

HOLINESS

SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

February 14, 2021
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1
Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 (Mark 7:24-30)

Today’s Epistle lesson is not used at all in the Western lectionary for Sundays.

Word Study: Holiness versus Uncleanness

There are a number of different words in the Greek New Testament that speak of holiness and sacred things versus uncleanness, defilement and contamination. Table I lists some definitions of Greek words. There are five root words listed that have different forms (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) and different connotations (the state of, the quality of), etc. To get a practical understanding of these words, let us look at how the root word *hagios* is used in the New Testament.

Table of Contents

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1	1069
Word Study: Holiness versus Uncleanness.....	1069
What is Belial?.....	1071
What Communion Has Light with Darkness?	1073
I Will Dwell in Them!.....	1074
We Are the Temple of God!	1075
Come Out from Among Them!.....	1077
Cleansing Ourselves.....	1080
Perfecting Holiness.....	1087

Hagios is used as the name for the Holy Spirit (*Hagion Pneuma*). The Lord Jesus is referred to using *hagios*: “the holy (*hagion*) thing being born (of Mary) will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Some other uses of *hagios* are as follows:

HOLY THING, PERSON	SOME REFERENCES
The Holy Prophets	Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:2
The Holy Apostles	Ephesians 3:5
The Holy Scriptures	Romans 1:2
The Holy Angels	Matthew 25:31, Acts 10:22
Jerusalem (The Holy City)	Matthew 27:53, Revelation 11:2
New Jerusalem (The Holy City)	Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19
Mosaic Law (the Holy Covenant, The Holy Commandment)	Luke 1:72, 2 Peter 2:21, Romans 7:12

TABLE I
Greek Words Describing Holiness & Defilement

GREEK WORD	DEFINITIONS	REFERENCE # IN STRONG'S DICTIONARY
HAGIOS	the saints or the sacred ones	40
AKATHARTOS	impure in the demonic sense	169
MOLUNA	to make black, to soil	3435

Quite opposed to *Hagios* is the word *Akathartos*. While *Hagios* is used for the Holy Spirit, the most prolific use¹ of *Akathartos* is for “unclean” spirits (*akatharton pneuma*) that Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy and others cast out of people. *Akathartos* is also used together with other words such as adultery, fornication, greediness, lewdness, covetousness, etc. For example:

- “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsia*) lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, etc.” (Galatians 5:19).
- Those alienated from God because of hardness of heart have “given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness (*akatharsias*) in greediness” (Ephesians 4:19).
- “But fornication and all uncleanness (*akatharsia*) or greediness, let it not be named among you” (Ephesians 5:3).
- “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsian*), passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).
- The ungrateful, who professed to be wise and worshipped creation, “God gave them over in the desire of their hearts to uncleanness (*akatharsian*) to dishonor their bodies among them” (Romans 1:24).

Not as commonly used is the word *moluno*, which comes from the Greek word meaning black, and therefore means to blacken or make dirty. It’s only used four times in the New Testament; once² in our Epistle reading (2 Corinthians 7:1).

What is Belial?

The Epistle reading starts off with a series of contrasts:

righteousness	lawlessness
light	darkness
Christ	Belial
believers	unbelievers
temple of God	idols

What is Belial? Belial here is a word borrowed from Hebrew meaning worthless. It is used a number of times in the Old Testament as “son of Belial” or “man of Belial” usually translated

¹ Matthew 10:1, 12:43; Mark 1:23-27; 3:11, 30; 5:2-13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:33-36; Luke 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16, 8:7; Revelation 16:13, 18:2.

² The other three uses are 1 Corinthians 8:7, Revelation 3:4, 14:4.

“worthless one” or “worthless man”. But it goes deeper than just worthlessness. Solomon referred to a man of Belial (Proverbs 6:12) as one who devised evil continually, and spoke of seven abominations that the Lord hates that were characteristic of the men of Belial. (Proverbs 6:16-19):

- Haughty eyes
- A lying tongue
- Hands that shed innocent blood
- A heart that devises wicked plans
- Feet that run to evil
- A false witness who utters lies
- One who spreads strife among brothers

These characteristics go deeper than just worthlessness; they’re of demonic origin and imply *akathartos*. David stated that the only way to deal with men of Belial was with iron and the shaft of a spear (2 Samuel 23:6-7), probably because they can’t be trusted to do anything right. What agreement can Christ possibly have with Belial?

Ignatius of Antioch referred³ to the audacity of Satan as Belial, in that he has no sense of shame and he perfectly fits what David and Solomon called the men of Belial.

“If, therefore, you are trodden down under the feet of the Lord, how do you tempt Him that cannot be tempted, forgetting that precept of the lawgiver, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God?’ (Deuteronomy 6:16). You even dare, most accursed one, to appropriate the works of God to yourself, and to declare that the dominion over these was delivered to you (Luke 4:6). Do you set forth your own fall as an example to the Lord, and promise to give Him what is really His own, if He would fall down and worship you (Matthew 4:9). How do you not shudder, O spirit more wicked through your malevolence than all other wicked spirits, to utter such words against the Lord! Through your appetite you were overcome, and through your vainglory you were brought to dishonor; through avarice and ambition you now draw others to ungodliness. O Belial, dragon, apostate, crooked serpent, rebel against God, outcast from Christ, alien from the Holy Spirit, exile from the ranks of the angels, reviler of the laws of God, enemy of all that is lawful. You rose up against the first formed of men (Adam), and drove them from obedience to the commandment of God, those who had in no respect injured you. You raised up the murderous Cain against Abel; you took arms against Job; do you now say to the Lord, ‘If You will fall down and worship me?’ O, what audacity! O, what madness! O runaway slave, who always needs whipping; do you rebel against the good Lord?”

