you have done what was your duty to do'".

Mark the Ascetic put it<sup>131</sup> this way: "Just as water and fire cannot be combined, so self-justification and humility exclude one another".

In the New Testament, the Virgin Mary prophesied about how all generations would call her blessed (Luke 1:46-52). She was a very humble lady and she has been very much exalted over the centuries, like her Son, who humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross. Because of this, He has been very much exalted (Philippians 2:7-11).

Jesus used a little child<sup>132</sup> to illustrate humility: "whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-5). Paul encouraged the Philippians: "in humbleness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3). James encouraged people to look beyond this life. "Let the humble (poor) brother glory in his exaltation"; that is, later in the kingdom of heaven (James 1:9, Matthew 5:3). On the other hand, James warns, let the rich man realize that his exaltation (riches) in this life will wither like a flower in the summer heat. Both James and Peter quote Proverbs 3:34, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5).

There is an attitude prevalent today where it's cool to be arrogant and obnoxious and to revile anything that isn't easily understood. The Gospel and Epistle lesson today stand against the tide of today's trends. Humility isn't cool today and people who are humble are often

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<sup>130</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 83, Studion Publishers, 1983. chapter 18

<sup>131</sup> Mark the Ascetic, On the Spiritual Law. Mark was a famous writer of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and a student of John Chrysostom, who actually moved mountains when necessary.

<sup>132</sup> The little child was Ignatius of Antioch, who was later the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bishop of Antioch and who was martyred in c. 107 AD. See Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 20.

ridiculed or taken advantage of. As Christians, we can be at peace even if the world hates us, reviles us or persecutes us because the world has done so to the prophets before us. All that the world accomplished in the past by doing so was to exalt the prophets in the kingdom of God.

### Identifying with the Lowly

The Psalmist David wrote the following words on the day that the Lord delivered him from his enemies and from the hand of Saul: “With the holy, you will be holy; and with the innocent man you will be innocent. With the excellent *man* you will be excellent; and with the perverse you will show disobedience. For You will save the lowly people, and will humble the eyes of the proud” (Psalm 18:25-27 LXX). Hanging out with evildoers will lead us into evildoing. Therefore just as we are encouraged to give alms to those who are less fortunate than we are, so we are also encouraged to hang out with the lowly-minded rather than with the proud and arrogant.

The Twelve Apostles emphasized this. The late 1<sup>st</sup> century document that summarized<sup>133</sup> what the Twelve Apostles taught states:

“Run from every evil thing and from everything that looks like it. Don’t be prone to anger, for anger leads to murder; don’t be jealous, quarrelsome, or hot tempered, for out of all these come murders. Do not be lustful, for lust leads to fornication; neither be a filthy talker, or haughty, for out of all these come adultery. Do not be not an observer of omens, since it leads to idolatry; don’t be an enchanter, an astrologer, or be willing to look at these things, for out of all these come idolatry. Do not be a liar, since a lie leads to theft; don’t be money-loving, or vainglorious, for out of all these come theft. Do not murmur, since it leads the way to blasphemy; neither be self-willed or evil-minded, for out of all these come blasphemy. But be meek, since the meek shall inherit the earth. Be long-suffering, compassionate, guileless, gentle and good and always trembling at the words that you have heard. Don’t exalt yourself, or give over-confidence to your soul. Don’t hang out with lofty people, but converse with the just and lowly. Receive as good whatever occurs, knowing that apart from God nothing comes to pass.”

John Chrysostom noted<sup>134</sup> that the good deeds of the Pharisee went for nothing because of his pride. On the other hand, the Three Young Men in the Babylonian furnace confessed their sins while in the furnace out of humility. Similarly Daniel in the lions’ den humbly asked God to remember him.

“Many are elated on account of their humility; but let us not be so affected. Have you done any act of humility? Don’t be proud of it; otherwise all the merit of it is lost. Such was the Pharisee; he was puffed up because he gave his tithes to the poor; and he lost all the merit of it (Luke 18:12). But not so the publican! Listen to Paul again saying, ‘I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this’ (1 Corinthians 4:4). Do you see that he does not exalt

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<sup>133</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”, Chapter 3, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

<sup>134</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philemon, II, Moral.



himself, but by every means abases and humbles himself, and that too when he had arrived at the peak of his Apostleship. The Three Children in the midst of the furnace said<sup>135</sup>, ‘We have sinned and committed iniquity with our fathers’. This is a contrite heart; on this account they could say, ‘Nevertheless in a contrite heart and a humble spirit let us be accepted’. Thus even after they had fallen into the furnace they were exceedingly humbled, even more so than they were before. For when they saw the miracle that was done, thinking themselves unworthy of that deliverance, they were humbled even more. When we are persuaded that we have received great benefits beyond what we deserve, then we are particularly grieved. They had given themselves up to the furnace; they had been taken captive for the sins of others. They were still young, but they didn’t murmur, or become indignant. Nor did they say, ‘What good is it to us that we serve God, or what advantage do we have in worshipping Him? This king is impious, and has become our lord. We are punished with the idolatrous by an idolatrous king. We have been led into captivity. We are deprived of our country, our freedom, and all our inheritance. We have become prisoners and slaves; we are enslaved to a barbarous king’. None of these things did they say, instead, ‘We have sinned and committed iniquity’. Not for themselves but for others they offered prayers; because, they said, ‘You have delivered us to a hateful and a wicked king’. Daniel, cast into the pit, said<sup>136</sup>, ‘For God has remembered me’. Shouldn’t He remember you, O Daniel, when you glorified Him before the king, saying, “Not for any wisdom that I have?”” (Daniel 2:30)

“This is the part of well-inclined servants, not only in His mercies, but in His corrections, and in punishments wholly to submit to Him.”

### **Not Much Separates the Humble and the Proud**

What is it that separates the humble and the proud? It turns out that there is not much, and one can step from one to the other very quickly. This is something we all need to be aware of and watch out for.

Gregory the Great illustrated this thin line between humility and pride in his epistle to Reccared, the Visigoth King of Spain, stating<sup>137</sup> that our enemies, the demons, do not try to ambush empty vessels, but those that are carrying valuables. Consequently, those people that have been given the greater gifts can expect the greater attacks. These attacks often come in the form of accolades for deeds well done, which fans the flame of pride. In this manner, we can go very quickly from humility and deeds well done to being proud for our good deeds.

“We must guard with vigilant attention against the snares of the ancient foe. The greater gifts he sees among men, the more subtle are the snares he uses to take them away. Robbers do not look out for empty travelers to seize them on

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<sup>135</sup> Lancelot Brenton, “Song of the Three Children”, 2-8, 15, in The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990. The “Song of the Three Children” was originally part of the Book of Daniel.

<sup>136</sup> Lancelot Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon”, 38, in The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990. “Bel and the Dragon” was originally part of the Book of Daniel.

<sup>137</sup> Gregory the Great, Epistle to King Reccared, IX, 122.

the road, but only travelers that carry vessels of gold and silver. The present life is a road. Everyone needs to be the more on his guard against ambush by demons in proportion as the gifts are greater which he carries. It is the duty, then, of your Excellency, with regard to this so great gift, which you have received in the conversion of the nation subject to you, to keep with all your might, first humility of heart, and secondly cleanness of body. It is written, 'Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted' (Luke 14:11; 18:14). From this it is evident that he truly loves what is noble who does not cut off his soul from the root of humility. Often the malignant demon, in order to destroy the good that previously he had no power to oppose, subtly comes into the mind of the worker after accomplishment of his work, and agitates it with silent thoughts of self-praise, so that the deluded mind admires itself for the great things that it has done. Being exalted in its own sight through this hidden tumor, it is deprived of the grace of Him, Who bestowed the gift. Thus the prophet says to the soul that grows proud, 'Having trusted in your beauty you played the harlot because of your fame' (Ezekiel 16:15). A soul's having trust in its beauty is its presuming within itself on its righteous doings. It plays the harlot because of its renown, when in what it has done right, it desires not the praise of its Maker to be spread abroad, but seeks the glory of its own reputation. Again the prophet writes, 'In that you are more beautiful, go down and be placed with the uncircumcised' (Ezekiel 32:19). The soul goes down because of being more beautiful when, owing to the beauty of its virtue, it ought to have been exalted before God, but it falls from His grace through its exalted feeling. What then is to be done in this case? When the malignant demon employs the good things that we have done to exalt the mind, we should always recall to memory our evil deeds. Thus we may acknowledge that what we have done sinfully is our own, but that it is of the gift of Almighty God alone when we avoid sins. Cleanness of body is to be guarded in our strivings after well-doing, since, according to the voice of the apostolic preacher, 'The temple of God is holy, which temple you are' (1 Corinthians 3:17). Again he says, 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). As to which sanctification, what he means by it he shows by adding, 'That you should abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor'" (1 Thessalonians 4:4-5).

Gregory the Great stated<sup>138</sup> that the humble and the haughty ought to be admonished and encouraged in different ways (Table 1). Haughtiness or pride caused the Fall of Man and continues to lead men to perdition. Opposed to haughtiness is the humility of Christ in His humanity.

"Differently to be admonished are the humble and the haughty. To the humble suggest how true is that excellence which they hold; to the haughty suggest how that temporal glory is as nothing, which even when embracing it they don't hold it. The pride of the devil became the occasion of our perdition, and the humility of God has generated our redemption. Our enemy, having been created among all things, desired to appear exalted above all things; but our Redeemer,

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<sup>138</sup> Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, IV, 17.

remaining great above all things, condescended to become little among all things.”

“What, then, is more debased than haughtiness? While it stretches itself above itself, it is lengthened out beyond the stature of true loftiness. What is nobler than humility? While it depresses itself to the lowest, it unites itself to its Maker who remains above the highest. Some are deceived by a false show of humility. Others are beguiled by ignorance of their own

**Table 1**  
**Encouragement and Admonition for the Humble and the Haughty**

<b>Let the Humble Hear</b>	<b>Let the Haughty Hear</b>
How eternal are the things that they long for, how transitory the things which they despise.	How transitory are the things they desire, how eternal the things they lose.
Everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted.	Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled (Luke 18:14).
Humility comes before glory (Proverbs 15:33).	The spirit is exalted before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).
To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is humble and meek, and that trembles at my words (Isaiah 66:2).	Why is earth and ashes proud? (Ecclesiasticus 10:9 LXX).
God has respect for the things that are humble.	He knows high things from afar off (Psalm 138:6)
The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28)	Pride is the beginning of sin (Ecclesiasticus 10:13 LXX)
Our Redeemer humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:8).	What is written concerning their leader, He is king over all the sons of pride (Job 41:34).
When they abase themselves, they ascend to the likeness of God.	When they exalt themselves, they fall into imitation of the apostate angel.

haughtiness. Some who think themselves humble have it alloyed with fear inappropriately; while an assertion of free speech commonly goes with the haughty. When any vices need to be rebuked, the humble sometimes are silent out of fear, and yet think of themselves as being silent out of humility. The haughty sometimes speak impatiently, and yet believe themselves to be speaking in the freedom of uprightness. The humble, through the fault of timidity under a show of humility, keep back from rebuking what is wrong. The haughty, through the unbridled impetuosity of pride, under the image of freedom, are impelled to rebuke things they shouldn't, or to rebuke them more than they ought. The haughty should be admonished not to be free more than is becoming, and the humble should be admonished not to be more submissive than is right. The haughty could turn the defense of righteousness into a display of pride; the humble, while they try too hard to submit themselves to men, could be driven to pay respect to their vices.”

## **Demons Undermine Our Humility with Gossiping and Jealousy**

Some of the methods used by the demons to undermine our desire to be humble can be very sneaky. Two will be mentioned here: gossiping and jealousy. Gossiping is an assault on humility because we exalt ourselves when we speak about someone behind their back.

John Chrysostom spoke up<sup>139</sup> against gossiping and reporting the failures of others abroad. Sometimes we parade these things under a cloak of zeal for goodness. Instead of gossiping, we should admit our own faults to our friends in humility so that they might pray for us.

“Don’t we fear to be called to account by God for our tattling? Why do we publish it? Why do we increase the evil? This is sufficient to destroy us. On this account Christ said, ‘Judge not, that you be not judged’” (Matthew 7:1).

“But we pay no attention to this, neither are we brought to our senses by what happened to the Pharisee. He said what was true, ‘I am not as this Publican’ (Luke 18:11). He also said it with no man listening; yet was he condemned. If he was condemned for this, what fearful punishment shall we suffer, who like gossiping women, carry about everywhere lies which we do not even believe?”

“Let us set ‘a door with a bolt over our mouth’ (Ecclesiasticus 28:25). Innumerable evil has arisen from tattling; families have been ruined, friendships torn apart, innumerable other miseries have happened. Don’t busy yourself with the affairs of your neighbor. If you are talkative and have a weakness, talk of your own faults to God; this way, the weakness will no longer be a weakness, but an advantage. Talk of your own faults to your friends, those who are thorough friends and righteous men, and in whom you have confidence, that they may pray for your sins. If you speak of the sins of others, you are not profited, neither have you gained anything, but have ruined yourself. If you confess your own sins to the Lord, you have great reward; for David says, ‘I said I will confess my iniquity against myself to the Lord, and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart’” (Psalm 32:5 LXX).

Jealousy is another assault of the demons against our humility because we exalt ourselves against someone else in thinking that we are better than they, and that we “deserve” whatever they have.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>140</sup> that not even some of the disciples of John the Baptist were free from jealousy over Christ’s disciples. The Pharisee had labored a great deal in keeping the Law and tithing, but jealousy, which led to vainglory, caused him to be worse off than one of the worst sinners in Israel (the Publican), who had not labored at all.

“A mad desire for glory is the cause of all evil. This led the disciples of John the Baptist to jealousy; when the jealousy had ceased for a little, they were roused again. Therefore they came to Jesus, and said, ‘Why don’t Your disciples fast?’ (Matthew 9:14) Let us avoid this passion; if we avoid this we shall escape hell, for this vice especially kindles the fire of hell. Everywhere it extends its

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<sup>139</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXI, 7-8.

<sup>140</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXIX, 3.

role, and tyrannically occupies every age and every rank. Jealousy has turned churches upside down, it is mischievous in state matters, has subverted houses, cities, peoples, and nations. Why do you marvel? It has even gone out into the desert, and shown its great power. For men who have bid farewell to riches and all the show of the world, who converse with no one, who have gained mastery over the more domineering desires after the flesh, these men sometimes have been made captives by vainglory, and have lost everything. Because of jealousy, one who had labored much (the Pharisee) went away worse off than one who had not labored at all (the Publican), and who had committed ten thousand sins. Condemning the passion is easy enough; all agree in doing that. The question is, how to get the better of it. We can do this by setting honor against honor. As we despise the riches of earth when we look to heavenly riches, as we despise this life when we think of that far better than this, so we will be able to spit on this world's glory, when we know of another far more majestic than it, which is really glory. The glory of this world is a vain and empty thing, and has the name without the reality. But the glory which is from heaven is true, and has Angels, and Archangels, and the Lord of Archangels to give its praise; or rather I should say that it has men as well."

### **The Antichrist: the Model of Those Who Exalt Themselves**

Paul wrote about "The Antichrist", "The Man of Sin", who will appear just before the Second Coming of Christ. One striking characteristic about this man is how he exalts himself. Paul described him as one "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Part of his exalting of himself will be causing deceit to prosper (Daniel 8:25, 11:36-37). In this way, he takes on the characteristics of the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Exodus 9:17), the rebellious Korah (Numbers 16:1-3) and Satan himself (Isaiah 14:13), all of whom exalted themselves against God. If we exalt ourselves, we imitate all these enemies of God, and we will perish with them. Humbling ourselves, however, is the antidote to this.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>141</sup> that the Antichrist revealed great mysteries. Not only will sin be a major characteristic of his life, but so will miracles.

"Paul spoke about the Antichrist, and revealed great mysteries (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). What is 'the falling away?' Paul calls him Apostasy, as being about to destroy many, and make them fall away. So that if it were possible, He says, even the Elect should be deceived (Matthew 24:24). He calls him 'the man of sin'. For he shall do damage without number, and shall cause others to do them. Paul calls him 'the son of perdition', because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Is it then Satan? By no means; but some man, that admits Satan's fully working in him. He is a man, who 'exalts himself against all that is called God or is worshipped'. For he will not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God; he will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God. He will be seated in the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem only, but also in every Church. Paul said that the Antichrist will not

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<sup>141</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, III, vv. 3-4.

just say things, ‘but will endeavor to show it. For he will perform great works, and will show wonderful signs.’”

Basil the Great, along with some other early 4<sup>th</sup> century Church Fathers, wondered<sup>142</sup> if the exaltation of the Antichrist was immanent due to all the persecution and the problems in the Church.

“Can the Lord have abandoned His Churches completely? Has the last hour come, and is ‘the falling away’ thus coming upon us, that now the lawless one ‘may be revealed the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and is worshipped?’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4) But if the temptation is for a season, bear with it, noble athletes of Christ. If the world is being delivered to complete and final destruction, let us not lose heart for the present, but let us await the revelation from heaven, and the revealing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. If all creation is to be dissolved, and the fashion of this world transformed, why should we be surprised that we, who are a part of creation, should feel the general calamity, and be delivered to afflictions, which our just God inflicts on us according to the measure of our strength. He does not let us ‘be tempted beyond what we are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it’ (1 Corinthians 10:13). Brothers, martyrs’ crowns await us. The companies of the confessors are ready to reach out their hands to us and to welcome us into their own ranks. Remember how none of the saints of old won their crowns of patient endurance by living luxuriously and being tempted; but all were tested by being put through the fire of great afflictions.”

### **Pride Overrules All the Virtues**

The Pharisees were strict adherents to the Mosaic Law. Every week, they practiced a strict fast (no food or water) on Monday and Thursday<sup>143</sup>. This fast commemorated Moses climbing Mt. Sinai on a Thursday to receive the Law (Exodus 24:9-18), then climbing back up Mt. Sinai again on a Monday to receive the Law the second time (Exodus 34:1-8). In addition, the Pharisees practiced a strict tithing of everything they earned (Luke 11:42, 18:12). Thus they spent a great deal of effort aimed at godliness. But pride mixed in with the efforts at being godly short circuited everything.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>144</sup> that pride is the greatest of evils. It caused the fall of Satan, the fall of Adam and the lack of justification of the Pharisee. Even though the Pharisee had spent much effort in fasting and tithing, he lost everything because of pride.

“The greatest of evils, and that which makes havoc of the whole world, is our entering into pride. The devil, not being such before, thus became ‘the devil’ by pride. Paul plainly declared, ‘Lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil’ (1 Timothy 3:6). The first man, puffed up by the devil with these hopes, became mortal; expecting to become a god, he lost even

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<sup>142</sup> Basil the Great, Letter to the Alexandrians, 139, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 346.

<sup>144</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 3.

what he had. God criticized him about this, and mocking his folly, said, ‘Look, Adam has become as one of us’ (Genesis 3:22). Everyone that came after Adam wrecked himself in impiety, fancying some equality with God. This was the center of our evil, the root and fountain of all wickedness. God, preparing a remedy suitable to the disease, laid the Law first as a strong and safe foundation. This being fixed as a base, the Builder in security lays on it all the rest. But if this were to be taken away, though a man might reach to the Heavens in his course of life, it is all easily undermined, and comes to a grievous end. Though you practice fasting, prayer, almsgiving, temperance, any other good thing whatever, without humility everyone falls away and perishes.

This took place in the instance of the Pharisee. Even after he had arrived at the summit of godliness (through fasting and tithing), he ‘went down’ (Luke 18:14) with the loss of everything, because he didn’t have the mother of virtues. Just as pride is the fountain of all wickedness, so is humility the principle of all self-command.”

Chrysostom also encouraged<sup>145</sup> his people to assume the attitude of the Publican, confess our sins and ask for mercy. However, there is a danger that pride can enter our hearts as we confess our sins and negate any benefits we obtain for doing this. If we confess our sins and admit our faults only so that people will see how humble and penitent we are, we have become prideful like the Pharisee.