John Chrysostom stated⁴ that by using such contrasting terminology, Paul was not flattering the Corinthians, but was pointing out the dark side of some in their midst. This is serious enough that it can never be forgiven, and the Corinthians really need to address it.

“Paul did not say, ‘those who are of the light, and those who are of the darkness; but he uses opposites themselves which cannot admit of their opposites,

³ Ignatius of Antioch, Spurious Epistle to the Philippians, 11.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, v. 14.

‘light and darkness.’ He didn’t say ‘those who are of Christ, with those who are of the devil’; but, what was far wider apart, Christ and Belial, so calling that apostate one, in the Hebrew tongue. Paul is not simply censuring vice and praising virtue; he mentions persons without particularizing.”

“Now what he says is this. Your King has nothing in common with him, ‘for what concord has Christ with Belial?’ Nor have the things anything in common, ‘for what communion has light with darkness?’ Therefore, neither should we. First, he mentions their king and then themselves; by this separating them most effectively. Then having said, ‘a temple of God with idols’, and having declared, ‘For you are a temple of the living God’, Paul is not flattering them. Having said ‘I will dwell in them’, as in temples, ‘and walk in them’, signifies the more abundant attachment of God to them.”

“Do you bear God within you and yet run to them (lawlessness, darkness, Belial, etc.)? God, who has nothing in common with them? And in what way can this deserve forgiveness? Bear in mind Who walks and Who dwells in you”

Continuing with the Old Testament Temple analogy, Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11 which contains mixed images from the restored Old Testament Kingdom and the future coming of the Kingdom of God in glory. Referring to the contrasts (Christ - Belial), Paul used the words of Isaiah to encourage the Corinthians to “come out from among them and be separate. Do not touch anything unclean (*akathartos, i.e., demonic*) and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Paul is not re-imposing the Mosaic Law rituals regarding washings; he is warning against something sinister involved with being unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14). Paul follows with a loose paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7:14 which speaks of the close relationship between King David and the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:18).

What Communion Has Light with Darkness?

Paul stated, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

The renowned monk Antony loathed⁵ the heretic Arians and drove them away from the cave where he lived. When the Arians lied and said that Antony’s opinions were the same as theirs, he traveled to Alexandria and denounced them. He warned all the brethren to have no fellowship with the most impious Arians, since there is no communion between light and darkness.

“Antony was altogether wonderful in faith, for he never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning. He had no friendly dealings with the Manichaeans or any other heretics; or, if he had, only as far as advice that they should change to piety. He thought and asserted that intercourse with these was harmful and destructive to the soul. In the same manner, he loathed the heresy of the Arians, and exhorted all neither to approach them nor to bold their erroneous belief. Once when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned their impiety, he

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, Life of St. Antony, 68-69.

drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.”

“Once also the Arians lied and said that Antony’s opinions were the same as theirs; he was displeased and angry with them. Being summoned by the bishops and all the brethren, he descended from the mountain, entered Alexandria, and denounced the Arians, saying that their heresy was the last of all and a forerunner of Antichrist. He taught the people that the Son of God was not a created being, neither had He come into being from non-existence, but that He was the Eternal Word and Wisdom of the Essence of the Father. Therefore, it was impious to say, ‘there was a time when He was not’, for the Word was always co-existent with the Father. Therefore, have no fellowship with the most impious Arians. There is no communion between light and darkness. For you are good Christians, but they, when they say that the Son of the Father, the Word of God, is a created being, differ in no way from the heathen, since they worship that which is created, rather than God the creator. But believe that the Creation itself is angry with them because they number the Creator, the Lord of all, by whom all things came into being, with those things which were originated.”

I Will Dwell in Them!

Paul said, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Paul makes these contrasts to say that we are the temple of the Living God. He then quotes from Ezekiel 37:26-27, which in turn refers to the restored Kingdom of God that lasts forever. “I will dwell in them” as one dwells in a Temple.

John Cassian documented⁶ the Desert Fathers’ analogies of the conquest of Canaan as applied to our lives for cleansing. This “conquest” is applied to our hearts to drive out all the evil passions that live there, since there is no fellowship of light with darkness.

“We are asked for our good to take possession of the ‘countries’ of those most wicked nations; this may be understood in this way. Each fault has its own special corner in the heart, which it claims for itself in the recesses of the soul, and drives out Israel, which can be seen as the contemplation of holy and heavenly things, and never ceases to oppose them. For virtues cannot possibly live side by side with faults. ‘For what participation has righteousness with unrighteousness? Or what communion has light with darkness?’ (2 Corinthians 6:14). But as soon as these faults have been overcome by the people of Israel, i.e., by those virtues which war against them, then at once the place in our heart which the spirit of concupiscence and fornication had occupied, will be filled by chastity. That which wrath had held, will be claimed by patience. That which had been occupied by a sorrow that works death, will be taken by a godly sorrow and one full of joy. That which had been wasted by listlessness and laziness, will at once be tilled by courage. That which pride had trodden down will be ennobled by humility. When

⁶ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Serapion, I, v, 23.

each of these faults has been expelled, their places (that is the tendency towards them) will be filled by the opposite virtues which are aptly termed the children of Israel, that is, of the soul that sees God. When these have expelled all passions from the heart we may believe that they have recovered their own possessions rather than have invaded those of others.”

John Cassian further showed⁷ that an unclean soul cannot receive or give spiritual things, since they do not proceed from the treasure of a good conscience. No one pours rich ointment or fine honey into a dirty vessel; the ointment or honey gets contaminated by the dirty vessel quicker than the vessel receives any sweetness from the content. This is because there is no communion of light with darkness.

“It is impossible for a novice either to understand or to teach spiritual knowledge. If one is incapable of receiving it how can he be fit to pass it on to another? If he has had the audacity to teach anything on these matters, most certainly his words will be idle and useless and only reach the ears of his hearers, without being able to touch their hearts. They will be uttered in sheer idleness and unfruitful vanity, for they do not proceed from the treasure of a good conscience, but from the empty impertinence of boastfulness. It is impossible for an impure soul (however earnestly it may devote itself to reading) to obtain spiritual knowledge. No one pours any rich ointment or fine honey or any precious liquid into a dirty and stinking vessel. For a jar that has once been filled with foul odors spoils the sweetest myrrh more readily than it receives any sweetness or grace from it, for what is pure is corrupted much more quickly than the corruptness is purified. The vessel of our bosom unless it has first been purified from all the foul stains of sin will not be worthy to receive that blessed ointment spoken by David. ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments’ (Psalm 133:1-2). Nor will it keep undefiled that spiritual knowledge and the words of Scripture which are ‘sweeter than honey and the honeycomb’ (Psalm 19:9-10). ‘For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?’” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

We Are the Temple of God!

Gregory of Nyssa pointed out⁸ that we are a Temple of God with our body and soul. This ceases at our death when the soul is separated from the body. At the Resurrection, when our soul and body reunite, we will again be a Temple of God.

“Jesus said, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’ (John 2:19). Just as we, through soul and body, become a temple of Him Who said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’ (2 Corinthians 6:16), even so the Lord terms their combination a ‘temple’, of which the ‘destruction’ signifies the dissolution of the soul from the body. If the heretics allege the passage in the Gospel, ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among

⁷ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 14.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 13.

us' (John 1:14), in order to make out that the flesh was taken into the Godhead without the soul, on the ground that the soul is not expressly mentioned along with the flesh, let them learn that it is customary for Holy Scripture to imply the whole by the part. For He that said, 'O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come' (Psalm 65:2), does not mean that the flesh will be presented before the Judge apart from the souls. When we read in sacred History that Jacob went down into Egypt with seventy⁹ souls (Deuteronomy 10:22), we understand the flesh also to be intended together with the souls. So, then, the Word, when He became flesh, took with the flesh the whole of human nature. Hence it was possible that hunger and thirst, fear and dread, desire and sleep, tears and trouble of spirit, and all such things, were in Him. For the Godhead, in its proper nature, admits no such affections, nor is the flesh by itself involved in them, if the soul is not affected coordinately with the body."

Ambrose of Milan stated¹⁰ that creatures don't have temples; only God has that. We are the Temple of God, not many Temples, but one Temple. We are not just the residence of the Holy Spirit, but also of the Father and the Son. He does not dwell in us as a priest or minister, but as God.

"You have read that the Holy Spirit has a temple. 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?' (1 Corinthians 3:16). Now God has a temple; a creature has no true temple. But the Spirit, Who dwells in us, has a temple. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

"But He does not dwell in the temple as a priest, nor as a minister, but as God, since the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people' (Leviticus 26:12). David says: 'The Lord is in His holy temple' (Psalm 11:4). Therefore, the Spirit dwells in His holy temple, as the Father dwells and as the Son dwells. He says: 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:23).

"But the Father abides in us through the Spirit, Whom He has given us. How, then, can different natures abide together? Certainly, it is impossible. But the Spirit abides with the Father and the Son. Paul joined the Communion of the Holy Spirit with the grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God, saying: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all'" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

"We observe, then, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit abide in one through the oneness of the same nature. Therefore, He Who dwells in the temple has divine power, for as of the Father and of the Son, so are we also the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not many temples, but one temple, for it is the temple of one Power."

⁹ In Acts 7:14, the Archdeacon Stephen said it was 75 souls. There may have been some servants included in the 75. Most translations refer to this as 70 "persons", taking liberty with the text that says 70 souls. See also Genesis 46:27.

¹⁰ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, III, xii, 90-93.

Cyril of Jerusalem encouraged¹¹ everyone not to be ignorant of the glory of chastity. Because the Lord dwells in us, the crown of chastity is angelic and its excellence is above man. Since our bodies will shine as the sun, let us not defile it with momentary pleasure.

“Let us all by God’s grace run the race of chastity, ‘Praise the Lord from the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children’ (Psalm 148:12); not going after wantonness, but praising the name of Christ. Let us not be ignorant of the glory of chastity; for its crown is angelic, and its excellence above man. Let us be circumspect of our bodies which are to shine as the sun; let us not for short pleasure defile so great, so noble a body. Short and momentary is the sin, but the shame for many years and forever. Angels walking upon earth are they who practice chastity; the Virgins have their portion with Mary the Virgin. Let all vain ornament be banished, and every hurtful glance, and all wanton gait, and every flowing robe, and perfume enticing to pleasure. But in all for perfume let there be the prayer of sweet odor, and the practice of good works, and the sanctification of our bodies. That the Virgin-born Lord may say even of us, both men who live in chastity and women who wear the crown, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Come Out from Among Them!

Paul said, “As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’. Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate’, says the Lord. ‘Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you’” (2 Corinthians 6:16-17).

John Chrysostom elaborated¹² on why we need to avoid evil men. It’s like having a limb that has gangrene; the whole body may die if the limb is not amputated. Evil men can subvert a good man quicker than bubonic plague can affect a town. Even if we are not injured by evil men, we still won’t escape, since people judge us by the company we keep. If people who don’t know us see us keeping company with evil men, they may be offended and keep company with evil men themselves and lose their salvation as a result. We will have to answer for this at Judgment Day.