“Let us apply ourselves to Prayer. It is a mighty weapon if it is offered with earnestness, without pride, and with a sincere mind. It has turned back wars and has benefited an entire nation though undeserving. ‘I have heard their groaning’, He says, ‘and I have come down to deliver them’ (Acts 7:34). It is a saving medicine, and has power to prevent sins and to heal evil desires. Those who are really widows and continue in prayer and supplication illustrate this (1 Timothy 5:5). If we pray with humility, striking our chest as the publican, if we say, ‘Be merciful to me a sinner’ (Luke 18:13), we shall obtain everything. Though we are not publicans, yet we have other sins as great as his.”

“Let us not only say, ‘Be merciful to me a sinner’, but let us also be thus minded. Should someone call us a sinner, let us not be angry. The Publican heard the words from the Pharisee, ‘I am not as this Publican’ (Luke 18:11), and was not provoked by it, but he accepted the criticism. The Pharisee spoke of the wound, and the Publican sought the medicine.”

“If we admit many evil things of ourselves, are we bothered when we hear the same things from others? If we are bothered, then there is no longer humility, or confession, but exhibition and pride. Is it exhibition to call one’s self a sinner? Yes; for we obtain the credit for humility, we are admired, we are commended; whereas if we say the opposite of ourselves, we are despised as prideful. We sometimes do this for the sake of credit. But what IS humility? It is bearing it when another reviles us, acknowledging our fault, enduring evil words spoken by others. Yet this is not a mark of humility but one of truthfulness. We call ourselves sinners, unworthy, and many other names; but if someone else applies one of them to us, we are bothered, we become angry. Do you see that this is not

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<sup>145</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVII, 9-10

confession, nor even truthfulness? We say of ourselves that we are such; we shouldn't be indignant if we hear it also said by others, as they reprove us.”

“In this way our sins are made lighter for us. When others criticize us; they lay a burden on themselves, but they lead us on to practical wisdom. Hear what the blessed David says, when Shimei cursed him, ‘Let him alone’, he said, ‘the Lord has ordered him, in order that He might look on my humiliation. The Lord will repay me with good for his cursing on this day’” (2 Samuel 16:11, 12).

“While we say evil things of ourselves, even in excess, if we don't hear from others the praises that are due to the most righteous, we are enraged. In doing so, we are trifling with things that are serious. For we even repudiate some praises in our desire for other praises, that we may be more admired. When we decline to accept praises, we do it that we may increase them. We do all things for credit, not for truth. Therefore all these things are hollow. I ask you to withdraw from this mother of evils, pride, and to live according to what is loved by God, that by doing so you may attain to the good things to come.”

Gregory the Great warned<sup>146</sup> that Christ will take vengeance against the proud at the Second Coming, where the proud are unclean before Him. This He demonstrated when He came in humility at the Incarnation, and asked us to imitate Him.

“The Apostle John warned that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18). Disease and fighting rage throughout the world; nations rise against nations, the globe of the earth gets shaken; the gaping earth with its inhabitants melts (Psalm 46:6). The king of pride is coming, and, awful to be said, there is an army of priests preparing for him, in that they, who have been appointed to be leaders in humility, enlist themselves under the neck of pride. Coming in power, Christ in His own person will oppose the vice of pride and take vengeance against pride. It is written, ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’ (James 4:6). Again, ‘Whoever exalts his heart is unclean before God’ (Proverbs 16:5 LXX). Against the man that is proud it is written, ‘Why is earth and ashes proud’ (Ecclesiasticus 10:9)? The Truth in person says, ‘Whoever exalts himself shall be abased (Luke 14:11). That He might bring us back to the way of life through humility, He condescended to exhibit in Himself what He teaches us. ‘Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart’ (Matthew 11:29). To this end the only begotten Son of God took on Himself the form of our weakness; to this end the Invisible appeared not only as visible but even as despised. He endured the mocks of insolence, the reproaches of derision, the torments of suffering; God in His humility taught man not to be proud. How great, then, is the virtue of humility, where He who is great beyond compare became little even to the suffering of death! Since the pride of the devil was the origin of our perdition, the humility of God has been found the means of our redemption. That is to say, our enemy, having been created among all things, desired to appear exalted above all things; but our Redeemer remaining great above all things, condescended to become little among all things.”

## Justification

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<sup>146</sup> Gregory the Great, Epistle to John of Constantinople, V, 18.



The interpretation of “Justification” and “Righteousness” and what they mean is different between East and West. Much of this difference comes from Augustine of Hippo, who was a much bigger influence in the West than in the East. In this section we will look at Western interpretation of “Justification”, then look at the Church Fathers’ views of various means of “Justification”

To begin, John Chrysostom defined<sup>147</sup> the meaning of the word “Justified”, when speaking of God. Paul stated that “doers of the Law will be justified” (Romans 2:13); therefore, this is also applicable to men.

“What does the word justified mean? That, if there could be a trial and an examination of the things He had done for the Jews, and of what had been done on their part towards Him, the victory would be with God, and all the right on His side.”

### Western Protestant Definition of “Justification”

Fr. John Breck summarized<sup>148</sup> “Righteousness” and “Justification by Faith” as seen in Western Protestant thinking.

A Roman Catholic friend (and a good theologian) recently asked me whether the Greek Fathers of the Church understand the term “righteousness” in a forensic sense. He was referring to a Protestant doctrine that holds that God does not “make” us righteous; He “declares” or “counts” us righteous. That is, God *imputes* righteousness to us, while we remain in a state of sinfulness; Luther would say, at once justified and sinful. Reading, for example, St Paul’s letter to the Romans, my friend asked, do the Eastern Fathers also read the notion of “righteousness” forensically? Well no, I thought. But then I had to formulate something of the reason why. After a lot of stumbling, this is what I passed on to him.

The Protestant notion of “imputation,” (as I understand it) grew out of the conviction that we are inherently (by nature) incapable of making ourselves righteous; we cannot become truly just on the basis of our own good deeds or merits. This states that insofar as the qualities of justice and righteousness are attributable to us, we should understand that God *imputes* them to us as an expression of His mercy. This God does so that we can re-enter the realm of His righteousness, His holiness, and thus be saved from the consequences of sin, which is (eternal) death. This interpretation, however, as many people have pointed out, means that our righteousness is little more than a legal fiction. God treats us *as if* we were just or righteous, although He (like us) knows full well that we are not<sup>149</sup>.

The difference between this notion and the Orthodox perspective is well illustrated by our respective interpretations of Romans 5:12. In the West, at least in the popular mind, the debate was long polarized between Catholic emphasis on salvation through “works-righteousness,” and

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<sup>147</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VI, v. 4.

<sup>148</sup> Very Rev. John Breck, God’s “Righteousness”, *Life in Christ*, September 2006, Article # 1, <http://www.oca.org>.

<sup>149</sup> D. Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Inter-Varsity Press, 1981, pp. 498-504) discusses various Protestant approaches to this question, including the distinction between “imparted” and “imputed” righteousness.

Protestant insistence on “justification by faith (alone!).” The presupposition underlying both views is that we inherit Adam’s *guilt*, according to Augustine, which resulted from his sinful disobedience to the divine commandment<sup>150</sup>.

Augustine seemed convinced that the guilt resulting from Adam's sin is transmitted through the sexual act, from generation to generation, like some deleterious gene. This “original sin” must be removed if we are to be saved from death, to share in eternal life. The question as to how this is accomplished has received many different answers. Medieval Catholic piety held that this occurs through infused grace, which confers upon us the power to perform righteous deeds and thereby actually to become or be made righteous. This enables us to build up a “treasury of merits,” the term “merit” being understood as a gift of divine grace rather than our own accomplishment (Council of Trent, 1547). The popular notion that we are saved only if our merits outweigh our sins on the scales of divine justice is usually attributed to Roman Catholics. It is shared, nevertheless, by many Orthodox, who have failed to appreciate the fullness of God’s grace, both in enabling us to perform good works and in forgiving us fully when we sincerely repent of our sins<sup>151</sup>.

To the Greek Fathers, what we inherit from Adam is not his sin and consequent guilt, but *mortality*<sup>152</sup>. From Adam (understood, really, as an archetype), we “inherit” the sting of *death*. Death has spread to all of humanity, as an inevitable consequence of our fallen nature; yet each of us, under the threat of death, rebels personally against God, the Author of Life. This means that our guilt is our own; we bring it upon ourselves. A sign in our local marina declares: “You are responsible for your wake!” How true! Just as boaters are responsible for their own wake, all men are responsible for their own actions.

Greek patristic tradition generally interprets Paul’s words as “righteousness,” rather than as “justice” in the forensic sense. That is, God demonstrated His righteousness, not His justice (Romans 3:25, 26). The term refers first to God's own quality of righteousness, understood more as an expression of love and mercy than as one of divine justice that must be “satisfied.” Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are capable of receiving that divine righteousness as a gift – one that can actually work a transformation in human life by enabling us to pray, to wage spiritual warfare against the passions, and to love both God and other people. Human nature remains “fallen”; but the Spirit leads the human person on a pathway of sanctification.

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<sup>150</sup> Modern dialog between Catholics and Protestants has gone beyond this focus on inherited guilt and is concerned more with the meaning of “justification.”

<sup>151</sup> The common view of merits as a means by which we put God in our debt (never sanctioned as dogma), together with the idea of inherited guilt, has been treated well and in detail in recent Catholic reflection. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 404-409), for example, makes an important distinction between original sin as a “deprivation of original holiness and justice” – which renders human nature “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin” – and personal faults for which each of us is responsible. In this perspective, “original sin” is close to the Orthodox understanding of “fallen human nature.”

<sup>152</sup> E.g., John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, X, v. 19; Maximus the Confessor, *Quaest. Ad Thal.* (PG 90:408). An excellent summary of this issue can be found in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, Fordham University Press, 1974, pp. 143-146.

In the Eastern perspective, there is no thought that we must accumulate merits in order to justify ourselves before God, although our faithful often seem (as evidenced in Confession) to feel that if we are to be saved, our good works must outweigh our sins. Nor, on the other hand, is there a denial of the place and importance of good works in Christian life! (Ephesians 2:8-10) Salvation is accomplished by grace in response to faith. But that faith cannot be passive; it must express itself, not merely by confessing Jesus as “personal Lord and Savior,” but by feeding, clothing, visiting and otherwise caring for the “least” of Jesus' brethren (Matthew 25:31-46).

What we are saved *from* is the key issue here. Rather than view salvation primarily as a forensic liberation from guilt through imputed or imparted righteousness, we should see it as incorporation, by baptism, into Christ's death and resurrection, such that we “die and rise” with Him. Thus we are saved *from Death*. We are freed from this ultimate consequence of sin and guilt – but only as a divinely bestowed gift of God's ineffable love, expressed in the suffering death of His Son, a gift to which we respond with faith that issues in love. That response, through the action of the indwelling Spirit, enables us finally to share in Christ's own resurrection and glorification, attaining what the Greek Fathers<sup>153</sup> call *theôsis* or “deification” (which means participation in God's life, and not confusion between God and His human creatures).

Good works should thus be understood to be a *response* to salvation rather than a *means* to salvation. And God's righteousness should be seen as a gift of loving, merciful, saving grace, rather than as a forensic tool, wielded in the service of divine judgment.

### **Justification by Confession**

Isaiah stated, “Let us plead together; first confess your transgressions, that you may be justified” (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). We normally think of justification as by faith and not by confession. Yet the Publican didn't show any obvious faith as he confessed, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). The Church Fathers make a very strong case for justification by other means than by faith alone. Here we will look at what the Church Fathers had to say about one being justified by confession of sins. Later we will look at confession itself, regarding what it entails.

Ignatius of Antioch set<sup>154</sup> the tone of the Early Church: in order to be justified before God, like the Publican, we need to be our own accusers and confess our sins.

“I know that you are not puffed up, for you have Jesus in yourselves. All the more I commend you; I know that you cherish modesty of spirit. As it is written, ‘A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech’ (Proverbs 18:17 LXX); and again, ‘first confess your transgressions, that you may be justified’ (Isaiah 43:26 LXX); and again, ‘When you shall have done all things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants’ (Luke 17:10); ‘for

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<sup>153</sup> “Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its ‘natural’ state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt – these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel.” J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 146.

<sup>154</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, 12.

that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16:15). For the Scripture says, 'God be merciful to me a sinner' (Luke 18:13). Therefore those great ones, Abraham and Job, styled themselves 'dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27, Job 30:19) before God. David says, 'Who *am* I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far??' (1 Chronicles 17:16) And Moses, who was 'the humblest of all men' (Numbers 12:3), said to God, 'I *am* not eloquent, but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue' (Exodus 4:10). Be therefore also of a humble spirit, that you may be exalted; for 'whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 14:11).

John Chrysostom spoke<sup>155</sup> of five different ways of repentance, and all lead to heaven. These are:

1. The condemnation of sins. 'First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). Also David said 'I acknowledged my sin, and did not hide my iniquity: I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart' (Psalm 32:5 LXX). Condemn yourself therefore for your sins. This is enough for the Master by way of self-defense. For he who condemns his sins, is slower to fall into them again. Awake your conscience, that inward accuser, in order that you may have no accuser at the judgment seat of the Lord.
2. The forgiveness of our neighbors' sins. This is not less than the first: not to bear a grudge against your enemies to overcome anger, to forgive the sins of our fellow-servants. Similarly those sins, which have been done against the Master, will be forgiven us. Note the second expiation of sins: 'If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' (Matthew 6:14).
3. Fervent and diligent prayer. Do this from the bottom of the heart. Have you not seen that widow, how she persuaded the shameless judge? (Luke 18:2-6) But you have a gentle Master, both tender, and kind. She asked, against her adversaries, but you do not ask against your adversaries, but on behalf of your own salvation.
4. Almsgiving. This has a great unspeakable power. Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar when he had engaged in all kinds of evil, and had entered into great impiety, 'O King, let my counsel please you, and atone for your sins by alms, and your iniquities by compassion on the poor; it may be that God will be long-suffering to your trespasses' (Daniel 4:27 LXX). What could be compared with this loving kindness? After countless sins, after so many transgressions, Daniel promised him that he would be reconciled with God if he will show kindness to his own fellow-servants.
5. Humility. Modesty and humility, not less than all words spoken, exhaust the nature of sins. The publican is proof; being unable to declare his good deeds, he brought forward his humility, and laid aside the heavy burden of his sins (Luke 18:13).

### **Confession as Medicine**

Chrysostom also noted<sup>156</sup> how fasting and confession with humility was like a physician's medicine applied to the wound caused by our sin. Everyone needs to confess their

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<sup>155</sup> John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say that Demons Govern Human Affairs, II, 6.

<sup>156</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IV, 6-7

sins continually in order to be blessed before God. Chrysostom added two other means to the list above that heal our wounds: the giving thanks in affliction and the defending of the oppressed.

“In ancient times the Ninevites sinned; they did the things that we are doing now. Let us see what it was that was available to them. As in the case of the sick, physicians apply many remedies. However the man of understanding doesn’t consider those things that didn’t help the sick person; only what helped him. What helped those barbarians? They applied fasting to the wounds, extreme fasting, lying on the ground, putting on sackcloth, ashes, and lamentations; they applied also a change of life. Let us see which of these things made them whole. The Physician has set down in writing the medicine that restored them. ‘God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it’ (Jonah 3:10). He didn’t say that He saw their fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I say this not to overturn fasting, but to exhort you that with fasting you do that which is better than fasting, the abstaining from evil. David also sinned (2 Samuel 11). Let us see then how he repented. Three days he sat on ashes. This he did not for the sin’s sake, but for the child’s (2 Samuel 12:14-18). The sin he wiped away by other means: by humility, contrition of heart, compunction of soul, by falling into sin no more, by remembering it always, by bearing thankfully everything that happened to him, by sparing those that grieved him, by not repaying in kind those who conspired against him; even preventing those who desire to do this. For instance, when Shimei was slandering him with criticism without number, and the captain who was with him was greatly indignant, David said, ‘Let him curse me, for the Lord has ordered him’ (2 Samuel 16:5-13). David had a contrite and humble heart, and it was this especially that wiped away his sins. This is confession; this is repentance! But if while we fast, we are proud, we have not only profited nothing, but we have even been injured.”

“Humble your heart, that you may draw God to you. ‘For the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy’ (Psalm 33:18-19). If anyone reviles you, don’t grow fierce, but groan, not for the insult, but for that sin which you are being reviled for. Groan when you have sinned, not because you are to be punished, for this is nothing, but because you have offended your Master, one so gentle and kind, who so loves you and longs for your salvation as to have given even His Son for you. Groan continually for this; this is confession. Don’t be cheerful today, sad tomorrow, and then again cheerful; but continue always in mourning and self contrition. For, ‘Blessed are they that mourn’ (Matthew 5:4); that is, that do this perpetually. Continue to do this, and to pay attention to yourself, to afflict your heart, as one who had lost a beloved son might mourn. ‘Tear your hearts, and not your garments’ (Joel 2:13). That which is torn will not exalt itself. ‘Sacrifice to God means a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise’ (Psalm 51:16 LXX). Though you are wise, wealthy, or a ruler, tear your heart. Do not allow it to have high thoughts or to be inflated. For that which is torn is not inflated, and even if there is something to make it rise, from being torn it cannot retain the inflation. So also be humble minded! Consider that the publican was justified by one word; that was not humiliation, but a true confession. Now if this has so great a power, how much

more humiliation. Forgive offenses to those who have transgressed against you, for this also forgives sins. Concerning humility He said, 'He was grieved, and he went on sorrowful in his ways. I have seen his ways; I healed him, I comforted him, and I gave him true comfort' (Isaiah 57:17-18 LXX). In Ahab's case, this appeased the wrath of God (1 Kings 21:29); concerning forgiveness, 'Forgive, and you shall be forgiven' (Luke 6:37). There is another way which brings us this medicine: condemning what we have done wrong; for, 'First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). When someone in affliction gives thanks, it loosens his sins; almsgiving too, which is greater than all."

"Summarize therefore the medicines which heal your wounds, and apply all continuously: humility, confession, forgetting wrongs, giving thanks in affliction, showing mercy both in alms and actions, persevering in prayer. Thus the widow won over the cruel and unyielding judge (Luke 18:2-7). If she satisfied the unjust, much more you can satisfy the gentle God. There is yet another way along with these: defending the oppressed; for He said, 'Judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow; and come, let us reason together, and though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white as snow' (Isaiah 1:17-18). What excuse then can we deserve if with so many ways leading us up to heaven, and so many medicines to heal our wounds, even after the Laver, we continue where we were. Let us not only continue so, but let those who have never yet fallen continue in their beautiful behavior; rather let them cultivate it more and more. These good works, where there are no sins, make the beauty greater. Let us who in many things have done wrong, for the correction of our sins, use the means mentioned, that we may stand at the tribunal of Christ with much boldness."

Chrysostom further stated<sup>157</sup> that we need to gain an appreciation for the Medicine of Repentance, where almsgiving adds strength to this. First we need to condemn and acknowledge our own sin. Humility is necessary also along with prayer and forgiveness of others.

"What then is the medicine of Repentance, and how is it made up? First, it is the condemnation of our own sins. 'I acknowledged my sin, and did not hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart' (Psalm 32:5 LXX). And 'First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). Also, 'A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech' (Proverbs 18:17 LXX).

"Secondly, it is great humility of mind. It is like a golden chain; if one has hold of the beginning, everything will follow. If you confess your sin as you ought to confess, your soul is humbled. Conscience turning it on itself causes it to be subdued."

"Other things too must be added to humility of mind to be such as the blessed David knew when he said, 'A broken and humbled heart God will not despise' (Psalm 51:17 LXX). For that which is broken does not rise up, does not strike back, but is ready to be treated badly. Such is contrition of heart; though it is insulted, though it is treated evil, it is quiet, and is not eager for vengeance."

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<sup>157</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IX, 8.

“After humility of mind, there is need of intense prayers, of many tears, tears by day, and tears by night. David says, ‘I am wearied with my groaning; I shall wash my bed every night; I shall water my couch with tears’ (Psalm 6:6 LXX). And again, ‘I have eaten ashes as it were bread, and mingled my drink with weeping’ (Psalm 102:9 LXX)

“After prayer this intense, there is need of much almsgiving, for this it is which especially gives strength to the medicine of repentance. Among physicians’ prescriptions, there are many herbs, but one is often essential; so also in the case of repentance, almsgiving is the essential herb, and it may be everything needed. Hear what the Divine Scripture says, ‘Give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you’ (Luke 11:41). And again, ‘By alms and by faithful dealings sins are purged away’ (Proverbs 15:27 LXX). And, ‘Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms makes an atonement for sins’ (Ecclesiasticus 3:30 LXX).

“Not being angry with anyone, not bearing malice; the forgiving all their trespasses is also necessary. For, it is said, ‘One man bears hatred against another, and does he seek pardon from the Lord?’ (Ecclesiasticus 28:3 LXX) The Lord said, ‘Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses’ (Mark 11:25).

“Finally, we need to convert our brethren from their wandering. For, it is said, ‘Go and convert your brethren, that your sins may be forgiven you’ (James 5:19-20 loosely). And from one’s being in close relations with the priests, ‘Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven’” (James 5:14-15).

John Chrysostom encouraged<sup>158</sup> us to think of confession as repairing the house of our soul. Houses constantly get old and need repair; so does our soul.

“The fashions and cares of this world, even before they come to light, are dissolving. If you throw the fashion aside, you will quickly come to the form. Nothing is weaker than vice, nothing so easily wears old. Then since it is likely that being men they would sin every day, Paul consoles his hearer by saying, ‘renew yourself’ from day to day (Romans 12:2). This is what we do with houses; we keep constantly repairing them as they get old, and so we should do to ourselves. Have we sinned today? Have we made our soul old? Don’t despair or be despondent; renew it by repentance, tears, confession, and by doing of good things. Never fail to do this. How are we to do this? ‘That you may prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God’” (Romans 12:2).

### **Justification by Other Methods – Or Lack of It**

Chrysostom also posed<sup>159</sup> a situation such as existed during the High Priesthood of Eli, where there were sacrilegious priests (Eli’s wayward sons) serving the Tabernacle (1 Samuel

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<sup>158</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XX, v. 2.

<sup>159</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, II, Moral.

2:12-25). If there were a sacrilegious priest serving our parish, would our reaction be the same as the Pharisee to the Publican? “I am not as this sacrilegious priest!” If this is the case and we react this way, our reward would be the same as the Pharisee.

“If a notorious sinner, when he confessed, ‘went home justified’ (Luke 18:14), he who is a sinner in a less degree, and is conscious of it, how will he not be rewarded? Examine your own life; you are guilty of many other lesser things. Deeply lament if there is anything you are guilty of! While sacrilege is a great evil, it is worse if our virtue is rendered vain by our accusing others. What was worse than the Publican? He was guilty of many offenses. Yet because the Pharisee only said, ‘I am not as this publican’, he destroyed all his merit. If we were to say, ‘I am not like this sacrilegious Priest’, we would make all our efforts in vain.”

Under certain circumstances, one can be justified by money. Cyril of Jerusalem stated<sup>160</sup> that from the Lord’s own words, one can be justified by money and its proper use. Cyril said this to contradict heretics of his day who said that money and men’s bodies are cursed.

“Riches, gold, and silver are not, as some think, the devil’s; for ‘The faithful has the whole world full of wealth; but the faithless not even a penny’ (Proverbs 17:6 LXX). Nothing is more faithless than the devil; and God says plainly, ‘The gold is Mine, and the silver is Mine’ (Haggai 2:8), but the devil says, ‘This has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish’ (Luke 4:6). Use it well, and there is no fault to be found with money. But whenever you have made a bad use of that which is good, if you are unwilling to blame your own management, it is impious to throw back the blame on the Creator. A man may even be justified by money: ‘I was hungry, and you gave Me food’; that certainly was from money. ‘I was naked, and you clothed Me’ (Matthew 25:35-36); that certainly was by money. Do you wish to learn that money may become a door to the kingdom of heaven? ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven’” (Matthew 19:21).

“Now I have made these remarks because of those heretics who count possessions, and money, and men’s bodies as accursed. For I neither wish you to be a slave of money, nor to treat as enemies the things which God has given you for use. Never say then that riches are the devil’s; though he say, ‘All these I will give you, for they are delivered to me’ (Luke 4:6), one may reject his assertion; for we need not believe the liar. Yet perhaps he spoke the truth, being compelled by the power of His presence; for he didn’t say, ‘All these I will give you, for they are mine’, but, ‘for they are delivered to me’. He hasn’t grasped dominion of them, but confessed that he had been entrusted with them, and was for a time dispensing them. But at a proper time interpreters should inquire whether his statement<sup>161</sup> is false or true.”

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<sup>160</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VIII, 6-7.

<sup>161</sup> See also Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V, xxiv, 1; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 5.



## John Chrysostom on Justification by Faith

John Chrysostom spoke a great deal on Justification by Faith. His perspective, understanding and depth of knowledge are unusual. Not only does he proclaim Justification by Faith from the Old Testament, but he shows that the Gentiles were part of God's plan from the beginning. 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish believers often had a misconception of how the Mosaic Law fit into the bigger picture, and how it is a fellow-worker with grace.

Chrysostom stated<sup>162</sup> that the grace that was revealed at Christ's Advent was present all along in the Law and the Prophets, but it was concealed. To 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews, however, there was confusion. (1) How could Gentiles, with no good works to show, be saved, while Jews, with many good works, may not be saved at all? But more perplexing than this was (2) where was the justice that uncircumcised Gentiles might enjoy the same blessings as Jews who had been nurtured in the Law for 1500 years? Paul sought to educate the Jews in what the Law had been saying all along. In all this, faith is not opposed to the Law but is an ally and cooperator with the Law.

“Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets’ (Romans 3:21). This statement needed much proof. That which is revealed is so as being old, but concealed. This is no recent thing, because it has been witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”

“Don't be troubled because it is a thing new and strange. Both the Law and the Prophets foretold it. Habakkuk stated, ‘The just shall live by faith’ (Habakkuk 2:4), and Abraham and David, themselves, speak with us about these things.”

“Paul generated many proofs of what he said. (1) From the worthiness of the person, for it is not a man who does these things, that He should be too weak for it, but the all-powerful God. It is to God that the righteousness belongs. (2) From the Law and the Prophets, you need not be afraid at hearing the words ‘without the Law’, since the Law itself approves this. (3) From the sacrifices under the old dispensation, he said, ‘In His blood’ (Revelation 1:5), to call to their minds those sheep and calves. If the sacrifices of unreasoning animals cleared from sin, much more would the blood of Christ. To show again that it was no recent thing, he says, the Father ‘foreordained’ it, but Christ in His own blood made it happen.”

“Paul calls the Faith ‘a law’, keeping the same terms, reducing the seeming novelty. But what is the ‘law of faith?’ It is being saved by grace! Paul shows God's power, in that He has not only saved, but has even justified, and this without needing works, but looking for faith only. He that has been saved, if he continues in the Law (thus rejecting grace), will be told that he himself has stopped his own mouth and accused himself; he has renounced claims to his own salvation. But he that has not believed, being humbled by these same means, will be capable of being brought over to the Faith. Faith's preeminence has not even allowing us to boast of the things of the Law.”

“We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law’ (Romans 3:28). When he had shown that by faith the Gentiles were

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<sup>162</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, vv. 21-31.

superior to the Jews, then he goes on to speak about it, and what seemed to annoy the Jews. These two things were what confused the Jews: (1) was it possible for men, who with works were not saved, to be saved without them? (2) Was justice served for the uncircumcised Gentiles to enjoy the same blessings with the Jews, who had been nurtured in the Law for 1500 years? This second confused them more by far than the first. The Jews even complained on this second point against Peter after they believed. What does Paul say then? 'Therefore we conclude, that by faith a man is justified'. He does not say, a Jew, or one under the Law, but opening the doors of faith to the world, he says 'a man', implying everyone."

"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law' (Romans 3:31). The use of the word 'establish' shows that it was not then standing, but was worn out. Note also Paul's power, how he maintains what he wishes. He shows that the Faith, so far from doing any disparagement to the 'Law', even assists it, as the Law, on the other hand, paved the way for the Faith. Just as the Law before bore witness to it, 'being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets' (Romans 3:21), so here the Law establishes grace. What was the object of the Law and was what the scope of all its enactments? To make man righteous! But this it had no power to do this! 'For all have sinned' (Romans 3:23). When faith came, it accomplished this. When a man is a believer, he is immediately justified. The intention of the Law it established, including what all its enactments aimed for. Consequently faith has not abolished, but perfected the Law."

"Paul demonstrated three points here; first, that without the Law it is possible to be justified. Second, that the Law could not do this. And third, that faith is not opposed to the Law. Since the chief cause of perplexity to the Jews was this, that faith seemed to be in opposition to the Law, Paul shows more than the Jew wishes, that so far from being contrary, faith is even in close alliance and cooperation with the Law, which was what they especially longed to hear proven."

"After this grace, whereby we were justified, there is need also of a life suited to it; let us show earnestness worthy the gift. Show it we shall, if we earnestly keep with love, the mother of good deeds. Now love is not bare words, or merely ways of speaking to men, but a taking care of them, and a putting forth of itself by works. For instance, relieving poverty, lending one's aid to the sick, rescuing from dangers, standing by those that are in difficulties, weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with those that rejoice (Romans 12:15). Even this last is a part of love. This seems a little thing, to be rejoicing with them that rejoice; nevertheless it is exceedingly great, and requires the spirit of true wisdom."

Chrysostom continued<sup>163</sup> to say that Paul advocated righteousness by grace using the same words that Moses used for keeping the Law. Thus grace is described in the Old Testament for those who have ears to hear. By acquiring righteousness by grace, one also acquired the righteousness of the Law, where Christ is the end or object of the Law. The righteousness of

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<sup>163</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, vv. 4-5.

faith is light and easy to receive; to pass this up in favor of the Law, which is burdensome and impossible to keep, represents a spirit of contentiousness and rebellion against God.

“Paul shows that there is only one kind of righteousness, and that he that has acquired righteousness by faith, has fulfilled the righteousness of the Law also. But he that rejects righteousness by faith falls short as well of the righteousness of the Law. For if Christ is ‘the end of the Law’ ( ), he that does not have Christ, even if he seems to have the righteousness of the Law, doesn’t have it. But he that has Christ, even though he hasn’t fulfilled the Law outright, has received the whole. For the end of the physician’s art is health. He that can make someone well, even though he doesn’t have the physician’s art, has everything; but he that doesn’t know how to heal, though he seems to be a follower of the physician’s art, comes short of everything. This is also the case of the Law and of faith. He that has Christ has the end of the Law, but he that is without Christ is an alien from both. For what was the object of the Law? To make man righteous! But it didn’t have the power, since no one fulfilled it. The end of the Law and all its parts were made, its feasts, commandments, sacrifices, etc., that man might be justified. Christ gave a fuller accomplishment of this end through faith. Don’t be afraid of transgressing the Law in having come over to the faith. For you really transgress it, when you do not believe Christ. If you believe in Him, then you have fulfilled the Law also, and much more than it commanded, for you have received a much greater righteousness.”

“Moses shows us the righteousness coming from the Law, what it is like. ‘You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them’ (Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5). There is no other way of becoming righteous in the Law except by fulfilling the whole of it. But this has not been possible for anyone, and therefore this righteousness failed those who tried to keep it. What does the righteousness of grace consist of? Hear the words in which Moses gives a clear sketch of it.”

“Obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. For this commandment, which I command you today, is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?’ The Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 31:10-14, Romans 10:6-9). This sounds very much like grace, where the Lord said, ‘My yoke is easy and My burden is light’ (Matthew 11:30).

“The chief characteristic of faith is to leave all the consequences of this lower world, to seek for that which is beyond nature, and to accept everything from the Power of God. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews did not accept this, but said that it was impossible to be justified by faith. But Paul uses the words (above), which are found in the Old Testament, to oppose them. What Paul says here of faith, Moses said to them of the Law, so showing that they had enjoyed at God’s hand a great benefit. There is no need to say that one must go up to heaven, or cross a great sea, and then receive the commandments, but things so great and grand God

has made easy access to. The phrase, ‘The Word is very near you’, means that it is easy. For in your mind and in your tongue is your salvation. You may be saved even while you sit at home. ‘In your mouth and in your heart’ is the source of salvation.”

“The resurrection is easy too, and has been shown even to those who are unbelieving. Since the righteousness of faith is greater, and it is light and easy to receive, to leave what is light and easy, and set about on the impossibilities of keeping the Law is a sign of contentiousness. Paul then deprives them of all excuse. For what do they deserve to have said in their defense, who choose what is burdensome and impractical, and pass by what is light, and able to save them, and which can give them those things which the Law could not give? All this can come only from a contentious spirit, which is in a state of rebellion against God. The Law is galling, but grace is easy. The Law, though they dispute ever so much, does not save; grace yields the righteousness resulting from itself, and includes that from the Law.”

Chrysostom further described<sup>164</sup> “the righteousness of God” as not just Christ dying for sinners, but Him who had not even known sin being cursed and dying disgracefully for those who didn’t even care. As a result, we became not just righteous, but we became the righteousness of God

“What has God done? ‘Him that knew no sin He made to be sin, for you’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Had He achieved nothing else but done only this, think how great a thing it were to give His Son for those that had outraged Him. He has not only done mighty things, but besides, has allowed Him that did no wrong to be punished for those who had done wrong. He mentioned what is far greater than this. ‘Him that knew no sin’, he says, Him that was righteousness itself, ‘He made sin’, that is He suffered as a sinner to be condemned, as one cursed to die. ‘For cursed is he that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13). To die this way was far greater than just to die; and this he also implied, saying, ‘Becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross’ (Philippians 2:8). This thing carried with it not only punishment, but also disgrace. Reflect therefore on the great things He granted to you. It is a great thing for even a sinner to die for anyone whatever. But He who underwent this both was righteous and died for sinners; and not died only, but even as one cursed; and not as cursed only, but thereby freely granting us those great goods, which we never looked for. He says, that ‘we might become the righteousness of God in Him’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul didn’t just say that He made the righteous One (i.e. Christ) a sinner, or that He might make sinners righteous. Instead He made Him to be sin, who had not even known sin. Because of this, we might become, not just righteous, but, ‘the righteousness of God’. This is the righteousness of God, when we are justified not by works, in which case it would be necessary that not even a spot should be found, but by grace, in which case all sin is done away. This does not allow us to be puffed up, seeing that the whole is the free gift of God; it teaches us also the greatness of that which is given. For that which was before was a righteousness of the Law and of works, but this is ‘the righteousness of God’”.

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<sup>164</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XI, 5.

Chrysostom also stated<sup>165</sup> that the Gentiles have been brought into Abraham's family. The Jews thought that the Law predated faith, but Paul demonstrated that Abraham was justified by faith prior to the Law. The Jews also thought that the Gentiles, who didn't keep the Law, were cursed by the Law. Paul demonstrated that only those who tried to keep the Law in all its points were cursed, because they couldn't do it. Instead those who live by faith are blessed with the believing Abraham, because this is what Abraham did. The Prophets (Habakkuk) say that the just shall live by faith, and the Law has served as our tutor until Christ. The Law is not the adversary of, but the fellow-worker with grace.

“The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the Gentiles be blessed’ (Galatians 3:8). If those were not Abraham's sons, who were related to him by blood, but those who follow his faith, for this is the meaning of the words, ‘In you all the Gentiles’, then it is plain that the Gentiles are brought into Abraham's family.”

“There is another important point. The Jews thought that the Law was the older, and faith came afterwards. Paul showed that faith came before the Law; in Abraham's case, he was justified before the giving of the Law<sup>166</sup>. Paul showed too that recent events came about according to prophecy. ‘The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, In you all the nations shall be blessed’ (Galatians 3:8). Thus God gave the Law after He had decreed that the Gentiles should be justified by Faith. And Paul doesn't say ‘revealed’, but, ‘preached the Gospel’, to signify that the patriarch was in joy at this method of justification, and in great desire for its accomplishment.”

“Further, the Jews had another apprehension; it was written, ‘Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the Law, to do them’ (Deuteronomy 27:26). Paul removes this with great skill and prudence, turning the argument of the Jews against themselves, and showing that those who relinquish the Law are not cursed, but blessed; and they who try to keep it, are not blessed but cursed. Paul had already shown this, by referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, ‘In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (Genesis 12:3), at a time, that is, when Faith existed, not the Law.”

“So then those, which are of faith, are blessed with the faithful Abraham’ (Galatians 3:9). Then, that they might not turn around, and object that, while Abraham was justified by faith, for the Law was not then given, but that faith would not justify after the delivery of the Law. Paul addressed this, and proved that not only did faith justify, but that the Law brought its adherents under a curse. ‘As many as are of the works of the Law, are under a curse’ (Galatians 3:10). From the Law itself, ‘For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them. Now that no man is justified by the Law is evident’ (Galatians 3:10-11). For all have sinned, and are under the curse.”

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<sup>165</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3, vv. 7-11, 23-26.

<sup>166</sup> That is, the Law was given at Mt. Sinai c. 500 years later.

“No man has fulfilled the Law; therefore they are under the curse, and faith justifies. From the prophet Habakkuk, ‘The just shall live by faith’ (Habakkuk 2:4), which not only establishes the righteousness that is of faith, but also states that there is no salvation through the Law. As no one kept the Law, but all were under the curse, on account of transgression, an easy way was provided, that from faith, which is a strong proof that no man can be justified by the Law. For Habakkuk doesn’t say, ‘The just shall live by the Law’, but, ‘by faith’”.

“‘Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed’ (Galatians 3:23). Here the expressions ‘we were kept’ and ‘under guard’, signify nothing else than the security given by the Commandments of the Law; which like a fortress fenced them around with fear and a life conformable to itself, and so preserved them for faith.

‘So that the Law has been our tutor until Christ, that we might be justified by faith’ (Galatians 3:24). Now the Tutor is not opposed to the Preceptor, but cooperates with him, ridding the youth from all vice, and having all time to make him ready to receive instructions from his Preceptor. When a youth’s habits have been formed, then the Tutor leaves him. ‘But now that faith has come, which leads to perfect manhood, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus’” (Galatians 3:26).

“The Law then is not the adversary but the fellow-worker of grace. But if when grace has come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. If it confines those who ought to go forward to grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night, kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only not benefit, it would injure us. So does the Law, if it stands between us and greater benefits. Those who still keep the Law disgrace it the most; just as the tutor makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure. We are no longer under a tutor, ‘for you are all sons of God’. Wonderful! See how mighty is the power of Faith, and how he unfolds as he proceeds! Before, he showed that it made them sons of the Patriarch; now he proves that they are sons of God also.”

Cyril of Jerusalem added<sup>167</sup> that although Abraham was justified by works and by faith, it was because of his faith, not his works, that he was called the “friend of God”.

“We have been made Abraham’s sons through faith. He was justified not only by works, but also by faith (James 2:21); though he did many things well, yet he was never called the friend<sup>168</sup> of God, except when he believed. Moreover, his every work was performed in faith. Through faith he left his parents; left country, place, and home through faith (Hebrews 11:8-10). In like manner as he was justified, we can be justified also. In his body he was already dead in regard to offspring, and Sarah his wife was now old, and there was no hope left of having children. God promised the old man a child, and Abraham, without being weakened in faith, though he considered his own body now as good as dead (Romans 4:19), heeded not the weakness of his body, but the power of Him who

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<sup>167</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, V, 5.

<sup>168</sup> See James 2:23, 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, Genesis 15:6.

promised. He counted Him faithful who had promised (Hebrews 11:11-12), and so beyond all expectation gained the child from bodies as it were already dead. After he had gained his son, he was commanded to offer him up, although he had heard the word, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called' (Genesis 21:12, 22:2), he proceeded to offer up his son, his only son, to God, believing that God is able to raise up even from the dead' (Hebrews 11:19). Having bound his son, and laid him on the wood, he purposed to offer him, but by the goodness of God in delivering to him a lamb instead of his child, he received his son alive. Being faithful in these things, he was sealed for righteousness, and received circumcision as a seal<sup>169</sup> of the faith, which he had while he was still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11), having received a promise that he should be the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).

### **The Relationship of the Mosaic Law to Faith**

Irenaeus of Lyons stated<sup>170</sup> that the Patriarchs who lived before Moses were justified by faith and by the precepts of the Law, where the Law that they observed was similar to the one that Christ fulfilled and extended.