“These things I say, that we may shun wicked men, and follow the good. If we amputate a limb when it is rotten and incurable, fearing lest the rest of the body should catch the same disease, how much more must we do this in the case of those who consent with us for evil? If we can set them right without receiving injury ourselves, we ought to use every means to do so; but if they remain incorrigible and may injure us, it is necessary to cut them off and cast them away. Doing so, they will often be gainers rather than losers. Paul exhorted, ‘Those who are outside God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves the evil person’ (1 Corinthians 5:13); and, ‘You are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you’ (1 Corinthians 5:2). A dreadful thing, dreadful indeed, is the society of wicked men. The pestilence seizes and the itch infects those that come in contact with those under the disease, not nearly as quickly as does the wickedness of evil men. For ‘Do not be deceived: Evil company

¹¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XII, 34.

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVII, 3.

corrupts good habits' (1 Corinthians 15:33). And Isaiah said, 'Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean *thing*; go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord' (Isaiah 52:11). Let no one then have a wicked man for his friend. When we have bad sons, we publicly disclaim them; much more ought we to fly from our companions and acquaintances when they are wicked. Even if we receive no injury from them, we shall not be able to escape ill report, for strangers search not into our lives, but judge us from our companions. This advice I address to young men and maidens. 'Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men' (Romans 12:17). Let us then use every means that our neighbor be not offended. For a life, though it be very upright, if it offends others has lost everything. But how is it possible for the life that is upright to offend? When the society of those that are not upright invests it with an evil reputation! When, trusting in ourselves, we consort with bad men, even though we are not harmed, we offend others. These things I say to men, women and maidens, leaving it to their conscience to see exactly how many evils are produced from this source. Neither I, nor any of the more perfect, may suspect anything evil. But the simpler brother may be harmed by occasion of your perfection; and you ought to be careful also for his infirmity. Even if he receives no injury, yet the Greek is harmed. Now Paul asks us to 'Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God'" (1 Corinthians 10:32).

Tertullian pointed out¹³ how the Apostles came out from the midst of the synagogue and its uncleanness. This was predicted in the Psalms and was fulfilled by the early Church, where the uncleanness of the synagogue stemmed from its rejection of Christ and its plotting against Him.

"You have the work of the apostles also predicted, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings the gospel of peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*, Who proclaims salvation' (Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15), not of war nor evil tidings. In response to which is the psalm, 'Their voice is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world' (Psalm 19:5 LXX). These are the words of those who carry round about the Law that proceeded from Sion and the Lord's Word from Jerusalem, in order that that might come to pass which was written: 'They who were far from my righteousness, have come near to my righteousness and truth' (Isaiah 46:12-13). When the apostles girded their loins for this business, they renounced the elders, rulers and priests of the Jews. This was above all things that they might preach the very selfsame God, whose scripture they were with all their might fulfilling! 'Depart! Depart! Go out from there; touch no unclean *thing*', that is blasphemy against Christ. 'Go out from the midst of her', even of the synagogue. 'Separate yourselves, you that bear the vessels of the Lord' (Isaiah 52:11). For already had the Lord, according to the preceding words (of the prophet), revealed His Holy One with His arm, that is to say, Christ by His mighty power, in the eyes of the nations, so that all the universe and the utmost parts of the earth have seen the salvation, which was from God. By thus departing from Judaism, when they exchanged the obligations and burdens of the law for the liberty of the gospel, they were fulfilling the psalm. 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast away their yoke from us' (Psalm 2:3); and this indeed they did. After that 'the

¹³ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 3, 22.

nations raged, and the people plotted vain things' (Acts 4:25); after that 'the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers gathered themselves together against the Lord, and against His Christ' (Psalm 2:2). What did the apostles thereupon suffer? Your answer: Every sort of iniquitous persecution, from men that belonged to that person who was the adversary of Him whom they were preaching."

Athanasius of Alexandria compared¹⁴ the followers of the 4th century heretic Arius with the 1st century heretics Philetus and Hymenaeus. Paul had to deliver Philetus and Hymenaeus over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh in order to teach them not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20). Because all of these are polluted and unclean, they are not able to celebrate the Paschal Feast with the Church.

"We speak of two things: faith and godliness — the hope is the same, everlasting life; for Paul said, 'Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life' (1 Timothy 6:12). And, 'Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come' (1 Timothy 4:7-8). For this cause, the Ario-maniacs¹⁵, who now have gone out from the Church, being opponents of Christ, have dug a pit of unbelief, into which they themselves have been thrust. Since they have advanced in ungodliness, they use 'smooth words and flattering speech to deceive the hearts of the simple' (Romans 16:18). Blaspheming the Son of God, they say that He is a creature, and that He has His being from things which are not. But as then against the adherents of Philetus and Hymenaeus¹⁶, so now the Apostle forewarns all men against ungodliness like theirs, saying, 'The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His"', and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity"' (2 Timothy 2:19). For it is well that a man should depart from wickedness and deeds of iniquity, that he may be able properly to celebrate the feast. For he who is defiled with the pollutions of the wicked is not able to sacrifice the Passover to the Lord our God. Hence, the people who were then in Egypt said, 'We cannot 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). So that being set free from wickedness, and having carefully put away from them all strange notions, 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, and I will receive you' (2 Corinthians 6:17). For a man will not otherwise depart from sin, and lay hold on virtuous deeds than by meditation on his acts. When he has been practiced by exercise in godliness, he will lay hold on the confession of faith. 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" (2 Timothy 4:8).

¹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, XI, 10.

¹⁵ This is the term that Athanasius used for the Arians to indicate that he thinks that their logic is crazy.