"The Lord did not repeal the natural precepts of the Law, by which man is justified, which those who were justified by faith, and who pleased God, observed prior to the giving of the Law. That He extended and fulfilled them, is shown from His words. 'It has been said to them of old time, Do not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That everyone who has looked upon a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matthew 5:27-28). And again, 'It has been said, You shall not murder. But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment' (Matthew 5:21-22). And, 'It has been said, You shall not swear falsely. But I say to you, don't swear at all; but let your conversation be, Yes and No' (Matthew 5:33-37). And other statements of a like nature! For all these do not contain or imply an opposition to and an overturning of the precepts of the past."

John Chrysostom encouraged<sup>171</sup> the repentance of Theodore, later a priest and a bishop, after his fall into worldliness. Theodore's case was like the Galatians, who had performed miracles and suffered persecution for Christ, but had fallen from grace in trying to be justified by circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic Law. Christ needed to be formed in Theodore again. Theodore did repent and became a pillar of the Church in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

"When the whole Galatian people fell after having believed, and worked miracles, and endured many trials for the sake of their faith in Christ, Paul restored them. That they had done miracles, he testified when he said, 'He therefore that supplies to you the Spirit and works miracles among you' (Galatians 3:5). They endured many contests for the sake of the faith, as Paul testified, 'Have you suffered so many things in vain -- if indeed *it was* in vain?'

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<sup>169</sup> That is, Abraham was first promised that he would be a father of many nations (Genesis 17:5), then he and his children were circumcised (Genesis 17:10) as a seal of the promise.

<sup>170</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xiii, 1.

<sup>171</sup> John Chrysostom, Exhortation to Theodore After His Fall, 1<sup>st</sup> Letter, 8.

(Galatians 3:4). Nevertheless after making so great an advance they committed sin sufficient to estrange them from Christ, concerning which he declares, 'Behold, I Paul tell you, that if you get circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing' (Galatians 5:2); and again 'You who would be justified by the Law are fallen from grace' (Galatians 5:4). Yet even after so great a lapse he welcomes them saying, 'My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you' (Galatians 4:19), showing that after extreme perversion it is possible for Christ to be formed again in us. He does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live" (Ezekiel 33:11, 18:32).

To illustrate the role of the Law, John Chrysostom used<sup>172</sup> the parable of the two sons who were asked by their father to work in his vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32). One said he wouldn't go, but later repented and did; the other said he would go, but didn't. The vineyard is the Kingdom of God and the first son represents the Gentiles. The second son represents the Jewish leaders that Jesus was speaking to, where they pronounced their own condemnation for not doing what the Law required.

"Jesus convicted the Jewish leaders by a parable, intimating both their unreasonable obstinacy, and the submissiveness of those who were utterly condemned by them. For these two children declare what came to pass with respect to both the Gentiles and the Jews. The Gentiles not having undertaken to obey, neither having become hearers of the Law, showed forth their obedience in their works. The Jewish leaders having said, 'All that the Lord has spoken, we will do' (Exodus 19:8), in their works were disobedient. That they might not think the Law would benefit them, He shows that this same thing condemns them. Just as Paul said, 'Not the hearers of the Law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the Law will be justified' (Romans 2:13). That He might make them self-condemned, He causes the judgment to be delivered by themselves, just as He does also in the ensuing parable of the vineyard."

John Chrysostom stated<sup>173</sup> that the Jews were burdened by the Gift of the Law in that they were required to keep it, and penalties were prescribed for not doing so. As a result, the Jews needed grace more than the Gentiles, since they were liable for more punishment. Paul magnified the greatness of the Law since only doers of the Law were justified. The Gentiles kept it without knowing all its details; the Jews didn't, even though schooled in it from childhood.

"Paul shows not only the equality of the Jew and the Gentile, but that the Jew was much burdened by the gift of the Law, while the Gentile is judged without Law. This 'without Law' (Greek: lawlessly) here expresses not the worse plight but the easier; that is, the Gentile does not have the Law to accuse him. For 'without Law', that is, without the condemnation arising from it, he is condemned solely from the reasoning of nature; but the Jew, 'in the Law', has nature and the Law to accuse him. The greater the attention he enjoyed, the greater the punishment he will suffer. See how much greater is the necessity which he lays on the Jews for a speedy recourse to grace! They said that they didn't need grace, being justified by the Law; Paul showed that they needed it more than the

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<sup>172</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 2.

<sup>173</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, V, vv. 12-14.



Gentiles, considering they are liable to be punished more. Then he adds another reason.”

“Paul said, ‘For not the hearers of the Law are just before God’ (Romans 2:13). Well does he add ‘before God’; before men they may be able to appear dignified, but before God it is quite otherwise. The doers of the Law alone are justified. Paul combats with a huge advantage, turning what they said to its opposite. If it is by the Law that you claim to be saved, the Gentile will stand before you, when he is seen to be a doer of what is written in the Law. How is it possible, one may say, for one who has not heard to be a doer? Not only is it possible without hearing to be a doer, but even with hearing not to be so. This last thing he makes plainer, when he says, ‘You that teach another, do you not teach yourself?’” (Romans 2:21)

“Paul was not rejecting the Law, he was justifying the Gentiles. When he was undermining the conceit of Judaism, he gave no handle against himself as vilifying the Law; but on the contrary, by extolling it and showing its greatness, he so makes good his whole position.”

John Chrysostom stated<sup>174</sup> that neither speaker nor listener will be justified unless their behavior closely corresponds with the teaching. In fact, our condemnation will be greater if we don’t practice what we say or what we listen to.

“Hearing profits nothing unless it is accompanied by practice. It makes our punishment heavier, if we continually hear the same things and do none of the things which are spoken. The chastisement will be heavier, since we have no excuse for our sin’ (John 15:22). Paul says ‘Not the hearers of the Law shall be justified’ (Romans 2:13). These things He says to the hearers. When He wishes to instruct the speaker also, that his manner of life might be in harmony with his speech, hear how Paul and the prophet Asaph address themselves to him. Through Asaph God says to the sinner, ‘What right do you have to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction?’ (Psalm 4:16-17) Paul, addressing himself to these same again, who thought great things of their teaching, says, ‘You are confident that you yourself are a leader of the blind, a light of those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes. You therefore, who teach another do you not teach yourself?’ (Romans 2:19-21) It could neither profit me the speaker to speak, nor you the hearers to hear, unless we comply with the things which are spoken, rather it would increase our condemnation. Let us not limit the display of our zeal to hearing only, but let us observe what is said, in our deeds. It is indeed a good thing to spend time continually in hearing the divine oracles; but this good thing becomes useless when the benefit to be derived from hearing is not linked with it.”

Gregory the Theologian spoke<sup>175</sup> of Rahab being justified by her hospitality and the Publican by his humility, but they received no praise for the rest of their conduct. Similarly the laborers in the vineyard all received the same wage, even though some worked all day while others worked just one hour (Matthew 20:12). The vineyard is the Kingdom of God and the

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<sup>174</sup> John Chrysostom, Homily to Those Who ad Not Attended the Assembly, 4.

<sup>175</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 19-20.

hiring of the workers is the call to baptism. The murmuring of the ones called first subtracts from the reward of their work, since they were not justified by their murmuring, so that all justly received the same reward. In this respect, those working from the 1<sup>st</sup> hour represent the Jews, while those coming at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour represent the Gentiles.

“Our success is always judged by comparison with our place in life by our just and merciful Judge. Often one who is in public life and has had small success has had a greater reward than one, in the enjoyment of liberty, who has not completely succeeded. I think it more marvelous for a man to advance a little in fetters, than for one to run who is not carrying any weight; or to be only a little splattered in walking through mud, than to be perfectly clean when the road is clean. To give you an example of what I have said: Rahab the harlot was justified by one thing alone, her hospitality, though she receives no praise for the rest of her conduct; and the Publican was exalted by one thing, his humility, though he received no testimony for anything else. Do not so easily despair concerning yourself.”

“Some will say, ‘What shall I gain, if, when I am preoccupied by baptism, and have cut off myself by my haste from the pleasures of life, when I could have lived in pleasure, and then obtained grace?’ The laborers in the vineyard who had worked the longest time gained nothing thereby, for equal wages were given to the last. Everyone therefore should wait until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Those who say this have told the secret of their delay. Though I cannot applaud their shiftiness, like Rahab and the Publican, I do applaud their confession. Listen to the interpretation of the parable. First of all, the issue here is baptism, and those who believe at different times enter the good vineyard of the Church. From the day and hour at which each believed, he is required to work. Although those, who entered first, contributed more to the measure of the labor, yet they did not contribute more to the measure of the purpose. The cause of their later entrance was their later call to the work of the vineyard. In all other respects let us see how different they are. The first did not believe or enter till they had agreed on their wages; but the others came forward to do the work without an agreement, which is a proof of greater faith. The first were found to be envious and murmuring, but no such charge is brought against those coming at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. To the first, that which was given was wages, though they were worthless fellows; to the last it was the free gift. So the first were convicted of foolishness, and with reason were deprived of the greater reward. The murmuring takes away the merit of their labor from the first, although they worked longer; therefore it turns out that the distribution of equal pay was just, if you measure the good will and murmuring against the labor.”

### **The Scriptures on Confession of Sins**

The Scriptures speak of the confession of sins, but these are not familiar to many people today. The Early Church Fathers, however, refer to these Scriptures fairly often. Considering first some of the Scriptures from the Old Testament:

David stated, “I acknowledged my sin, and did not hide my iniquity: I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart” (Psalm 32:5 LXX).

Isaiah stated, “Let us plead together; first confess your transgressions, that you may be justified” (Isaiah 43:26 LXX).

Solomon stated, “A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech” (Proverbs 18:17 LXX).

The New Testament doesn’t spell out confession in as much detail as the Old Testament, but the following indicate that confession, as in the Old Testament, is what God desires. “Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

In addition, the following have been interpreted in terms of confession by many of the Church Fathers. “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). That is, by our words of confession we are justified. Similarly, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31). In this latter reference, Paul was addressing abuses of the Lord’s Table at Corinth. A traditional practice from the beginning was the confession of sins just prior to the Lord’s Table. In today’s common practice among some, where the Lord’s Table is just a remembrance and not the Body and Blood of Christ, confession prior to partaking is not needed.

John Cassian wrote<sup>176</sup> of the benefits of true confession as bringing out the grace of God. We acquire victory over our faults without works or merit on our part to outweigh them.

“The thief on the Cross, who was by a single confession admitted into paradise (Luke 23:40), did not acquire such bliss by the merits of his life, but obtained it by the gift of a merciful God. Those two heinous sins of King David, blotted out by one word of penitence (2 Samuel 12:13), the merits of his works were not sufficient to obtain pardon for so great a sin. But the grace of God abounded; when the opportunity for true penitence was taken, He removed the whole weight of sins through the full confession of but one word. If we consider also the beginning of the call and salvation of mankind, in which we are saved not of ourselves, nor of our works, but by the gift and grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9), we can clearly see how the whole of perfection is ‘not of him that wills nor of him that runs, but of God that has mercy’ (Romans 9:16). He makes us victorious over our faults, without any merits of works and life on our part to outweigh them, and without any effort of our will to scale the difficult heights of perfection, or to subdue the flesh which we have to use. No tortures of this body, and no contrition of heart, can be sufficient for the acquisition of that true chastity of the inner man so as to be able to gain that great virtue of purity, merely by human

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<sup>176</sup> John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, XII, 11.

efforts, i.e., without the aid of God. This is inherent in the angels alone and occurs in heaven. The performance of everything good flows from His grace, who by multiplying His bounty has granted such lasting bliss, and vast glory to our feeble will and our short, petty course of life.”

John Cassian also stated<sup>177</sup> that almsgiving, tears and repentance are connected, where the almsgiving generates a remedy for our wounds. That is, we discover that it’s not all about me! Tears are good in that they show a heartfelt contrition for sin. Confession of sins is necessary in order to be justified.

“There are many fruits of penitence by which we can succeed in expiating our sins. Eternal salvation is not only promised for penitence, of which the blessed Apostle Peter says, ‘Repent and be converted that your sins may be forgiven’ (Acts 3:19); and John the Baptist and the Lord Himself said, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 3:2, 4:17). By the affection of love the weight of our sins is overwhelmed; for ‘love covers a multitude of sins’ (1 Peter 4:8). In the same way also by the fruits of almsgiving a remedy is provided for our wounds, because ‘Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms makes an atonement for sins’ (Ecclesiasticus 3:30). So also by the shedding of tears is gained the washing away of offenses, for ‘Every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with tears’. Finally to show that they are not shed in vain, he adds, ‘Depart from me all you that work iniquity, for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping’ (Psalm 6:6-8). Moreover by means of confession of sins, their absolution is granted. ‘I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart’ (Psalm 32:5 LXX); and again: ‘First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified’ (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). By afflicting the heart and body, forgiveness for sins committed is in like manner obtained; for he says, ‘Look on my affliction and my trouble; and forgive all my sins’ (Psalm 25:18 LXX). More especially by amendment of life: ‘Remove your iniquities from your souls before My eyes; cease from your iniquities; learn to do well; diligently seek judgment; deliver him that is suffering wrong; plead for the orphan, and obtain justice for the widow. And come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are as purple, I will make them white as snow; and though they are as scarlet, I will make them white as wool’ (Isaiah 1:16-18 LXX). Sometimes the pardon of our sins is obtained by the intercession of the saints, for ‘If anyone sees his brother sin a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that’ (1 John 5:16). Again: ‘Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven’” (James 5:14-15).

John Chrysostom stated<sup>178</sup> that we need a continual reminder of our sins in order to grow as a Christian. Confession and a continual mourning for our shortcomings are part of our

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<sup>177</sup> John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Pinufius, III, xx, 8.

<sup>178</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, VII, 2.

humility before God. To help our growth in godliness, forgiving others from our heart, almsgiving, constancy in prayer and fasting are very helpful.

“Let us tremble at His words that He may continually build us up. ‘To whom will I have respect, but to the humble and meek, and the man that trembles at my words?’ (Isaiah 66:2 LXX) Let us mourn for our sins as Christ commanded, let us be pricked to the heart for our transgressions, let us reckon up exactly all the wicked deeds, which in time past we have dared, and let us earnestly strive to wipe them out in all kinds of ways.”

“Now to this end God has opened to us many ways. ‘First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified’ (Isaiah 43:26 LXX); and again, ‘I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart’ (Psalm 32:5 LXX). A continual accusation and remembrance of sins contributes not a little to lessen their magnitude. But there is another more prevailing way than this: to bear malice against none of those who have offended against us, to forgive the trespasses of all those who have trespassed against us. Will you learn a third? Hear Daniel saying, ‘Atone for your sins by alms, and your iniquities by compassion on the poor; it may be God will be long-suffering to your trespasses’ (Daniel 4:27 LXX). And there is another besides this: constancy in prayer, and persevering attendance on the intercessions made with God. In like manner fasting brings to us no small comfort and release from sins committed, provided it is attended with kindness to others; it quenches the vehemence of the wrath of God. ‘Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms makes an atonement for sins’” (Ecclesiasticus 3:30 LXX).

“Let us then travel along all these ways; for if we give ourselves wholly to these employments, if on them we spend our time, not only shall we wash off our bygone transgressions, but shall gain very great profit for the future. For we shall not allow the devil to assault us with leisure either for slothful living, or for pernicious curiosity, since by these, and in consequence of these, he leads us to foolish questions and hurtful disputations, from seeing us at leisure and idle, and taking no thought for high living. But let us block this approach against him, let us watch, let us be sober, that having in this short time worked a little, we may obtain eternal goods in endless ages.”

Jerome noted<sup>179</sup> that while some men are called righteous, no one is safe from falling into sin. We are righteous when we confess our sins, and our righteousness depends on the mercy of God and not on our own merit. All our lives our enemy diligently sows tares; our task is to choose wisely and reject the tares that we are exposed to.

“It is clear that men are called righteous, and said to be without fault; but that if negligence comes over them, they may fall. A man always occupies a middle place, so that he may slip from the height of virtue into vice, or may rise from vice to virtue. He is never safe, but must dread shipwreck even in fair weather; and, therefore, no one is without sin. Solomon says, ‘For there is not a righteous man in the earth, who will do good, and not sin’ (Ecclesiastes 7:21 LXX); and likewise ‘There is no man that sins not’ (2 Chronicles 6:36). So, also, the blessed David says, ‘Who can understand his own errors? Cleanse me from

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<sup>179</sup> Jerome, Against the Pelagians, I, 12-13.

hidden faults, and keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins' (Psalm 19:12-13). Again, 'Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified' (Psalm 143:2). Holy Scripture is full of passages to the same effect."

"Does the little epistle of the Evangelist John contradict itself? If 'whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God' (1 John 3:9), how is it that John says in the same place, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us?' (1 John 1:8) John tells us that 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). We are then righteous when we confess that we are sinners, and our righteousness depends not upon our own merits, but on the mercy of God. 'A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech' (Proverbs 18:17 LXX). And elsewhere, 'First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). 'God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all' (Romans 11:32). The highest righteousness of man is this — whatever virtue he may be able to acquire, not to think of it as his own, but as the gift of God. He then who is born of God does not sin, so long as the seed of God remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. But while the householder slept, an enemy sowed tares when we were not aware; a sower by night scatters in the Lord's field dandelion and wild oats among the good grain (Matthew 13:24-30). This parable of the householder in the Gospel should excite our fears. He cleanses his floor, and gathers the wheat into his granary, but leaves the chaff to be scattered by the winds, or burned by the fire. The chaff is separated from the wheat at the end of the world; this is a proof that, while we are in the mortal body, chaff is mixed with the wheat (Matthew 13:36-43). But some object and ask why the Apostle said, 'and he cannot sin, because he is born of God' (1 John 3:9). I reply by asking you what becomes of the reward of his choice? For if a man does not sin because he cannot sin, free will is destroyed, and goodness cannot possibly be due to his efforts, but must be part of a nature unresponsive to evil."

John Cassian stated<sup>180</sup> that all the saints grieved over and confessed their sin. Man's righteousness is weak and imperfect, and always needs God's mercy.

"With daily sighs all the saints grieve over this weakness of their nature; while they search into their shifting thoughts and the secrets and inmost recesses of their conscience, they cry out in entreaty, 'Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified' (Psalm 143:2). Also this, 'Who will boast that he has a pure heart? Or who will boldly say that he is pure from sins?' (Proverbs 20:9) Again, 'There is not a righteous man in the earth, who will do good, and not sin' (Ecclesiastes 7:21 LXX). This also, 'Who can understand his own errors?' (Psalm 19:13) They have recognized that man's righteousness is weak and imperfect and always needs God's mercy. Isaiah, whose iniquities and sins God purged away with the live coal from the altar, after that marvelous vision of God, said, 'Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips, and I

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<sup>180</sup> John Cassian, Third Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxiii, 17.

dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). He would not have felt the uncleanness of his lips, unless it had been given him to recognize the true purity of perfection by the vision of God, at the sight of Whom he suddenly became aware of his own uncleanness, of which he had previously been ignorant. When he says, 'Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips', he shows that his confession that follows refers to his own lips, and not to the uncleanness of the people. He confesses the uncleanness of all sinners, but he also embraces the mass of the wicked and the good, saying, 'You are indeed angry, for we have sinned. In these ways we continue; and we need to be saved. But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:5-6). What, I ask, could be clearer than this saying, in which the prophet includes not one only but all our righteousness and, looking around on all things that are considered unclean and disgusting, because he could find nothing in the life of men fouler or more unclean, chose to compare them to filthy rags."

### Practical Details of Confession

Leo the Great, writing<sup>181</sup> to Bishop Theodore, stated that forgiveness is always available, and should never be withheld, if we would just confess our sins.

"To those who in time of need and in urgent danger implore the aid first of penitence, then of reconciliation, means of amendment and reconciliation must not be forbidden, because we cannot place limits to God's mercy or fix times for Him with whom true conversion suffers no delay of forgiveness. As God's Spirit says by the prophet, 'When you shall turn and mourn, then you shall be saved' (Isaiah 30:15 LXX); and elsewhere, 'first confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX); and again, 'For with the Lord is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption' (Psalm 130:7 LXX). And so in dispensing God's gifts we must not be hard, or neglect the tears and groans of self-accusers, seeing that we believe the feeling of penitence springs from the inspiration of God. As Paul says, 'God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do his will*'" (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

John Chrysostom stated<sup>182</sup> that confessing our sins leads us to avoid being overwhelmed with the difficulties of this life. By doing this, we concentrate on the things that our Master cares about rather than what our fellow-servants care about.