¹⁶ Philetus and Hymenaeus were at one-time apostles and companions of the Apostle Paul; however, they apostatized to follow the arch heretic Simon Magus. See 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18. For further details, see Mark Kern, *Simon Magus Heresiarch*, St Athanasius Press, 2004, pp. 58-59.

John Cassian encouraged the people of Constantinople to separate themselves from the arch heretic Nestorius¹⁷, who had just been deposed as Patriarch of Constantinople. Cassian warned the people to come out from the midst of the Nestorians and don't touch the unclean things that he is saying. Instead Cassian encouraged the people to listen to the teachings of the patriarchs prior to Nestorius.

“As Paul says, when the smaller part of the body is grieved, the greater part grieves and sympathizes with it (1 Corinthians 12:26), how much more should the smaller part sympathize when the greater part is grieved? It is indeed utterly inhuman for the smaller parts not to feel the sufferings of the greater in one and the same body, if the greater feel those of the smaller. Therefore, I pray and beseech you, you who live within the circuit of Constantinople, and who are my fellow-citizens through the love of my country, and my brothers through the unity of the faith. Separate yourselves from that ravening wolf ‘who eats up my people *as* they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord’ (Psalm 14:4). ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle’ (Colossians 2:21) anything of his, for all those things lead to death. ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean’ (2 Corinthians 6:17). Remember your ancient teachers, and your priests; Gregory¹⁸ whose fame was spread through the world, Nectarius¹⁹ renowned for holiness, John²⁰ a marvel of faith and purity. John, I say; like John the Evangelist who was indeed a disciple of Jesus and an Apostle; and reclined on the breast and heart of the Lord. Remember him. Follow him. Think of his purity, his faith, his doctrine, and holiness. Remember him always as your teacher and nurse, in whose bosom and embraces you grew up. He was the teacher in common both of you and of me, whose disciples and pupils we are. Read his writings. Hold fast his instruction. Embrace his faith and merits. For though to attain this is a hard and magnificent thing: yet even to follow is beautiful and sublime. For in the highest matters, not merely the attainment, but even the attempt to copy is worthy of praise.”

Cleansing Ourselves

Paul said, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

What does being “clean” mean? It has nothing to do with dirt on the flesh; instead it is a spiritual dimension regarding how one relates to God. This can be illustrated by the definition of clean versus unclean animals that are capable of being offered as a sacrifice under the Old

¹⁷ Nestorius taught that Jesus was two persons, one divine, one human. His heresy was debunked at the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 AD and again at the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 AD.

¹⁸ That is, Gregory the Theologian, who was Patriarch of Constantinople up to 381 AD.

¹⁹ That is Nectarius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 381 to 397 AD.

²⁰ That is, John Chrysostom, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 398 to 404 AD, and who was exiled by the empress Eudoxia, causing Chrysostom's death en route. Chrysostom angered Eudoxia by his criticism of her morals, and stating that Eudoxia, like Herodias (Matthew 14:1-11), was asking for the head of John (himself) on a platter.

Covenant. As Christians, we are all sacrifices, as Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1).

Clement of Alexandria pointed out²¹ the meaning of clean versus unclean animals, and who these animals refer to. Clean animals part the hoof and ruminate; these are those who study the oracles of God and ruminate on them in the soul’s receptacle for instructions. Those that ruminate but don’t part the hoof are the Jews, who have the oracles of God, but don’t have the twofold support of faith and are apt to slip. Those that part the hoof but don’t ruminate are the heretics who go by the Name of the Father and the Son, but are incapable of grinding down the clear declaration of the oracles.

“We can contemplate the Church from the law of sacrifices respecting clean and unclean animals. In this way the common Jews and the heretics are distinguished mystically from the divine Church. For such of the sacrifices as part the hoof, and ruminate, the Scripture represents as clean and acceptable to God (Leviticus 11); since the just obtain access to the Father and to the Son by faith. For this is the stability of those who part the hoof, those who study the oracles of God night and day, and ruminate them in the soul’s receptacle for instructions. The Law expresses this under the figure of the rumination of the clean animal. But such as have neither the one nor the other of those qualities it separates as unclean.”

“Those that ruminate, but do not part the hoof, indicate the majority of the Jews, who have indeed the oracles of God, but have not faith, and the step which, resting on the truth, conveys to the Father by the Son. This kind of cattle are apt to slip, not having a division in the foot, and not resting on the twofold support of faith. For ‘no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him’ (Luke 10:22). Those also are likewise unclean that part the hoof, but do not ruminate²². This refers to the heretics, who indeed go upon the name of the Father and the Son, but are incapable of grinding down the clear declaration of the oracles. And besides, they perform the works of righteousness coarsely and not with precision, if they perform them at all. To such the Lord says, ‘Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?’ (Luke 6:46). Those that neither part the hoof nor chew the cud are entirely unclean.”

John Cassian wrote²³ that pride is connected to uncleanness. When people get puffed up, they are given over to confusion and delusion that they might see their impure desires and their uncleanness. People usually don’t see this coming.

“He who is puffed up with pride, and has permitted himself to be worshipped as God, is ‘given over to vile passions and a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting’ (Romans 1:26-28). Because, ‘everyone that is proud in heart is unclean before God’ (Proverbs 16:5 LXX). He who is puffed up with swelling pride of heart is given over to most shameful confusion to be deluded by it, that when thus humbled he may know that he is unclean through impurity of the

²¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VII, 18.

²² Such as the swine, which parts the hoof, but doesn’t ruminate.

²³ John Cassian, *Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia*, XII, 21-22.

flesh and knowledge of impure desires. This was a thing which he had refused to recognize in the pride of his heart. The shameful infection of the flesh may disclose the hidden impurity of the heart, which he contracted through the sin of pride, and that through the patent pollution of his body he may be proved to be impure. He did not formerly see that he had become unclean through the pride of his spirit.”

“This clearly shows that every soul of which the swellings of pride have taken possession, is given over to spiritual wickedness. It is entangled in the lusts of the flesh, that the soul being at last humbled by earthly faults, and carnally polluted, may recognize its uncleanness. While it stood erect in the coldness of its heart, it could not understand that through pride of heart it was rendered unclean in the sight of God. By this means, being humbled, a man may get rid of his former coldness. Being cast down and confused with the shame of his fleshly lusts, he may from then on hasten more eagerly towards fervor and warmth of spirit.”

John Cassian recorded²⁴ the words of Abbot Theonas of the Desert Fathers saying that all the saints realized that they and the people around them were unclean. But they trusted in the grace and mercy of the Lord. They look for full justification, but they do not hope that they can achieve this by their own human frailty.

“With daily sighs all the saints grieve over this weakness of their nature and while they search into their shifting thoughts and the secrets and inmost recesses of their conscience, cry out: ‘Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous’ (Psalm 143:2). And this: ‘Who can say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”’ (Proverbs 20:9); and again: ‘There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin’ (Ecclesiastes 7:20). So, they have recognized that man’s righteousness is weak and imperfect and always needs God’s mercy. Consider Isaiah, whose iniquities and sins God purged away with the live coal of His word sent from the altar, after that marvelous vision of God, after his view of the Seraphim on high and the revelation of heavenly mysteries. ‘Woe is me, for I am pricked to the heart; for being a man, and having unclean lips, I dwell in the midst of a people having unclean lips’ (Isaiah 6:5 LXX). I fancy that perhaps even then he would not have felt the uncleanness of his lips, unless it had been given him to recognize the true and complete purity of perfection by the vision of God. At the sight of God, 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. But even when in his prayer he confesses the uncleanness of all sinners, he embraces in his general supplication not only the mass of the wicked but also of the good, saying: ‘Behold You were angry and we have sinned; therefore, we have erred, and we are all become as unclean, and all our righteousness as a filthy rag’ (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. 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 rags²⁵”.

²⁴ John Cassian, Third Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxiii, 17.

²⁵ Literally: as menstrual cloths.

“Though he says here that the saints have sinned, and have not only sinned but also have always remained in their sins, he does not altogether despair of salvation, but adds: ‘You are indeed angry, for we have sinned. In these ways we continue; and we need to be saved’ (Isaiah 64:5). I will compare that to Paul: ‘O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!’” (Romans 7:24)

“You see then how all the saints with truth confess not so much in the person of the people as in their own that they are sinners, and yet by no means despair of their salvation. They look for full justification, which they do not hope that they can obtain by virtue of the state of human frailty, but from the grace and mercy of the Lord.”

To fight the spiritual warfare, Paul concludes “let us cleanse (*katharia*, the opposite of *akathartos*) ourselves from all filthiness (*moluno* or blackening, staining) of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (*hagiosune* as in the saints) in the fear of God” (7:1). Chrysostom pointed out that Paul did not say to avoid intermixing with unbelievers, but to avoid being yoked with them.

Another example of cleansing of heart and soul in order to appear before God is the example of Israel at Mt. Sinai. To prepare to hear the words of the Law spoken by a Holy God, the people needed to prepare to become a kingdom of priests by:

- Washing their clothes
- Fasting from sex
- Consecration by Moses

Anyone, man or beast, that touched the holy mountain that the Lord God came down on was to be put to death (Exodus 19:10-15).

“Cleansing” is amplified by the Apostle John (1 John 2:4-6, 3:1-3): “He who says he abides in Him ought to walk as He walked” (1 John 2:6). This world does not know us because it didn’t know Him (1 John 3:1, John 1:10). That’s why we separate ourselves. The world won’t have anything to do with us; we’ll just get blackened or dirtied by the world.

While we are in the world, we, like Christ and the Holy Spirit, are not of the world. We are made holy or sanctified (Greek: *hagiazō*) by the Word, which is Truth (John 17:14-19). By contrast, what the world offers is lawlessness, darkness, worthlessness, and delusion. As Ezekiel put it: “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:24-25). The whole point of the Mosaic Law’s focus on clean vs. unclean was not to exclude Gentiles but to focus on holiness and avoid the filthiness of demons and idols. Seen in this light, the Mosaic Law really makes sense.

John Chrysostom compared²⁶ physical warfare in his day to the invisible warfare that the demons wage against us. Physical warfare is like child’s play in comparison. When a soul gets wounded by the demons, it is then tormented and gnawed on, since the demons have an implacable hatred against the human race. Savage beasts are meek and quiet compared to the activity of the

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood, VI, 13.

demons in their warfare against us. To survive this invisible warfare, we need protection by the providential care of God.