"If we grieved for our sins, if we mourn over our offenses, nothing else will give us sorrow; this one anguish would expel all kinds of dejection. By our thorough confession we will avoid being overwhelmed with the pains of the present life, and being puffed up with its splendors. In this way, we entirely appease God; just as by our deviant conduct we provoke Him to anger. If you had a servant, and he, after suffering much evil at the hands of his fellow-servants, takes no account of any of his fellow-servants, but is only anxious not to provoke his master; is he not able by this alone to do away with your anger? But if he

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<sup>181</sup> Leo the Great, Letter to Theodore, CVIII, 4

<sup>182</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VIII, 8.

doesn't care about his offenses against you, while he is very thoughtful about those against his fellow-servants, will you not lay on him the heavier punishment? God does this also; when we neglect His wrath, He brings it upon us more heavily; but when we pay attention to it, He is more gentle. Rather, He lays it on us no more at all. He wills that we should take action on ourselves for our offenses, and then He does not exact it Himself. This is why He threatens punishment; that by fear He may destroy contempt; and when the threat alone is sufficient to cause fear in us, He does not allow us to undergo the actual trial. For instance, He said to Jeremiah, 'Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen<sup>183</sup> of heaven' (Jeremiah 7:17-18). We should fear lest the same kind of thing be said concerning us. 'Do you not see what they do? No one seeks the things of Christ, but everyone seeks their own things. The children run to uncleanness; the fathers to covetousness; the wives encourage their husbands in the pomp and vanity of life, and sharpen their appetites for it'. Take your stand in the market place, and question those who come and go; not one will you see hastening on a spiritual errand, but all run after carnal things. How long before we awake from our overindulging?. How long are we to keep sinking down into deep slumber?"

### **We Need to Remember Our Sins**

Ambrose of Milan stated<sup>184</sup> that Christ forgets about all our transgressions when He forgives them, but we should remember them in order to correct them, so that we don't repeat them. Confession is good in that it justifies us, avoids the devil triumphing over us and avoids punishment. Sin is like the stink of rotting flesh; confession removes that, no matter how bad the stink.

"We have a good Lord, Whose will it is to forgive all, Who called you and said, 'I am He that blots out your transgressions, and I will not remember them, but you should remember them that we may plead together' (Isaiah 43:25-26 LXX). That is to say, 'I do not recall those transgressions which I have forgiven you, which are covered, as it were, with oblivion, but you should remember them. I will not remember them because of My grace; you should remember them in order to correct them. Remember, you may know that the sin is forgiven; don't boast as though you were innocent, that you don't aggravate the sin; but you will be justified, if you confess your sin'. For showing shame at our confession of sins loosens the bands of transgression."

"You see what God requires of you, that you remember that grace which you have received, and don't boast as though you had not received it. You see by how complete a promise of remission He draws you to confession. Pay attention, lest by resisting the commandments of God you fall into the offense of the Jews, to whom the Lord Jesus said, "We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance; we mourned to you, and you didn't lament'" (Matthew 11:17).

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<sup>183</sup> "The Queen of Heaven" was the mother goddess Astarte, which was identical to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar and represented fertility. Worship of Astarte belonged chiefly to the women, who made raisin cakes for her (Hosea 3:1).

<sup>184</sup> Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Repentance, II, vi-vii, 40-41, 44, 52-53, 57-58.



“This, then, is the mystery<sup>185</sup>. ‘We played the flute to you’, singing the song of the New Testament, ‘and you didn’t dance’. That is, you did not raise your souls to spiritual grace. ‘We mourned, and you didn’t lament’. That is, you did not repent. Therefore the Jewish people were forsaken, because they rejected grace and did not repent. Repentance came by John, grace by Christ. The Church keeps both that it may both attain to grace and not cast away repentance, for grace is the gift of One Who confers it; repentance is the remedy of the sinner.”

“Let us mourn for a time, that we may rejoice for eternity. Let us fear the Lord; let us anticipate Him with the confession of our sins; let us correct our backslidings and amend our faults, lest of us it is said, ‘Woe is me, my soul, for the godly man has perished from the earth, and there is none among men to correct them’” (Micah 7:2 LXX).

“Why do you fear to confess your sins to our good Lord? ‘First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified’ (Isaiah 43:26 LXX). The rewards of justification are set before him who is still guilty of sin, for he is justified who voluntarily confesses his own sin. ‘A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech’ (Proverbs 18:17 LXX). The Lord knows all things, but He waits for your words, not that He may punish, but that He may pardon. It is not His will that the devil should triumph over you and accuse you when you conceal your sins. Be upfront with your accuser; if you accuse yourself, you will fear no accuser; if you report yourself, though you were dead, you shall live.”

“The Lord Jesus weeps, seeing the heavy burden of the sinner; He does not allow the Church to weep alone. He has compassion with His beloved, and says to him that is dead, ‘Come out’ (John 11:43); that is, ‘You who lie in darkness of conscience, and in the squalor of your sins, as in the prison-house of the guilty, come out, declare your sins that you may be justified. ‘With the mouth confession is made unto salvation’” (Romans 10:10).

“If you have confessed at the call of Christ, the bars will be broken, and every chain loosed, even though the stench of the bodily corruption is grievous. Lazarus had been dead four days and his flesh stank in the tomb; but He Whose flesh saw no corruption was three days in the sepulcher, for He knew no evils of the flesh. However great the stench of the dead body may be, it is all done away by the sacred ointment; and the dead rises again, and the command is given to loose his hands who till now was in sin. The covering is taken from his face which veiled the truth of the grace, which he had received. Since he has received forgiveness, the command is given to uncover his face, to lay bare his features. He whose sin is forgiven has nothing to be ashamed of.”

John Chrysostom noted<sup>186</sup> that when God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden, He did so in a way that might lead to their confession of their sin; but instead they blamed someone else for their sin.

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<sup>185</sup> Jesus was comparing Himself during His earthly ministry to that of John the Baptist. Jesus came dining with tax collectors in a freer kind of life, but the Jewish leaders didn’t respond. John the Baptist came mourning and fasting, but they didn’t respond to him either.

<sup>186</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XII, 10.

“Man was self-taught with respect to the knowledge of virtue. Adam sinned the first sin; and after the sin immediately hid himself (Genesis 3:8); but if he had not known he had been doing something wrong, why did he hide himself? At that time there was no formal education, no Law, no Moses. How did he recognize the sin, and hide himself? Not only did he hide himself, but when called to account, he endeavored to lay the blame on another, saying, ‘The woman, whom You gave me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate’ (Genesis 3:12). The woman transferred the accusation to another; that is, the serpent (Genesis 3:13). Observe the wisdom of God; for when Adam said, ‘I heard Your voice, and I was afraid, for I was naked, and I hid myself’, God does not at once convict him of what he had done, nor say, ‘Why have you eaten of the tree?’ Instead He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked, unless you have eaten of that Tree of which alone I commanded you not to eat?’ (Genesis 3:11) He did not keep silence, nor did He openly convict him. He did not keep silence, that He might call him forth to the confession of his crime. He did not convict him openly, that the man might not be deprived of that pardon which is granted to us from confession. Therefore he did not declare openly the cause that this knowledge sprung from, but he carried on the discussion in the form of interrogation, leaving the man himself to come to the confession.”

John Cassian stated<sup>187</sup> that confession and penitence are needed to clean us up from our sins. The words we read about David’s tears can apply to us also if we are truly sorry for our sins and desire to avoid sinning again. Even though God forgets our sin when He forgives us, He encourages us to remember them, so that we avoid repeating them. Our work at penitence and confession is rewarded as we obtain purity of heart.

“Holy and humble contrition is described as follows, ‘I acknowledged my sin, and didn’t hide my iniquity; I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and You forgave the ungodliness of my heart’ (Psalm 32:5-6 LXX). When we kneel in prayer, how shall we be able to stir ourselves up to tears of confession, by which we may be able to obtain pardon for our offenses, according to these words, ‘I shall wash my bed every night; I shall water my couch with tears’ (Psalm 6:6 LXX)? We might expel from our hearts all recollection of our faults, but on the contrary we are instructed to preserve the remembrance of them, as the Lord says, ‘I will not remember your sins; but you remember them’ (Isaiah 43:25-26 LXX). Not only when I am at work, but also when I am at prayer I try to recall to my mind the recollection of my sins, that I may be more inclined to true humility and contrition of heart. I venture to say with the prophet, ‘Look upon my humility and my trouble, and forgive all my sins’” (Psalm 25:18 LXX).

“The remembrance of sins is useful to men who are still doing penance, that they may with constant smiting of the breast say, ‘I am conscious of my iniquity; and my sin is continually before me’ (Psalm 51:5 LXX). While we do penance, and are still grieved by the recollection of faulty actions, the shower of tears, which is caused by the confession of our faults, is sure to quench the fire of our conscience. As a man continues in this state of humility of heart and

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<sup>187</sup> John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Pinufius, III, xx, 6-7.

contrition of spirit and conquers the sinful habits that he was confessing, the remembrance of these things fades away, and the thorns of conscience are by God's grace extracted from his inmost heart. Then it is clear that he has attained the reward of pardon, and that he is purged from the stain of the sins he has committed. We can only attain this forgetfulness by the obliteration of our former sins and desires, and by perfect purity of heart. This most certainly will not be attained by any of those who from sloth or carelessness have failed to purge their faults. It will only be attained by one who constantly groans until he has removed every spot of his former stains, and by the goodness of his heart has proclaimed to the Lord, 'I acknowledged my sin, and didn't hide my iniquity' (Psalm 32:5 LXX); and, 'My tears have been my food day and night' (Psalm 42:4). In the end it may be granted to him to hear these words, 'Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord' (Jeremiah 31:16). These words also may be uttered of him by the voice of the Lord, 'I have blotted out as a cloud your transgressions, and your sin as darkness' (Isaiah 44:22 LXX), and again, 'I am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember them' (Isaiah 43:25 LXX). When he is freed from the 'cords of his sins' (Proverbs 5:22), by which everyone is bound, he will with all thanksgiving sing to the Lord, 'You have broken my bonds apart; I will offer to You the sacrifice of praise'" (Psalm 116:16-17 LXX).

### **Confession Is Like the Cleansing of the Laver**

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, compared<sup>188</sup> confession to a priest with the Old Testament laver that was placed outside the Temple, where the priests washed before serving.

"When the pastor of a Church prepares himself to patiently cleanse the sins of their neighbors in confession, he supports the laver before the doors of the temple. Whoever is striving to enter the gate of eternity may show his temptations to his pastor's heart, and wash the hands of his thought and of his deed in the laver. And for the most part it comes to pass that, while the ruler's mind becomes aware, of the trials of others, it is itself also attacked by the temptations that it hears about. The same water of the laver in which a multitude of people is cleansed is undoubtedly itself defiled. In receiving the pollutions of those who wash, it loses the calmness of its own purity. But the pastor ought not be afraid of this, since under God, who nicely balances all things, he is the more easily rescued from his own temptations as he is more compassionately distressed by those of others."

John Chrysostom stated<sup>189</sup> that we are cleansed by tears and confession; however fake tears are worse than none at all. The Lord Himself wept on occasion, but He was never recorded as laughing, and neither was the Apostle Paul.

"Just like after a violent cloudburst of rain, where there is a clear open sky; so likewise when tears are pouring down, calm arises, and serenity, and the darkness that results from our sins quite disappears. Just like as by water and the spirit, so by tears and confession are we cleansed the second time; unless we are

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<sup>188</sup> Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 5.

<sup>189</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 8-9.

acting thus out of display and vanity. A woman whose tears were fake, I would call her justly condemnable, more than if she decked herself out like a prostitute. The Lord seeks those tears which are shed not for display, but in remorse; those which trickle down secretly and in closets, and in sight of no one, softly and noiselessly; those which arise from a certain depth of mind, those shed in anguish and in sorrow, those which are for God alone. Such were Hannah's, for 'her lips moved but her voice was not heard' (1 Samuel 1:13), however, her tears alone uttered a cry more clear than any trumpet. Because of this, God also opened her womb, and made the hard rock a fruitful field. If you also weep thus, you have become a follower of your Lord. He also wept, both over Lazarus (John 11:35), and over the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39); and regarding Judas He was greatly troubled. Weeping one may see Him do, but nowhere laughing; not a smile even a little; none of the evangelists at least has mentioned this. Paul wept also for three years night and day (Acts 20:31); he has said this of himself, and others say this of him (Romans 12:15). But whether he laughed, neither has he said himself anywhere about this, nor has any other of the saints said this either. But this is said of Sarah only (Genesis 18:12-15), when she is blamed, and of Ham, the son of Noah, when instead of a freeman he became a slave (Genesis 9:25). These things I say, not to suppress all laughter, but to take away dissipation of mind."

John Chrysostom compared<sup>190</sup> confession to a sacrifice to God, like when Abraham climbed up the mountain to offer up his only son, Isaac. We go up to the priest alone and leave behind worldly thoughts and doubts, taking only watchfulness, tears and humility of heart.

"In prayer we can keep awake, if we bear in mind with whom we are conversing, if we reflect that we are offering sacrifice and have in our hands a knife, fire and wood. If in thought we throw open wide the gates of heaven; if we transport ourselves there and take the sword of the Spirit to slay the victim; we can make watchfulness the sacrifice and tears the drink offering to Him. Such is the blood of this victim; such the slaughter that colors that altar. Don't allow any worldly thoughts to occupy your soul then. Remember Abraham, when he was offering sacrifice, didn't allow wife, servant nor any other to be present. Don't allow any of the slavish and degraded passions to be present with you, but go up alone to the mountain where he went up, where no second person is permitted to go. Should any such thoughts attempt to go up with you, command them with authority, and say, 'Sit here, and I and the lad will proceed thus far, and having worshipped we will return to you' (Genesis 22:5 LXX). Leaving the donkey and the servants below, and whatever is void of reason and sense, go up, taking with you whatever is reasonable, as he took Isaac. Build your altar as he did, with nothing human. Let nothing disturb you then, but be lifted up above the heavens. Groan deeply; sacrifice confession, 'First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified' (Isaiah 43:26 LXX); sacrifice contrition of heart. These victims don't turn to ashes, dissolve into smoke or melt into air; they don't need wood and fire, but only a deep-pricked heart. This is wood, this is fire that burns, but not

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<sup>190</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, V, 4.

consumes them. For he that prays with warmth is burned, yet not consumed; but like gold that is purified by fire becomes brighter.”

John Chrysostom stated<sup>191</sup> that confession is not difficult or burdensome; if a publican, a notorious extortionist can be justified by confession, so can we.

“If we forgive our neighbors their trespasses, ours will be forgiven to us; if we give alms, if we are humble. This also takes away sins. If the publican, only for saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ (Luke 18:13), went down justified, much more we also, if we are humble and contrite, shall be able to obtain abundant loving kindness. If we confess our own sins and condemn ourselves, we shall be cleansed from most of our defilement. There are many ways that purify. Let us therefore in every way war against the devil. This is not difficult or burdensome. Forgive him that has injured you; have pity on the needy; humble your soul. Though you deserve punishment as a sinner, you will be able to obtain the kingdom, by these means purging your sins, and wiping off their stain. God grant that we all, having purified ourselves here by confession from all the filth of our sins, may there obtain the blessings promised in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

### **Precautions for Confession**

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, cautioned<sup>192</sup> those who come to confession, but repeat afterward the same sins that they confessed. It is like a sow, when washed, returning to wallow in the mud. He sets himself up as an enemy of God, despises the pardon that he might have received and makes even his tears filthy before God.

“Those who lament their transgressions and yet don’t abandon them are to be admonished to learn to consider anxiously that they cleanse themselves in vain by their weeping, if they defile themselves in their living. They may wash themselves in tears, but when clean, they end up returning to filth. It is written, ‘The dog returns to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:22). For the dog, when he vomits, certainly casts forth the food, which weighed upon his stomach; but, when he returns to his vomit, he is again loaded with what he had been relieved from. They who mourn their transgressions certainly cast forth by confession the wickedness, which oppressed the inmost parts of their soul; and yet, in returning to it after confession, they take it in again. But the sow, by wallowing in the mire when washed, is made filthier. One who mourns his past transgressions, yet doesn’t abandon them, subjects himself to the penalty of more grievous sin, since he despises the pardon which he might have won by his weeping. He rolls himself in filthy water; because in withholding purity of life from his weeping, he makes even his tears filthy before the eyes of God. Again it is written, ‘Do not use a lot of words in your prayer’ (Ecclesiasticus 7:14). To use a lot of words in prayer is, after lamenting, committing further sins that again require lamenting. Isaiah said, ‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil (Isaiah 1:16). He neglects being clean after washing, whoever after tears doesn’t maintain innocence of life. He that is baptized from

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<sup>191</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philemon, I, Moral.

<sup>192</sup> Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 30.

the touch of a dead body and touches it again, what has he gained by his washing (Ecclesiasticus. 34:25)? He is baptized from the touch of a dead body, who is cleansed from sin by weeping; but he touches a dead body after his baptism, who after tears repeats his sin.”

“Those who lament transgressions, yet don’t abandon them, are to be admonished to acknowledge themselves to be before the eyes of the strict judge like those who, when they come before the face of certain men, show them affection with great submission, but, when they depart, atrociously bring upon them all the enmity and hurt they can. What is weeping for sin but exhibiting the humility of one’s devotion to God? What is doing wickedly after weeping but putting in practice arrogant enmity against Him to whom entreaty has been made? James addresses this, ‘Whosoever will be a friend of this world becomes the enemy of God’” (James 4:4).

At some times, the methods of confession were quite different than they are today. Basil the Great, in writing to critics among the clergy at Neocaesarea, described<sup>193</sup> an all-night vigil of confession that was common among many Churches.

“The following customs are agreeable to those of all the Churches of God. The people go at night to the house of prayer, and in distress, affliction, and continual tears, making confession to God, at last rise from their prayers and begin to sing psalms. Divided into two parts, they sing antiphonally with one another, thus at once confirming their study of the Gospels, and at the same time producing for themselves a heedful temper and a heart free from distraction. Afterwards they again commit the prelude of the strain to one, and the rest take it up. After passing the night singing various psalms, praying at intervals as the day begins to dawn, all together, as with one voice and one heart, raise the psalm of confession to the Lord, each forming for himself his own expressions of penitence. If it is for these reasons that you renounce me, you will renounce the Egyptians, the Libyans, Thebans, Palestinians, Arabians, Phoenicians, Syrians, and the dwellers by the Euphrates; in a word all those among whom vigils, prayers, and common psalmody have been held in honor.”

### **Even the Greatest of the Saints Confess Their Sins**

Cyprian of Carthage noted<sup>194</sup> that Daniel and the Three Young Men in the furnace continued to confess their sins and the sins of their people, even after they had performed miraculous deeds of faith.

“Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, the illustrious and noble youths, even amid the flames of a raging furnace, did not cease from making public confession to God. Although possessed of a good conscience, and having often deserved well of the Lord by obedience of faith and fear, yet they continued to maintain their humility, making atonement to the Lord, even amid the flames. The sacred

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<sup>193</sup> Basil the Great, Letter to the Clergy of Neocaesarea, CCVII, 3.

<sup>194</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, III, 31.

Scripture<sup>195</sup> speaks, saying, ‘Azarias stood up and prayed, and, opening his mouth, made confession before God together with his companions in the midst of the fire’. Daniel also, after the grace of his faith and innocence, after the condescension of the Lord repeatedly with respect to his virtues and praises, strove by fasting to further deserve well of God, wrapping himself in sackcloth and ashes, sorrowfully making confession: ‘O Lord God, great, and strong, and dreadful, keeping Your covenant and mercy for them that love You and keep Your commandments, we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, and have rebelled. We have transgressed, and departed from Your precepts, and from Your judgments. We have not listened to the words of Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your Name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame’” (Daniel 9:4-7).

John Chrysostom noted<sup>196</sup> Jesus’ response to the woman with a hemorrhage who touched the hem of His clothing. Even though she was miraculously healed because of her faith, Jesus still sought her confession.

“When she approached Jesus, and had received her health, Jesus did not immediately call her, but first He said, ‘Who touched me?’ (Luke 8:45) Then Peter and the others said, ‘Master, the multitude throngs around You, and You say, who touched me?’ The multitude did not follow Him far off, but thronged Him on every side. Jesus continued to say, ‘Somebody has touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me’ (Luke 8:46), where He answered according to the impression of His hearers. But these things He said, that He might also induce the woman of herself to make confession. For on this account neither did He immediately convict her, in order that having signified that He knows all things clearly, He might induce her of her own accord to publish everything, and work upon her to proclaim herself what had been done.”

Cyril of Jerusalem used<sup>197</sup> as examples of great results from confession of sins David the King, Solomon, Ahab, Manasseh, Hezekiah and Nebuchadnezzar. Each was rewarded significantly for their honest confession of their sins, even though their sins were monstrous. If He can forgive these monstrosities, we can feel confident that our merciful God will certainly forgive our sins, if we honestly confess them.

“Consider the blessed David as an example of repentance. Great as he was, he fell; walking in the evening on the housetop, he took a careless look, and felt a human passion. His sin was completed, but his truthfulness concerning the confession of his fault didn’t die. Nathan the Prophet came, a swift accuser, and a healer of the wound. ‘The Lord is angry, and you have sinned’ (2 Samuel 12:7-12). So spoke the subject to the reigning king. But David the king was not indignant, for he considered not the speaker, but God who had sent him. He was

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<sup>195</sup> Lancelot Brenton, “Song of the Three Children”, 2-8, 15, in The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990. The “Song of the Three Children” was originally part of the Book of Daniel.

<sup>196</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXI, 2.

<sup>197</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, II, 12-15, 17-19.

not puffed up by the array of soldiers standing around, for he had seen in thought the angelic host of the Lord, and he trembled as seeing Him who is invisible. In answer to God who sent the messenger, he said, 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Samuel 12:13). Do you see the humility of the king and his confession? He had not been convicted by anyone, since few were aware of the matter. The deed was done quickly, and immediately the Prophet appeared as accuser, and the offender confessed the fault. Because he candidly confessed, he received a speedy cure. For Nathan the Prophet, who had uttered the threat, said immediately, 'The Lord also has put away your sin' (2 Samuel 12:13). You see the swift relenting of a merciful God. He says, however, 'You have greatly provoked the enemies of the Lord' (2 Samuel 12:14). Though you had many enemies because of your righteousness, your self-control protected you; but now that you have surrendered your strongest armor; your enemies have risen up, and stand ready against you."

"It is good to make confession. Solomon also fell but afterwards repented' (Proverbs 24:32 LXX). Ahab, too, the King of Samaria, became a wicked idolater, an outrageous man, the murderer of the Prophets, a stranger to godliness, a coveter of other men's fields and vineyards. When he had slain Naboth by Jezebel's means, and the Prophet Elijah came to threaten him, he tore his garments, and put on sackcloth. The merciful God said to Elijah, 'See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days' (1 Kings 21:29). After this forgiveness he did not depart from his wickedness (1 Kings 22:1-27); nevertheless the forgiving God forgave him, not as being ignorant of the future, but as granting a forgiveness corresponding to his present season of repentance. A righteous judge will give sentence according to each case that has occurred."

"Manasseh also was utterly wicked, and sawed<sup>198</sup> Isaiah in half (Hebrews 11:37); he was defiled with all kinds of idolatries, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Chronicles 33:9). After being led captive to Babylon, he used his experience of misfortune for a healing course of repentance; Manasseh 'humbled himself before the Lord, and prayed, and the Lord heard him, and brought him back to his kingdom' (2 Chronicles 33:11-13). If He who sawed the Prophet in half was saved by repentance, shall not you then, having done no such great wickedness, be saved?"

"We need to pay attention lest without reason we underestimate the power of repentance. We often don't know the power that repentance has? Hezekiah, by means of confession, routed 185,000 of his enemies. This was truly a great thing, but still small in comparison with what remains to be told; the same king by repentance obtained the recall of a divine sentence, which had already gone out. When he had fallen sick, Elisha said to him, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die' (2 Kings 20:1). What expectation remained, what hope of recovery, when the Prophet said, 'you shall die?' Yet Hezekiah did not desist from repentance; but remembering what is written, 'When you shall turn and mourn,

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<sup>198</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 120 states that the Jewish leaders intentionally deleted from the Hebrew Scriptures the account of Isaiah being sawn in half by Manasseh. Manasseh used a wooden saw in order to prolong the agony.



then shall you be saved' (Isaiah 30:15 LXX), he turned to the wall, and from his bed lifting his mind to heaven, for thickness of walls is no hindrance to prayers sent up with devotion. He said<sup>199</sup>, 'Remember me, O Lord, for it is sufficient for my healing that You remember me. You are not subject to times, but are Yourself the giver of the Law of life. For our life depends not on a nativity, nor on a conjunction of stars, as some idly talk. You are the Lawgiver according to Your Will'. And he, who could not hope to live because of the prophetic sentence, had fifteen years added to his life, and as a sign the sun ran backward in its course."

"Nebuchadnezzar was bloodthirsty, fierce, and lion-like in disposition. He dug up the bones of the kings from their graves in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 8:1, Baruch 2:24-25). He carried the people away captive and put out the eyes of King Zedekiah, after the king had already seen his children slain (2 Kings 25:7). He broke in pieces the Cherubim, the sculptured images, and the mercy-seat<sup>200</sup>, from which God spoke with His voice. The veil of the Sanctuary he trampled under foot; the altar of incense he took and carried away to an idol's temple (2 Chronicles 36:7). All the offerings he took away; the Temple he burned from the foundations. How great punishments did he deserve, for slaying kings, for setting fire to the Sanctuary, for taking the people captive, for setting the sacred vessels in the house of idols?"

"He was turned into a wild beast, living in the wilderness, that he might be saved. He had claws like a lion (Daniel 4:33); for he was a ravager of the Sanctuary. He had a lion's mane; for he was a ravaging and a roaring lion. He ate grass like an ox; for he was a brute beast, not knowing Him who had given him his kingdom. His body was wet from the dew; after seeing the fire of the furnace quenched by the dew, he didn't believe. After this, 'I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever' (Daniel 4:34). When, therefore, he recognized the Most High, sent up these words of thankfulness to God, repented himself for what he had done, and recognized his own weakness; then God gave back to him the honor of the kingdom."

"If after Nebuchadnezzar had done such deeds and had made confession, God give him pardon and the kingdom, surely when we repent He will give us remission of sins, and the kingdom of heaven, if we live a worthy life. The Lord is loving to man, and swift to pardon, but slow to punish. Let no man therefore despair of his own salvation. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, denied the Lord three times before a young lady; but he repented, and wept bitterly. Now weeping shows the repentance of the heart; therefore he not only received forgiveness for his denial, but also held his Apostolic dignity intact."

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<sup>199</sup> Cyril adds to the words of Hezekiah recorded in 2 Kings 20:2.

<sup>200</sup> These were the two Cherubim that Solomon made. They were 15 feet tall, made of olive wood overlaid with gold, where their outstretched wings overshadowed the Ark (1 Kings 6:23-26, 8:6-7).. Nebuchadnezzar carried off or destroyed "all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord" (2 Kings 24:13, 1 Esdras 1:54 LXX).. However, later accounts say that the tent, the Ark and the Altar of Incense were removed by Jeremiah and hidden in a cave at Mt. Sinai. This was included at one time among the writings of Jeremiah (2 Maccabees 2:4-8).

## God Desires Confession by the Sinner

John Chrysostom stated<sup>201</sup> that the primary role of John the Baptist was to bring the people to confession and to a sense of their own sins.

“The reason for the coming of John the Baptist was primarily to bring the people to a sense of their own sins. Among other things, his clothing declared this, being that of repentance and confession. This was indicated also by what he preached, for nothing else did he say, but ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ (Matthew 3:8). Since the Jewish leaders didn’t condemn their own sins, this made them start off separated from Christ. If they came to a sense of their own sins, they would have started longing to seek their Redeemer, and to ask for forgiveness. John came to bring this about, and to persuade them to repent, not just in order that they might avoid punishment, but that having become by repentance more humble, and condemning themselves, they might hasten to receive forgiveness.”

Jerome, writing to Rusticus, who had reneged on a vow to the Lord, pointed out<sup>202</sup> that King David illustrates the Lord’s desire for sinners to confess their sins and remove the stink of their wounds. The Lord accepts us as we are, not as we once were; to continue to be just before God, we must continue to confess our sin. Just as a parent does not immediately disown a child over one misdeed, so the Lord is patient in His desire for our confession.

“King David illustrated the desire of the Lord for confession by sinners after he had slept with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite. When the prophet Nathan rebuked David for this, David replied, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’. Immediately after he confessed his fault Nathan comforted him by the words, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die’ (2 Samuel 12:13). David had added murder to adultery; yet bursting into tears he said, ‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions’ (Psalm 51:1). A sin so great needed to find great mercy. Such was the progress that David made that he who had once been a sinner and a penitent afterwards became a master, able to say, ‘I will teach transgressors your ways; and sinners shall be converted to you’ (Psalm 51:13). For as ‘confession and beauty are before God’ (Psalm 96:6 Vulgate), so a sinner who confesses his sins and says, ‘My wounds are foul *and* festering, because of my foolishness’ (Psalm 38:5) loses his foul wounds and is made whole and clean. But ‘He that covers his own ungodliness shall not prosper’” (Proverbs 28:13).

Ezekiel said, ‘as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins’ (Ezekiel 33:12). The Lord judges every man according to how he finds him. It is not the past that He looks upon but the present. There may be sins from long ago, but renewal and conversion remove them. ‘A righteous man may fall seven times but rises up again’ (Proverbs 24:16). If he falls, how is he righteous? And if he is righteous, how does he fall? The answer is that a sinner does not lose the name of

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<sup>201</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, X, 2.

<sup>202</sup> Jerome, Letter to Rusticus, CXXII, 3.

righteous if he always repents for his sins and rises again. If a sinner repents, his sins are forgiven not only till seven times but till seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). One who has been forgiven much also loves much (Luke 7:47). The harlot washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair; and to her, as a type of the Church gathered from the Gentiles, was the declaration made, 'Your sins are forgiven' (Luke 7:48). The self-righteous Pharisee perished in his pride, while the humble publican was saved by his confession" (Luke 18:10-14).

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>203</sup> how God tried to bring Cain to confess his sin after he killed Abel. Even after Cain scorned Him, God continued to look after him, trying to bring him to let go of the hatred later in his life.

"On the occasion of the murder of Abel, God said to Cain, 'Did you not sin, even if you brought your offering rightly, but did not divide it rightly? Be at peace; Abel will submit to you, and you shall rule over him' (Genesis 4:7 LXX). God tried to repress the murder beforehand, aiming at peace between them. But when Cain had murdered Abel, He did not then bring His care for Cain to a close, but again answers the fratricide in gentle terms, saying, 'Where is your brother Abel?', that even then, Cain might make a full confession. But Cain struggled in defense of his crime, with a greater and sadder shamelessness. Even then God did not leave him, but again speaks the language of an injured and despised lover, and said, 'The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me' (Genesis 4:10). God rebuked the earth with the murderer saying, 'Cursed be the earth, which opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood' (Genesis 4:11-12). God did like those who lament, as David did when Saul had fallen (2 Samuel 1:21). God, as though singing some solitary dirge, said, 'The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me and now you are cursed from the earth which has opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand'. He said this to humble Cain's fiery passion, and to persuade him to love Abel at least now that he was gone. You have extinguished his life, He would say; why don't you now extinguish the hatred also? He loves both the one and the other, since He made them both. Does He let the murderer go unpunished? No, for he would have grown worse. He both corrects Cain and also displays, even in this, His love. He does not kill him, but only fetters him with trembling, that he may strip himself of the crime, so that he may come back to a natural tenderness for Abel, and that so at last he may make a truce with Abel now that he has gone. He desired that Cain should not go away to the next world still angry with Abel. Those who are adept at love do this when they meet with no love in return; they do this to win over those that scorn them."

### **Confess Now Before Judgment Day**

Some people tend to put off confession, finding it difficult to admit their mistakes. Others assume that they will have an opportunity later in life to confess their sins before they die. Both these outlooks are somewhat naïve, and represent poor planning for one of the most important things that they will ever do in their lives.

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<sup>203</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXIII, v. 10.

John Chrysostom encouraged<sup>204</sup> his people to prevail on the Judge to forgive us our sins now in this life before it is too late. He likened this life to a prison, where the hardness and security of the prison increases with our personal wealth. If the Judge has to haul us out of prison in chains on Judgment Day, we have little hope of pardon. If we prevail on Him now, we will not even have to face Judgment Day.

“Let us take courage at Christ’s love for man, and let us show an anxious repentance, before the Day comes. Everything depends on us now, but then He that judges alone has control over the sentence. ‘Let us therefore come before His face with confession’ (1 Esdras 8:74); let us mourn. If we are able to prevail on the Judge before the Appointed Day to forgive us our sins, then we need not so much as enter into the court. On the other hand, if this is not done, He will hear us publicly in the presence of the world, and we shall no longer have any hope of pardon. Unless we have done away with our sins here, when we have departed there, we shall not be able to escape accounting for them. Like those, who are taken out of earthly prisons, and who are brought in their chains to the place of judgment, so all souls, when they have departed bound with the many chains of their sins, are led to the awesome Judgment Seat. Our present life is nothing better than a prison. When we enter into the next life, we will see everyone bound with chains. If we were able to enter into each man’s life, into each man’s soul, we would see it bound with chains worse than iron; and this most especially if you enter into the souls of those that are rich. The more wealth men have about them, so much the more are they bound. Regarding prisoners, when we see him with irons on his back, on his hands, and often on his feet too, we account him miserable. So also with the rich man, when we see him surrounded with innumerable things. Consider him not rich, but rather wretched because of these things. Together with these chains, he has a cruel jailer too, namely the wicked love of riches. The love of wealth doesn’t allow him to get out of this prison, but provides thousands of fetters for him, plus guards, doors and bolts. When it has thrown him into the inner prison, it persuades him to feel pleasure in these bonds; thus he does not find any hope of deliverance from the evils which press on him.”

John Chrysostom also advised<sup>205</sup> people of his day not to put off confession until old age, since there is the possibility that we might be snatched away in the midst of our sins. Putting off confession is like building a house on a rotten foundation and assuming it will be good enough to avoid collapsing.

“A wise man advised, ‘Do not delay to turn to the Lord, nor postpone it from day to day’ (Ecclesiasticus 5:7), and ‘do not boast of tomorrow, for you don’t know what tomorrow shall bring’ (Proverbs 27:1). By putting this off there is danger; but by addressing it immediately there is secure salvation. Consider that as often as you have fornicated, this often have you condemned yourself. Such is the nature of sin; once committed, the Judge has also passed his sentence. Have you been drunken, gluttonous, or robbed someone? Acknowledge it to God as a mercy that He didn’t snatch you away in the midst of your sins; do not seek

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<sup>204</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIV, 6.

<sup>205</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXII, v. 18.

another occasion to work evil. Many have been snatched away in the midst of their covetousness, and have departed to certain punishment. We should be fearful lest this should happen to us, and we end up without excuse. 'But God gave to many a set time for confession in extreme old age'. Will He give it to us also? Maybe! Consider that we are deliberating about our souls, and consider that He may not give us this opportunity. If we are always putting things off, for this reason perhaps we shall not have an opportunity given to us."

"When we go out to battle, we do not say, 'there is no need to make my will, perhaps I shall come back safe'; when we are deliberating about marriage, we don't say 'suppose I take a poor wife; many have gotten rich in this way contrary to expectation'. When building a house, we don't say, 'suppose I lay a rotten foundation, many houses have stood up with bad foundations'. Yet in deliberating about the soul, we lean on things more rotten than this. What if after we have had time for confession given to us, we still continue as we are? This sort of man will be listless even in old age. For this mode of reasoning even after eighty years desires ninety, and after ninety a hundred, and after a hundred we will be less likely to act. The whole of life will have been consumed in vain, and what was spoken of the Jews will happen to us; 'Their days were consumed in vanity' (Psalm 78:33). When we depart bearing the heavy burden of our sins, we shall carry away fuel for the fire and a plentiful feast for the worm (Mark 9:42-48). Therefore I pray that we halt and desist from wickedness, that we may also obtain the promised good things."

John Chrysostom further noted<sup>206</sup> that the torments of the age to come are much worse than anything in this life. In this life extreme torture makes death come quicker, ending the torture. In the age to come no one dies; the torture just continues. Therefore we should come to confession while we have time.

"Let us be careful with our life. If we consider whatever labors and punishments are part of this life, all these combined will be nothing in comparison with the things to come. Consider fire, steel and wild beasts, and if there are any worse than these; these are not even a shadow compared with the torments of the age to come. Extreme torments applied in this life become especially light, making death come quickly, since the body can't take both intensity and long duration of suffering. Not so in the age to come! While we have time then, 'let us come before His Presence with<sup>207</sup> confession' (Psalm 95:2) that in that Day we may see Him gentle and serene, that we may escape altogether those threat bearing Powers. Notice how this world's soldiers, who perform the bidding of those in authority, drag men around; they chain, scourge, pierce their sides, apply torches, and dismember them. Yet all these things are jokes compared to the punishments in the age to come. These punishments are temporal; but there the worm doesn't die and the fire isn't quenched (Mark 9:42-48). Our bodies in the age to come are incorruptible. God grant that we may never learn these things by experience; but that these fearful things may never be nearer to us than in the

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<sup>206</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IX, 4.

<sup>207</sup> Most translations read Psalm 95:2, "Come before His Presence with thanksgiving". However the Hebrew word *todah* can also mean "confession", and this is how John Chrysostom interpreted it.

mention of them. God grant that we may not be delivered over to those tormentors, but are be of no use any longer; physicians can't help when the patient is dead. They may say that so and so ought to have been done; but all is fruitless and in vain. The Jews will then say, 'Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord' (Matthew 23:39), but they will not be able to reap any advantage of this cry towards escaping their punishment; when they ought to have said it, they didn't. Let us reform ourselves that this may not be the case with our life, and that we may stand at the tribunal of Christ with boldness."

### **A Desire for Holiness Justifies Us**

We are not justified just by faith or by confession, but we are also justified by holiness. One may argue that both confession and holiness require faith. To say this may sound like one is trying to justify the theological opinion of "Justification by Faith alone" rather than taking the words of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers plainly for what they say.

Irenaeus of Lyons noted<sup>208</sup> that God gave circumcision and the Sabbath as signs of holiness, that His people might be recognized as holy and separate from idolaters. The signs meant something; circumcision referred to that of the heart and the Sabbaths referred to a consecration for God's service. Abraham, Noah and Enoch pleased God and were justified by holiness without either circumcision or the Sabbaths, since the Law was not established for righteous men, who had it written on their hearts. However, when righteousness and love for God had become forgotten when Israel was in Egypt, a written Law became necessary. God fed them with manna that they might learn, like Abraham that man does not live by bread alone.

"We learn from the Scripture that God gave circumcision, not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign<sup>209</sup>, that the race of Abraham might continue recognizable (Genesis 17:9-11). Ezekiel says the same with regard to the Sabbaths, 'I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord, that sanctifies them' (Ezekiel 20:12). God said to Moses, 'My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations' (Exodus 31:13). These signs were symbolic; that is, meaningful and for a purpose, inasmuch as they were given by a wise Artist. The circumcision of the flesh typified that of the Spirit. 'We have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands' (Colossians 2:11). And 'Circumcise the hardness of your heart' (Deuteronomy 10:16 LXX). The Sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God's service. 'For we have been counted', says the Apostle Paul, 'all day long as sheep for the slaughter' (Romans 8:36); that is, consecrated to God, and serving our faith continually, and persevering in it, abstaining from all avarice (Matthew 6:19). Moreover, the Sabbath of God, which represents rest, is the kingdom, is described using created things; in the kingdom, the man who has persevered in serving God shall, in a state of rest, partake of God's table."

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<sup>208</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, xvi, 1-3.