“We are shut up in this body, as in some prison house, and are unable to see anything of the invisible world. If we could, we would see a far greater and more formidable conflict than any visible battle we could ever behold: the devil’s most gloomy battle array, and his frantic onset. There is no brass or iron there. No horses, chariots or wheels, no fire and arrows. These are visible things. But there are other much more fearful engines than these used in war. In fighting against these enemies, one does not need breastplate, shield, sword and spear; yet just the sight of this accursed array is enough to paralyze the soul, unless it happens to be very noble. We need a high degree of protection of our own courage from the providential care of God. If it were possible to see clearly and fearlessly with the naked eye the whole of his battle array, and his warfare against us, you would see no torrents of blood, no dead bodies, but so many fallen souls. There would be such disastrous wounds that the whole of physical warfare, you would think to be mere child’s sport and pastime rather than war. So many are smitten every day in the invisible warfare; the wounds in the two cases do not bring about the same death, but as great as is the difference between the soul from the body, so great is the difference between that death and this. For when the soul receives a wound, and falls, it does not lie as a lifeless body, but it is then tormented, being gnawed by an evil conscience. After its removal from this life, at the time of judgment, it is delivered over to eternal punishment; and if anyone is without grief with regard to the wounds given by the devil, his danger becomes greater because of his insensitivity. Whoever is not pained by the first wound, will readily receive a second, and after that a third. The unclean spirit will not cease assaulting to the last breath, whenever he finds a soul indifferent to his first wounds. If you inquire into the method of attack, you would find this much more severe and varied. For no one ever knew so many forms of craft and deceit as that unclean spirit. By this, he has acquired the greater part of his power, nor can anyone have so implacable a hatred against his worst enemies as the evil one has against the human race. If anyone asks about the vehemence with which he fights, here again it would be ludicrous to bring men into comparison with him. If anyone chooses out the fiercest and most savage of beasts, and is minded to compare their fury against his, he will find that savage beasts were meek and quiet in comparison. Such rage does he breathe forth when he attacks our souls. The period of visible warfare is brief, and there are respites; for the approach of the night and the fatigue of slaughter, meal-times also, and many other things, afford a respite to the soldier. He can doff his armor and breathe a little, and refresh himself with food and drink, and in many other ways recover his former strength. But in the case of the evil one it is not possible ever to lay aside one’s armor, it is not possible even to sleep, if one would remain always unscathed. For one of two things must happen: either to fall and perish unarmed, or to stand equipped and ever watchful. For he always stands with his own battle array, watching for our indolence, and laboring more zealously for our destruction, than we for our salvation.”

John Cassian quotes²⁷ Abbot Serenus, one of the Desert Fathers, in pointing out how a man becomes unclean from the operations of the demons. The demons can't unite themselves to a man's soul – only God can do that – but they can overpower the weakness of our bodies just like wine or fever can. When a man is overpowered in this way, he may do things that he is not aware of and not remember afterward what happened.

“A spirit can be imperceptibly joined with a spirit, and exercise an unseen power of persuasion toward what is allowed to it. There is between them, just as between men, some sort of similarity and kinship of substance, since the description which is given of the nature of the soul, applies equally well to their substance. But it is impossible for spirits to be implanted in spirits inwardly or united with them in such a way that one can hold the other; for this is the true prerogative of Deity alone, which is the only simple and incorporeal nature.”

“Those possessed by unclean spirits sometimes say and do what they do not want to, and are forced to utter what they don't know; for it is perfectly clear that they are not subject to the entrance of the spirits all in the same way. Some are affected by them in such a way as to have not the slightest conception of what they do and say, while others know and afterwards recollect it. But we must not imagine that this is done by the infusion of the spirit in such a way that it penetrates into the actual substance of the soul and, being as it were united to it and somehow clothed with it, utters words and sayings through the mouth of the sufferer. We ought not to believe that this can possibly be done by them. For we can clearly see that this results from no loss of the soul but from weakness of the body. The unclean spirit can seize on those members in which the vigor of the soul resides, and can lay on them an enormous and intolerable weight to overwhelm it with foulest darkness, and interfere with its intellectual powers. This sometimes happen also from the fault of wine and fever or excessive cold, and other indispositions affecting men from outside the body. It was this which the devil was forbidden to attempt to inflict on the blessed Job, though he had received power over his flesh. The Lord commanded him saying: ‘Behold, I give him into your hands: only preserve²⁸ his soul’ (Job 2:6). That is, do not weaken the seat of his soul and make him mad, and overpower the understanding and wisdom of what remains, by smothering the ruling power in his heart with your weight.”

“Even if spirit is mingled with this solid matter, that is, flesh, should we therefore believe that it can be united to the soul, which is in like manner spirit, in such a way as to make it also receptive in the same way of its own nature? This thing is possible to the Trinity alone, which is so capable of pervading every intellectual nature, that it cannot only embrace and surround it but even insert itself into it and, incorporeal though it is, be infused into a body! We maintain that some spiritual natures exist, such as angels, archangels and the other powers, and indeed our own souls; yet we ought certainly not to consider them incorporeal. They have in their own fashion a body in which they exist, though it is much finer than our bodies are, in accordance with Paul's words when he says: ‘*There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of

²⁷ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 10-13.

²⁸ Many English translations say “preserve his life”. But that is the translator taking liberty with the Greek word “*psuche*”, which means breath or soul.

the terrestrial *is* another' (1 Corinthians 15:40). Again: 'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15:44); from which it is clearly gathered that there is nothing incorporeal but God alone. Therefore, it is only by Him that all spiritual and intellectual substances can be pervaded, because He alone is whole and everywhere and in all things, in such a way as to behold and see the thoughts of men and their inner movements and all the recesses of the soul. It was of Him alone that Paul spoke when he said: 'For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account' (Hebrews 4:12-13). And David says: 'Who fashions their hearts one by one' (Psalm 33:15); and again: 'For He knows the secrets of the heart' (Psalm 44:22); and Job too: 'For You alone know the hearts of men'" (2 Chronicles 6:30).

Justin Martyr pointed out²⁹ to Trypho, a Jewish philosopher, that the gifts that used to be present with Israel are now present within the Church, both good as in the prophets, and bad as in false teachers and false prophets. Just like Israel, this meant that the Church was required to cleanse itself in order to maintain these gifts, which meant both warnings to the wicked and living a holy life.