<sup>209</sup> By the 1<sup>st</sup> century, this "sign" became so prominent that it represented a national identity. There was no way that the Jewish leaders could give up circumcision when the Gospel came.

“Man was not justified by these things, but they were given as a sign to the people. Abraham himself, without circumcision and without observance of Sabbaths, ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’ (Romans 4:3); and he was called ‘the friend of God’ (James 2:23). So did Noah please God, although he was uncircumcised, and receive the dimensions of the ark and the world of the second race of men. Enoch, too, pleased God, and without circumcision, was God’s emissary to the angels at his translation, although he was just a man. He was translated, and is preserved until now as a witness of the just judgment of God. The angels, when they had transgressed, fell to the earth for judgment (Isaiah 14:12-14), but the man who pleased God was translated for salvation. Moreover, the rest of those righteous men who lived before Abraham, and of those patriarchs who preceded Moses, were justified without the need of the Law of Moses. As also Moses himself says, ‘The Lord did not form this covenant at Horeb<sup>210</sup> for your fathers, but for you’” (Deuteronomy 5:2-3).

“Why did the Lord not form the covenant for the fathers? Because ‘the Law was not established for righteous men’ (1 Timothy 1:9)! But the righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls, that is, they loved God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by commands about forbidden things, because they had the righteousness of the Law in themselves. But when this righteousness and love to God had passed into oblivion, and became extinct in Egypt, God necessarily, because of His great goodwill to men, revealed Himself by a voice, and led the people with power out of Egypt, in order that man might again become the follower of God. He afflicted those who were disobedient, that they should not despise their Creator; He fed them with manna, that they might receive food for their souls. ‘He fed you with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord’ (Deuteronomy 8:3). It urgently directed love to God, and taught just dealing towards our neighbor, that we should not be unjust or unworthy of God, who prepares man for His friendship through the medium of the Decalogue. Similarly the Decalogue dealt with our neighbor in matters which profited man himself; God never stood in no need of anything from man.”

From the opposite side, Clement of Alexandria noted<sup>211</sup> the methods that God uses in dealing with men. Those who have no fear of God in their lives cannot be justified because they have no respect for Him. Yet He still deals kindly and justly with them. If we choose to live in sin, it is our free will that chooses punishment; blame lies with us, not with God.

“God is good. The Lord speaks many a time before He proceeds to act. ‘For my arrows’, He says, ‘will make an end of them. They shall be consumed with hunger and the devouring of birds, and there shall be irreparable destruction. I will send against them the teeth of wild beasts, with the rage of serpents creeping on the ground. Outside, the sword shall bereave them of children, and

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<sup>210</sup> “Horeb” and “Sinai” are used synonymously in the Scriptures. Mt. Sinai is one of the mountain peaks of the range known as Mt. Horeb.

<sup>211</sup> Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, I, 8.

terror shall come out of the secret chambers' (Deuteronomy 32:23-25 LXX). God is not angry in the way that some think; but often restrains, and always exhorts humanity, and shows what ought to be done. This is a good device, to terrify lest we sin. 'The fear of the Lord drives away sins, and he that is without fear cannot be justified' (Ecclesiasticus 1:21-22 LXX). God does not inflict punishment from wrath, but for the ends of justice; since it is not expedient that justice should be neglected on our account. Each one of us, who sins, with his own free-will chooses punishment, and the blame lies with him who chooses. God is without blame. 'But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? Certainly not!' (Romans 3:5-6) He says, therefore, threatening, 'I will sharpen My sword, and My hand shall lay hold on judgment; and I will render justice to My enemies, and pay back those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh from the blood of the wounded' (Deuteronomy 32:41-42). It is clear, then, that those who are not at enmity with the truth, and do not hate the Word, will not hate their own salvation, but will escape the punishment of enmity. 'The crown of wisdom is the fear of the Lord' (Ecclesiasticus 1:18 LXX). Very clearly, therefore, has the Lord unfolded His method of dealing, saying, 'I have overthrown you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah; and you became as a brand plucked from the fire; and yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord'" (Amos 4:11 LXX).

"See how God, through His love of goodness, seeks repentance; and He pursues, threatening silently, showing His own love for man. 'I will turn away my face from them, and will show what shall happen to them' (Deuteronomy 32:20 LXX). Where the face of the Lord looks, there is peace and rejoicing; but where it is turned, there is the introduction of evil. The Lord, accordingly, does not wish to look on evil things; for He is good. But on His looking away, evil arises spontaneously through human unbelief. 'Consider therefore', says Paul, 'the goodness and severity of God. On those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness' (Romans 11:22), that is, in faith in Christ."

### **Practical Advice for Seeking Holiness**

David contrasted holiness with its opposite, where David defined three kinds of evil. David said (Psalm 1:1),

1. Don't walk in the counsel of the wicked.
2. Don't stand in the way of sinners.
3. Don't sit in the seat of scoffers.

On the other hand, David said that one can do two things that contrast these three kinds of evil, and these two things will make a person happy. He said (Psalm 1:2),

1. Set one's will in the Law of the Lord
2. Meditate on His Law day and night.



Hilary of Poitiers had some great insight into life as we know it and had much to say<sup>212</sup> about David's definition of evil versus holiness. One cannot get to holiness or be justified without understanding some of this. There is a difference between the wicked, sinners and scoffers. "The wicked" include heretics and the irreverent, who despise their maker and believe in evolution as the source of all life. The counsel of the wicked is always wavering and drifting in vicious circles with the course of their imagination; blessed is the man that doesn't go there. "Sinners" are those who may be outwardly good and even attend Church, but are caught up in greed, drunkenness, pride or lying. Blessed is the man who will not allow himself to be hurried into this path, and his Faith draws him back. The "seat of scoffers" is like an infection. God-fearing men may try to administer the laws of the courts, even though they are bound by the laws of the Church. They may have good intentions; but they contract the infection of using sin and the ways of the world to implement the various aspects required by their "seat", and end up poisoning the will of the godly. Conversely, happy is the man whose will, not whose fear is in the Law of the Lord.

"There must, therefore, be a distinction between the wicked and the sinner, and between the sinner and the scoffers, chiefly because here the wicked has a counsel, the sinner has a way, scoffers have a seat. The question involves walking, not standing, in the counsel of the wicked, and standing, not walking, in the way of the sinner. We must note the precise difference between the sinner and the wicked, that so it may become clear why to the sinner is assigned a way, and to the wicked a counsel. Men are accustomed to connect standing with a counsel, and walking with a way or a path, not vice versa."

"Not every man that is a sinner is also wicked, but the wicked man cannot fail to be a sinner. For example, sons, though they are drunken, licentious and spendthrift, may love their fathers; with all these vices, they may not be free from guilt, but may very well perform their duty to their father. But the wicked<sup>213</sup>, though they may be models of sobriety and thriftiness, because they despise their parent, they are worse transgressors than if they were guilty of every sin. This analogy is also true of our relationship with our Father in Heaven and our duty to Him."

"There is no doubt then that, the wicked must be distinguished from the sinner. Those men are wicked who scorn searching for the knowledge of God, who in their irreverent mind take for granted that there is no Creator of the world. They say that it arrived at the existing order and beauty, which we see, by chance movements. In order to deprive their Creator of all power to pass judgment on a life lived rightly or in sin, they will have it that man comes into being and passes out of it again by the simple operation of a Law of nature."

"Thus, all the counsel of the wicked characterized by these men is wavering, unsteady, and vague, and wanders about in the same familiar paths and over the same familiar ground, never finding a resting place, for it fails to reach any definite decision. They have never in their system risen to the teaching of a Creator of the world. Instead of answering our questions as to the cause, beginning, and duration of the world, whether the world is for man, or man for the

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<sup>212</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, Homilies on the Psalms, I, 6-11.

<sup>213</sup> Hilary uses the term "undutiful" as being synonymous with wicked, as he shows in the following paragraph.

world, the reason of death, its extent and nature, they press in ceaseless motion around the circle of this godless argument and find no rest in these imaginings.”

“There are other counsels of the wicked: those who have fallen into heresy, unrestrained by the laws of either the New Testament or the Old. Their reasoning is a vicious circle with no grasp or foothold to keep them from an interminable round of endless indecision. Their wickedness consists in measuring God, not by His own revelation, but by a standard of their choosing. They forget that it is as godless to make a God as it is to deny Him; if you ask them what effect these opinions have on their faith and hope, they are perplexed and confused. They wander from the point and willfully avoid the real issue of the debate. Happy is the man who has not walked in this kind of counsel of the wicked, who has not even entertained the wish to walk therein, for it is a sin even to think for a moment of things that are wicked.”

“The man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked shall not stand in the way of sinners either. There are many, whose confession of God acquits them of wickedness, yet does not set them free from sin. For example, those who are in the Church but do not observe her laws; such are the greedy, the drunken, brawlers, the lustful, the proud, hypocrites, liars, plunderers. No doubt we are urged towards these sins by the promptings of our natural instincts; but it is good for us to withdraw from the path into which we are being hurried and not to stand there, seeing that we are offered a way of escape. It is for this reason that the man who has not stood in the way of sinners is happy, for while nature carries him into that way, the Faith draws him back.”

“The third condition for gaining happiness is not to sit in the seat of the scoffers. The Pharisees sat as teachers in Moses’ seat, and Pilate sat in the seat of judgment. What seat then are we to consider scoffers? Not that of Moses, for it is the occupants of the seat and not the occupation of it that the Lord condemns, when He says, The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; whatever they ask you to do, that do; but do not go after their work. The occupation of that seat is not scoffing, to which obedience is commanded by the Lord’s own word. Real scoffing was the infection that Pilate sought to avoid by washing his hands. He knew what was right<sup>214</sup>, but he refused to do it out of political concerns. Many God-fearing men are led astray by seeking worldly honors and the desire to administer the Law of the courts, though they are bound by the laws of the Church.”

“Although they have a godly intention, as is shown by their merciful and upright demeanor, still they cannot escape a certain contagious infection arising from how their life is spent. The conduct of civil cases does not allow them to be true to the holy principles of the Church’s Law, even though they wish it. They are compelled, against their will, by the conditions of the seat they have won,

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<sup>214</sup> Pontius Pilate and his wife Claudia Procula were good friends with the Synagogue Ruler Jairus and his wife Fulvia. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, Pilate’s wife and son were present, and Jesus healed Pilate’s son of lameness at the same occasion. Thus Pilate knew better at Jesus’ trial, and he was especially worried when the Jewish leaders stated that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7-8). For details, see Catherine van Dyke, tr., “The Letters of Pontius Pilate and Claudia Procula”, Relics of Repentance, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Issana Press, Lincoln, NE 68503, 1990.

using verbal abuse, insult, or punishment. Their position makes them authors as well as victims; their system is impregnated with the infection. Hence this title, the seat of scoffers, by which David describes their seat, because by its infection it poisons the will of the godly.”

“But the fact that he has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scoffers, does not constitute the perfection of the man’s happiness. The belief in one God, the avoidance of sin, the preference of private life to public position, all this may be found even in a pagan. The difference is that David portrays the man that is perfect as one whose will has been in the Law of the Lord. Most men are kept within the Law by fear; few are brought under the Law by will. Fear acknowledges what it is afraid of, but perfect piety is ready to obey commands. This is why that man is happy whose will, not whose fear is in the Law of God.”

### Asking the Lord for Mercy

Luke records the Publican saying, “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13). We note his humility by his standing far off with downcast eyes beating his chest. His request for mercy is reminiscent of Blind Bartimaeus of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43), where Luke appears to be emphasizing the use of the words “Lord have mercy” in different contexts<sup>215</sup>. These words had already been incorporated into the Liturgy of the Early Church as part of the prayers.

Ignatius of Antioch also encouraged<sup>216</sup> humility and gave examples of the saints who were very humble.

“I know that you are not puffed up, for you have Jesus in yourselves. When I commend you, I know that you cherish reverence of spirit; as it is written, ‘The righteous man is his own accuser’ (Proverbs 18:17 LXX); and again, ‘Declare first your own iniquities, that you may be justified’ (Isaiah 43:26 LXX ); and again, ‘When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants’ (Luke 17:10). ‘That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God’ (Luke 16:15). As the publican said, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ (Luke 18:13). Therefore those great ones, Abraham and Job, styled themselves ‘dust and ashes’ before God (Genesis 18:27, Job 30:19). And David says, ‘Who am I, O Lord God? And what *is* my house, that You have loved me forever?’ (1 Chronicles 17:16 LXX) Moses, who was ‘the humblest of all men’ (Numbers 12:3), said to God, ‘I have a feeble voice, and a slow tongue’ (Exodus 4:10 LXX). Be therefore also of a humble spirit, that you may be exalted; for ‘he that humbles himself shall be exalted, and he that exalts himself shall be humbled’” (Luke 14:11).

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<sup>215</sup> For more details of the use of the words “Lord have mercy” see the Study for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke, where the subject is Blind Bartimaeus of Jericho.

<sup>216</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 12.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>217</sup> the life of Job, where Job was justified not because he suffered, but because he endured his suffering humbly and thankfully. Job sets the standard for us; anyone who suffers less than Job and complains against God is condemned by Job's testimony.

“How can we suffer for Christ, you ask? If someone accuses you falsely, not on account of Christ, yet if you bear it patiently, if you give thanks, if you pray for him, all this you do for Christ. But if you curse him, if you utter discontent, if you attempt to revenge it, though you aren't able, it is not for Christ's sake. You will suffer loss, and will be deprived of your reward on account of your intention. We have the choice with our own minds. For instance, great were the sufferings of Job, yet he suffered with thankfulness; and he was justified, not because he suffered, but because in suffering he endured it thankfully. No one ever suffered like Job. If another under lighter sufferings curses the whole world, and complains against God, he is condemned and sentenced, not because he suffered, but because he blasphemed. He didn't blaspheme from any necessity; since if necessity were the cause, Job too must have blasphemed. Since Job, who suffered more severely than anyone, did no such thing, blasphemy is not caused by necessity, but from the man's weakness of purpose. We need therefore strength of soul, and nothing will then appear distressful; but if our soul is weak, we find a grievance in everything.”

Cyprian of Carthage stated<sup>218</sup> that the Publican placed all his hope of salvation not in the confidence of his innocence, because there is none who is innocent. But confessing his sinfulness he prayed humbly, and He who pardons the humble heard the petitioner.

The words and attitude of the publican became part of the first Liturgy of the Church, drafted by James the Lord's brother. We note that the imagery of the Old Testament is present in the Liturgy of St. James more so than in the Liturgy of John Chrysostom. The St. James Liturgy begins<sup>219</sup> with the following words, where the priest appears before the altar, and assumes the same manner as the publican had in the Temple:

“O Sovereign Lord our God, condemn me not, defiled with a multitude of sins. Behold, I have come to this Your divine and heavenly mystery, not as being worthy; but looking only to Your goodness, I direct my voice to You: God be merciful to me, a sinner. I have sinned against Heaven, and before You, and am unworthy to come into the presence of this Your holy and spiritual table, upon which Your only-begotten Son, and our Lord Jesus Christ, is mystically set forth as a sacrifice for me, a sinner, and stained with every spot. I present to You this supplication and thanksgiving, that Your Spirit the Comforter may be sent down upon me, strengthening and fitting me for this service. Count me worthy to make known without condemnation the word, delivered from You by me to the people, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy,

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<sup>217</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IX, Moral.

<sup>218</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IV, 6.

<sup>219</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Divine Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord”, I, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

and good, and quickening, and consubstantial Spirit, now and ever, and to all eternity. Amen.”

Later in the Liturgy of St. James, after the Great Entrance with the bread and wine, at the prayer before the veil<sup>220</sup>, the priest continues<sup>221</sup> to pray as the publican did:

“O Lord God, who created us, and brought us into life, who showed us ways to salvation, who granted us a revelation of heavenly mysteries, and appointed us to this ministry in the power of Your all-holy Spirit, grant, O Sovereign, that we may become servants of Your New Testament, ministers of Your pure mysteries. Receive us as we draw near to Your holy altar, according to the greatness of Your mercy, that we may become worthy of offering to You gifts and sacrifices for our transgressions and for those of the people. Grant to us, O Lord, with all fear and a pure conscience to offer to You this spiritual and bloodless sacrifice, and graciously receive it to Your holy and spiritual altar above the skies for an odor of a sweet spiritual smell; send down in answer on us the grace of Your all-holy Spirit.”

“O God, look on us, and have regard to this our reasonable service; accept it, as You accepted the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, the peace-offerings of Samuel, the repentance of David, and the incense of Zachariah. As You accepted from the hand of Your Apostles this true service, so accept also in Your goodness from the hands of us sinners these offered gifts. Grant that our offering may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, as a propitiation for our transgressions and the errors of the people, and for the rest of the souls that have fallen asleep earlier. That we also, Your humble, sinful, and unworthy servants, being counted worthy without guile to serve Your holy altar, may receive the reward of faithful and wise stewards, and may find grace and mercy in the awesome Day of Your just and good retribution.”

“We thank You, O Lord our God, that You have given us boldness for the entrance into Your holy places, which You have renewed to us as a new and living way through the veil of the flesh of Your Christ. We therefore, being counted worthy to enter into the place of the tabernacle of Your glory, and to be within the veil, and to behold the Holy of Holies, cast ourselves down before Your goodness.”

“Lord have mercy on us: since we are full of fear and trembling, when about to stand at Your holy altar, and to offer this dread and bloodless sacrifice for our own sins and for the errors of the people<sup>222</sup>. Send forth, O God, Your good grace, and sanctify our souls, and bodies, and spirits; turn our thoughts to

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<sup>220</sup> In the Liturgy of John Chrysostom, this prayer is shortened to the following: O Lord God Almighty, Who alone are holy, Who dost accept a sacrifice of praise from those who call upon Thee with their whole heart: Receive also the prayer of us sinners, and lead us to Thy Holy Altar. Enable us to offer unto Thee gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and for the ignorance of the people. Make us worthy to find grace in Thy sight, that our sacrifice may be acceptable unto Thee and that the Good Spirit of Thy grace may rest upon us and upon these gifts here spread forth and upon all Thy people.

<sup>221</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Divine Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord”, XXVI-XXVII, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 7. We note that the veil models that in the Tabernacle that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies and the Presence of God.

<sup>222</sup> This section is based on Hebrews 5:1-3.

holiness, that with a pure conscience we may bring to You a peace-offering, the sacrifice of praise.”

“By the mercy and loving-kindness of Your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, and good, and quickening Spirit, now and always.”

“And the people respond, ‘Amen’.”

John Chrysostom stated<sup>223</sup> that we can ask the Lord for mercy, but we won’t necessarily obtain mercy unless we deserve it. By being merciful to those around us, we draw God’s mercy toward us also.

“The devil has set us up to be enemies and adversaries to ourselves! Let us be sober, let us open our eyes, let us watch, let us lay hold on eternal life, let us shake off this long sleep. There is a Judgment, there is a Punishment, there is a Resurrection, there is an Inquisition into what we have done! The Lord will come in the clouds! ‘A fire shall be kindled before him, and round about him there shall be a very great tempest’ (Psalm 50:3 LXX). A river of fire rolls before him (Daniel 7:10), the undying worm, unquenchable fire (Mark 9:44-48), outer darkness, gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:13). For if the prophets, though stoned, did not keep silence, much more ought we to bear with enmity, and not to just tell you what you want to hear, that we may not be cut in half ourselves (Matthew 24:51) for deceiving you. There is unrelenting deathless punishment, and no one to stand up for us. ‘Who will pity’, he says, ‘the snake charmer that is bitten by the snake?’ (Ecclesiasticus 12:13) When we don’t pity our own selves, who will pity us? If you see a man piercing himself with a sword, will you be able to spare his life? No way! Much more, when we have it in our power to do well, and we do not do well, who will spare us? No one! Let us pity ourselves! When we pray to God, saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on me’, let us say it to ourselves, and have mercy on ourselves. We are the arbiters of God’s having mercy on us. This grace He has given to us. If we do things worthy of mercy, worthy of His loving-kindness towards us, God will have mercy on us. However, if we do not have mercy on ourselves, who will spare us? Have mercy on your neighbor, and you shall find mercy from God Himself. How many people come to you every day saying, ‘Have pity on me’, and you do not turn towards them. How many come naked, how many come maimed, and we do not bend toward them, but dismiss their supplications. How then can we ask to obtain mercy, when we ourselves do nothing worthy of mercy? Let us become compassionate, let us become pitiful, so that we may be well-pleasing to God, and obtain the good things promised to those that love Him.”

### **The Proper Use of Fasting<sup>224</sup>**

The Pharisee in the Parable boasted to God that he fasted twice a week. While fasting as a means of discipline for the body is good, and it has been part of the life of the people of God

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<sup>223</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians*, IX, vv. 10-11.

<sup>224</sup> For more study on the history and use of fasting prior to the Coming of Christ, see the Study for the Gospel Lesson of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent.

from the beginning, pride and boasting about it is not good. Traditionally the Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday<sup>225</sup>, to remember Moses climbing Mt. Sinai on a Thursday to receive the Law (Exodus 24:9-18), then climbing back up Mt. Sinai again on a Monday to receive the Law the second time (Exodus 34:1-8).

In the Mosaic Law, fasting is only specified on one occasion: the Day of Atonement or the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month (Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:27-32, Numbers 19:7-11). On this occasion, fasting meant abstinence from both work and food from evening until evening and was a remembrance of the sin of Nadab and Abihu who offered “strange fire” before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-3).

Following the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity, Jewish tradition states that additional fasting was prescribed to remember and mourn the sins of the nation prior to the Captivity as shown in Table 1. In addition, fasting was also proclaimed for the feast of Purim on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar (12<sup>th</sup> month) to remember the genocide planned by Haman (Esther 9:29-32)

**Table 1**  
**One Day Fasts after the Captivity**

<b>DAY</b>	<b>EVENT REMEMBERED</b>	<b>SCRIPTURE</b>
17 Tammuz (4 <sup>th</sup> month)	Capture of Jerusalem	Jeremiah 52:6,7, Zechariah 8:19
9 Ab (5 <sup>th</sup> month)	Burning of Temple	2 Kings 25:8, Zechariah 7:3, 8:19
3 Tishri (7 <sup>th</sup> month)	Death of Gedaliah	Jeremiah 40:4ff, Zechariah 8:19
10 Tebeth (10 <sup>th</sup> month)	Beginning of Attack on Jerusalem	2 Kings 25:1, Jeremiah 52:4, Zechariah 8:19
13 Adar (12 <sup>th</sup> month)	Purim: genocide of Haman	Esther 9:29-32

Besides one day fasts, the Scripture also speaks of extended fasting where ordinary food was not consumed. In some cases this meant something akin to Orthodox fasts where the faster consumes one uncooked vegetarian meal per day. In other cases, it meant no food at all for a long time, such as Moses climbing Mt. Sinai and Elijah traveling to Mt. Sinai. In some cases, such as Moses on Mt. Sinai, there was a miraculous aspect of the fast where the individual was nourished by God. There is sometimes a profound fasting spoken of in the Old Testament where an extended fast is accompanied by sackcloth, ashes and often weeping. This was not something that one entered into lightly, and there was usually some strong motivation behind it. Some examples of fasting are shown in Table 2, which shows that there was a lot of fasting done under the Old Covenant.

Jerome gave<sup>226</sup> a brief history of fasting among the people of God, beginning with a partial fast by Adam. The godly have always fasted while those who are distant from God indulge themselves with food and drink.

“Fasting was in part commanded to Adam. Noah called some animals clean, some unclean, and the unclean animals were taken into the Ark by pairs,

<sup>225</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 346.

<sup>226</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, II, 15.

the clean in uneven numbers. The eating of the unclean was forbidden; otherwise the term unclean would be meaningless. Thus fasting was in part consecrated; restraint in the use of all was taught by the prohibition of some.”

“Why did Esau lose his birthright on account of food? He could not atone with tears for the impatience of his appetite. The people of Israel on their way to the land of promise longed for the flesh of Egypt, saying: ‘Oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full!’ (Exodus 16:3) And again, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!’ (Numbers 11:4-6) They despised angels’ food, and longed for the meat of Egypt.”

“Moses’ fast for forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai showed that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word of God. He said to the Lord, ‘the people are full and make idols’ (Exodus 32:8). Moses with empty stomach received the Law written with the finger of God. The people that ate and drank and rose up to play fashioned a golden calf, and preferred an Egyptian ox to the majesty of the Lord. Forty days’ work perished through the fullness of a single hour. Moses boldly broke the tablets, for he knew that drunkards cannot hear the word of God. ‘The beloved<sup>227</sup> grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God *who* made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation’ (Deuteronomy 32:15). The Lord warned: ‘Beware, lest when you have eaten and drunk, have built beautiful houses, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, then your heart may be lifted up, and you’ll forget the Lord your God’ (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). The people ate and their heart grew thick, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart (Isaiah 6:10, Matthew 13:13-15). The people well fed and fat-fleshed could not bear the countenance of Moses who fasted. The second writing of the tablets could not have been without fasting. What was lost by drunkenness was regained by abstinence, a proof that by fasting we can return to Paradise, where we have been expelled through fullness.”

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, taught<sup>228</sup> about the “Fast of the Seventh Month”, which was the solemn fast of the Day of Atonement on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> Month. Leo applied this fast to the current practice in Orthodoxy where everyone is encouraged to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, where Leo also included a vigil on Saturday after Great Vespers to prepare for the Liturgy on Sunday. Leo greatly encouraged almsgiving, confession of sins and freedom from worldly cares along with the fast as the means of a deeper cleansing of the people of God.

“The Prophets proclaimed the justice of God, Whose vengeance the people of Israel incurred often through their iniquities. God cannot be appeased except by fasting to win mercy. Joel warns, ‘Thus says the Lord your God, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning; tear your hearts and not your garments; and turn to the Lord your God, for He is merciful and

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<sup>227</sup> The “beloved”, Hebrew *Jeshurun*, is a poetical, but yet tender and loving name for the people of Israel.

<sup>228</sup> Leo the Great, Sermons, 88, 1-3, 5.



**Table 2**  
**Extended Fasts**

<b>PROFOUND FASTING EVENT</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>
Moses in receiving the Law: 40 days for each trip up Mt. Sinai	Exodus 34:28
Hannah won the gift of a son (Samuel) by fasting	1 Samuel 1:15-17
David's valiant men at the death of Saul (7 days)	1 Samuel 31:8-13
King David, facing persecution from Saul, his own family, etc.	Psalm 35:9-16, 109: 21-29
David, petitioning for Bathsheba's first son (7 days)	2 Samuel 12:16-20
Elijah fasted for 40 days on his journey to Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai)	1 Kings 19:8-9
King Ahab repenting for his part in Jezebel's wickedness.	1 Kings 21:27-29
Hezekiah fasted in sackcloth and Assyria was repelled	2 Kings 18-19
Jehoshaphat and all Israel at the approach of the armies of Moab and Ammon	2 Chronicles 20:1-24
The people of Nineveh facing destruction prophesied by Jonah. Even the King of Nineveh sat in ashes (Jonah 3:6)	Jonah 3
Queen Esther, Mordecai and all the Jews facing genocide at the hands of Haman fasted in sackcloth and ashes	Esther 4:3
Daniel and the three youths gained a good report by fasting	Daniel 1-2
Daniel fasted for a week in the lions' den until Habakkuk came	Bel and Dragon 1:38 LXX
Daniel, seeking to know how long Jerusalem would be desolate, prior to an angelic visit.	Daniel 9:3-22
Ezra, seeking the Lord for a safe journey from Babylon to Israel (at least several days)	Ezra 8:21-23
Nehemiah, regarding the broken down wall of Jerusalem	Nehemiah 1:1-4
Nehemiah, Ezra and all Israel as they confessed their sins following the Feast of Booths and the Reading of the Law.	Nehemiah 9:1-3
The Prophetess Anna as a way of life	Luke 2:36-38
John the Baptist as a way of life	Matthew 9:14-18
Jesus fasted for 40 days prior to his baptism	Matthew 4:1-11
The Centurion Cornelius seeking a word from the Lord	Acts 10:4, 30
Paul fasted often	2 Corinthians 11:27
All hands on Paul's ship in the face of shipwreck (14 days)	Acts 27:27-34
Paul encouraged Timothy to break his fast with wine for health	1 Timothy 5:23
The desert hermits imitated the diet of John the Baptist	Jerome, <u>Against Jovinianus</u> , II, 15.

compassionate, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy' (Joel 2:12-13 LXX). Again, 'Sound the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, proclaim a solemn service, gather the people, sanctify the Church' (Joel 2:15-16). This exhortation must be obeyed in our days also, because these healing remedies must be proclaimed by us too for sanctification. Christian devotion may gain what Jewish transgression lost."

"Individual fasting benefits a certain portion of the Church only; the fast which the whole Church undergoes is better. God's people become strongest when the hearts of the entire faithful meet together in one common act of holy obedience, when in the camp of the Christian army there is on all sides the same making ready for the fight and defense. The cruel enemy may rage; yet he will be able to catch no one, if he finds no one off his guard, no one inactive in works of piety."

"To this unconquerable strength of unity, we are invited by the teaching of the solemn Fast of the Seventh Month, that we may lift our souls to the Lord free from worldly cares and earthly concerns. Even though this endeavor is always

needed, we cannot all adhere to it perpetually; let us at least on Wednesday and Friday withdraw ourselves from worldly occupations, and steal a little time for promoting our eternal welfare. ‘For in many things we all stumble’ (James 3:2). Though we are cleansed by the daily gift of God from pollutions, darker stains cling to unwary souls, which need a greater care to wash out. The fullest abolition of sins is obtained when the whole Church offers up one prayer and one confession. If the Lord has promised fulfillment of all they shall ask, to the devout agreement of two or three, what shall be denied to many thousands of people who unite in one act of worship?” (Matthew 18:19-20)

“Let us engage in the solemn fast with a good will. Nothing hard, nothing harsh is asked of anyone, nor is anything imposed beyond our strength, whether in the discipline of abstinence or in the amount of alms. Each knows what he can and what he cannot do; let everyone pay his quota, assessing himself at a just and reasonable rate, that the sacrifice of mercy is not offered sadly. Because few possess this greatness of heart, and yet it is truly a pious thing for each one not to forsake the care of his own family, we exhort you to perform God’s bidding according to the measure of your ability. ‘He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, will supply and multiply the seed you have *sown* and increase the fruits of your righteousness’ (2 Corinthians 9:10). On Wednesday and Friday therefore let us fast; and on Saturday keep vigil all together in the presence of the blessed Apostle Peter, by whose prayers we are sure God’s mercy will be granted to us in all things.”

Leo continued<sup>229</sup> to say that the fast can also help purify us from falsehood, such as taught in his day by Nestorius and Eutyches.

“The year’s course has brought back the seventh month to us; I feel certain that your minds are spiritually aroused to keep the solemn fast. You have learned by experience how well this preparation purifies both the outer and the inner parts of men, so that by abstaining from the lawful, resistance becomes easier to the unlawful. Do not limit your plan of abstinence, dearly-beloved, to the things of the body, or to the lessening of food alone. For the greater advantages of this virtue belong to that chastity of the soul, which not only crushes the lusts of the flesh, but also despises the vanities of worldly wisdom. As Paul says, ‘Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men’” (Colossians 2:8).

“We restrain ourselves from food; but much more we fast from errors in order that the mind may not be taken captive by falsehood. There are many enemies of the Truth, especially Nestorius and Eutyches, who dare to stir up civil wars<sup>230</sup> within the Church, in order that by leading the ignorant into agreement with their ungodly doctrines, they may boast of increase in numbers through those whom they have been able to sever from the Body of Christ.”

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<sup>229</sup> Leo the Great, Sermons, 91, 1-3

<sup>230</sup> Probably the occasion was some businessmen had come to Rome from Egypt after the murder of Proterius, Patriarch of Alexandria, in 457 AD by Coptic mobs, and who supported the heresy of Eutyches. Proterius replaced Dioscorus, who was deposed for heresy by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, and this began the split between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the rest of Orthodoxy.

“Utter this confession with all your heart and reject the lies of heretics, that your fasting and almsgiving may not be polluted by any infectious error. Then we will offer the clean sacrifice and our gifts of mercy will be holy, when those who perform them understand what they are doing. When the Lord says, ‘unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you’ (John 6:53), you ought to be partakers at the Holy Table, and to have no doubt whatever concerning the reality of Christ’s Body and Blood. That is taken in the mouth, which is believed in Faith, and it is vain for the heretics to respond ‘Amen’, who dispute what is taken<sup>231</sup>. When the Prophet says, ‘Blessed is he, who considers the poor and needy’ (Psalm 41:1 LXX), he is the praiseworthy distributor of clothes and food among the poor, who knows he is clothing and feeding Christ in the poor. He Himself says, ‘as long as you have done it to one of My brethren, you have done it to Me’” (Matthew 25:40).

Athanasius of Alexandria noted<sup>232</sup> that trumpets not only proclaimed a fast in the Old Testament, but they sanctified the fast to distinguish those who pollute the fast. The Pharisee polluted his fasting with self-exaltation. As we refrain from food during fasting, we are encouraged to have our soul feed on virtues. If the soul is not nourished with virtue, it descends to nourishment by nothing but sin. At the Lord’s Table, our Lord Jesus Christ is the food of the saints as we eat His flesh and drink His blood. Similarly the devil is the food of the impure, and of those who work the deeds of darkness. Moses, Elijah and Daniel fasted for an extended period of time by the contemplation of God, and His Word can miraculously take the place of all food.

“There are diverse proclamations to the prophet blowing the trumpet; for he says, ‘Blow the trumpet in Zion: sanctify a fast’ (Joel 2:15). This is a warning trumpet, and commands with great earnestness, that when we fast, we should make the fast holy. For not all those who call upon God, consider God holy; there are some who defile their own mind concerning Him; for He is holy, and has pleasure in the saints (Psalm 16:3 LXX). Therefore the blessed Paul accuses those who dishonor God, ‘You dishonor God through breaking the Law’ (Romans 2:23). To make a separation from those who pollute the fast, he said, ‘Sanctify a fast’. Many crowd into the fast and pollute themselves in the thoughts of their hearts, sometimes by doing evil against their brethren, sometimes by fraud. There are many who exalt themselves above their neighbors, thereby causing great harm. The boast of fasting did no good to the Pharisee, although he fasted twice per week (Luke 18:12), because he exalted himself against the publican. In the same manner the Word blamed the people of Israel on account of such a fast, exhorting them, ‘I have not chosen this fast, nor *such* a day for a man to humble his soul; not even if you should bow down your neck like a hook, and should strew sackcloth and ashes under you; neither shall this fast be called acceptable’ (Isaiah 58:5 LXX). That we may be able to show what kind of persons we should be when we fast, and of what character the fast should be, listen again, ‘The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, In the tenth day of this seventh month, there shall be a Day of Atonement; a convocation, and a holy day shall it be to you; and you shall

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<sup>231</sup> This “Amen” is the response of the person receiving the Eucharist from the priest.

<sup>232</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, I, 4-7.

humble your souls, and offer whole burnt-offerings to the Lord' (Leviticus 23:26-27). Afterwards, that the Law might be defined on this point, He proceeds, 'Every soul that shall not humble itself, shall be cut off from the people'" (Leviticus 23:29).

"Notice how much a fast can do, and in what manner the Law commands us to fast. We are required to fast with the soul as well as with the body. The soul is humbled when it does not follow wicked opinions, but feeds on virtues. Virtues and vices are the food of the soul and it can eat either of these two foods according to its own will. If it is bent toward virtue, it will be nourished by virtues, righteousness, temperance, meekness, and fortitude, 'Being nourished by the words of the Faith' (1 Timothy 4:6). Such was the case with our Lord, who said, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work' (John 4:34). If the soul is not nourished with virtue, it inclines downwards, and is nourished by nothing but sin. In describing sinners and their food, the Holy Spirit referred to the devil, when He said, 'I have given him to be food to the Ethiopian nations' (Psalm 74:14 LXX). This is the food of sinners. Our Lord Jesus Christ, being heavenly bread, is the food of the saints, according to, 'unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you' (John 6:53). Similarly the devil is the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing of the light, but work the deeds of darkness. Therefore, in order to withdraw and turn them from vices, He commands them to be nourished with the food of virtue; namely, humbleness of mind, lowliness to endure humiliations, and the acknowledgment of God. Not only does such a fast as this obtain pardon for souls, but being kept holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth."

"Some fasting has been miraculous. Moses, when fasting, conversed with God, and received the Law. Elijah, when fasting, was thought worthy of divine visions, and was taken up like Christ, who ascended into heaven. Daniel, when fasting, although a young man, was entrusted with the mystery; he alone understood the secret things of the king, and was thought worthy of divine visions. Let no man fall into unbelief because the length of the fast of these men was prolonged. Rather let him know that the contemplation of God and the word are sufficient to nourish those who hear, and can take the place of all food. The angels are sustained by nothing else than beholding at all times the face of the Father, and of Christ who is in heaven. Thus Moses, as long as he talked with God, fasted bodily, but was nourished by divine words. When he came down from Mt. Sinai, he suffered hunger like other men. For it is not said that he fasted longer than forty days — those in which he was conversing with God. Many of the saints have been thought worthy of similar transcendent nourishment."

"Having our souls nourished with divine food, with the Word, and according to the will of God, and fasting bodily in things external, let us keep this great and saving feast. Even the ignorant Jews received this divine food, through the type, when they ate a lamb at the Passover. Not understanding the type, even to this day they eat the lamb, going astray in that they are without the City and the Truth. As long as Judea and the City existed, there was a type, a lamb, and a shadow, since the Law commanded, 'These things shall not be done in another city; but in the land of Judea, and in no place outside the land of Judea'

(Deuteronomy 12:11-14). The Law commanded them to offer whole burnt offerings and sacrifices at no other altar than that in Jerusalem. On this account, in that city alone was there an altar and temple built, and in no other city were they permitted to perform these rites, even though there were synagogues throughout the world. When that City came to an end, those things that were figurative were also done away with.”

Gregory the Great pointed out<sup>233</sup> that one of the dangers of too much fasting is a lack of humility – like the Pharisee. While those who refuse to fast may imitate the Fall of our first parents, continually seeking food, the overly abstinent may run into impatience and anger. During times of fasting, we discover what our wills really desire. Fasting by itself is not that commendable; it’s the virtues that go with fasting that are important. For example, a good fast is one that gives to the indigent the food that we withhold from ourselves.

“When the flesh is worn more than it needs to be by abstinence, humility may be displayed outwardly; but there may be grievous pride within. Sometimes the mind gets puffed up by the virtue of abstinence; the arrogant Pharisee numbered this among his merits, saying, ‘I fast twice per week’” (Luke 18:12).

“The gluttonous, in giving themselves to the enjoyment of dainties, may pierce themselves through with the sword of lechery. While they serve the belly, they become cruelly bound in the nooses of vice. When the hand is always stretched out for food, we imitate the fall of our first parent. Conversely the abstinent must beware lest their spirit break out into impatience, and the spirit becomes overcome by anger.”

“Sometimes the mind of the abstinent is corrupted, and loses all the good of abstinence in that it fails to guard itself from spiritual vices. ‘In the days of your fasts you find what you desire’ (Isaiah 48:3). And, ‘You fast for quarrels and strife, and strike the lowly with your fists’ (Isaiah 48:4). In vain is the body worn by abstinence, if the mind is dissipated by vice. Those that keep up their abstinence without end, should not suppose this is virtuous before the hidden judge, lest their heart might be lifted up to haughtiness. The Prophet Isaiah said, ‘This is the fast that I have chosen: to share your bread with the hungry, and bring to your house the poor who are cast out’” (Isaiah 48:6-7).

“We should consider how small the virtue of abstinence is accounted, seeing that it is only commended because of other virtues. Joel says, ‘Sanctify a fast’ (Joel 2:15). To sanctify a fast is to show abstinence of the flesh to be worthy of God by other good things being added to it. An abstinence that pleases God occurs when they bestow on the indigent the nourishment, which they withhold from themselves. For we should listen to what the Lord says, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?’ (Zachariah 7:5-6) A man fasts to himself and not to God, if what he withholds from his belly, he doesn’t give to the needy, but keeps to be offered afterwards to his own belly.”

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<sup>233</sup> Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 19.