"The prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. You should understand that the gifts formerly among your nation have been transferred to us. Just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with your holy prophets, so there are now many false teachers among us, of whom our Lord forewarned us to beware. In no respect are we deficient, since we know that He foreknew all that would happen to us after His resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven. He said we would be put to death, and hated for His name's sake; and that many false prophets and false Christs would appear in His name, and deceive many: and so, has it come about. Many have taught godless, blasphemous and unholy doctrines, forging them in His name. They are still teaching those things, and these teachings proceed from the unclean spirit of the devil, and were put into their hearts. Therefore, we are most anxious that you be persuaded not to be misled by such persons, since we know that everyone who can speak the truth, and yet speaks it not, shall be judged by God. God testified by Ezekiel, 'I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. When I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die", and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul' (Ezekiel 3:17-19). On this account we are, through fear, very earnest in desiring to speak with men according to the Scriptures, but not from love of money, glory or pleasure. For no man can convict us of any of these vices. No more do we wish to live like the rulers of your people, whom God reproaches when He says, 'Your princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves

²⁹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 82.

bribes, and follows after rewards' (Isaiah 1:23). Now, if you know certain among us to be of this sort, do not for their sakes blaspheme the Scriptures and Christ, and do not strive to give falsified interpretations."

Perfecting Holiness

Paul stated, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Since we are in the world, but not of the world (John 15:19, 17:14; 1 John 4:4-6, 3:1), seeking holiness is a continual process.

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁰ that the Scriptures apply the term "holiness" to both God, the angels and us. However, holiness for us is not the same as the holiness of God or the angels, just as holiness in the Old Testament was not the same as it is with us today. Old Testament holiness meant little more than being free from idolatry; we are called to a higher standard.

"If one considers the character of the holiness, what the first was and what the second, he will find there is a great difference. In the Old Testament, when they did not worship idols, commit fornication or adultery, they were called holy. But we become holy, not by refraining from these vices merely, but by acquiring things greater. This gift we obtain first by means of the coming upon us of the Holy Spirit; and next, by a rule of life far more comprehensive than that of the Jews. To prove that these words are not mere boasting, listen to what He said to them, 'You shall not use divination, nor cause your children to pass through the fire; you shall be blameless before the Lord' (Deuteronomy 18:10-13). So that holiness with them consisted in being free from the customs of idolatry'; but it is not so with us. 'That she may be holy both in body and in spirit' (1 Corinthians 7:34). 'Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14); and, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1). For the word 'holy' does not have the same force to give the same meaning in every case to which it is applied; since God is called 'Holy', though not as we are. What, for instance, does Isaiah say, when he heard that cry raised by the flying Seraphim? 'Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). Though he was holy and clean; but if we are compared with the holiness which is above, we are unclean. Angels are holy; Archangels are holy; the Cherubim and Seraphim themselves are holy. Of this holiness there is a double difference; that is, in relation to us, and to the higher powers."

John Chrysostom stated³¹ that just avoiding unclean things does not make one automatically clean. True holiness is freedom from every kind of sin, including vainglory, and the manner in which holiness is perfected is important. Alms-giving is very helpful in this regard, provided it is not done out of pride.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIV, 2.

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, v. 1.

“Let us neither touch unclean things, for this is cleansing of the flesh; nor things which defile the soul, for this is cleansing of the spirit. Yet Paul is not content with this only, but adds, ‘Perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ (2 Corinthians 7:1). Not to touch the unclean thing does not make one clean, something else is needed besides for us to become holy: earnestness, heedfulness, piety. Paul said it well, ‘In the fear of God’. For it is possible to perfect chasteness, not in the fear of God but for vainglory. Along with this he implies yet another thing, by saying, ‘In the fear of God’; the manner, by which holiness may be perfected. For if lust is an arrogant thing, if you occupy its territory with the fear of God, you have halted its frenzy. Now by holiness here Paul means not chastity alone, but the freedom from every kind of sin, for he is holy that is pure. Now one will become pure, not if he is free from fornication only, but if from covetousness also, and envy, pride and vainglory. This is especially true regarding vainglory, which one needs to avoid in everything. If alms-giving includes vainglory, it will also include display and cruelty. For when you don’t do it out of mercy, but from pride, such a deed is not only not alms but even an insult; for you have put your brother to open shame. Just the giving of money is not almsgiving, but the giving it out of mercy.”

SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

Humility and Persistence

February 14, 2021
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 (Mark 7:24-30)

So how badly do we want to pursue holiness? One theme for today’s Gospel lesson is Desire. How far are we willing to go to pursue the things of God? This Gospel Lesson is commonly used in the West either at about this time of year (leading up to Lent and Easter) or in mid-August for the 15th Sunday after Trinity.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 (Mark 7:24-30) 1089

What is Christ Doing?.....	1089
The Humility of the Canaanite Woman	1091
We Need to Ask if We Want to Receive.....	1091
To Receive Mercy, We Need to be Worthy of It.....	1093
Why Was Jesus Sent Only to Israel?.....	1096

The Gospel lesson begins with Jesus passing through Tyre and Sidon – He had gone there for this purpose -- where a Gentile woman (a Syro-Phoenician woman) started crying out after Him, “Have mercy on me!” She had a daughter who was demon possessed (the daughter had an “unclean”, i.e. *akathartos*, spirit³² according to Mark 7:25) and begged Jesus to help her. Jesus responded with what may seem to us as coldness; the exchange occurred as follows:

SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN	JESUS’ RESPONSE
Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David	No answer
Have mercy on me (shouting)	I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel
Lord help me (bowing down)	It is not proper to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs
Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their master’s table	Great is your faith; be it done for you as you will

What is Christ Doing?

Our inclination is to recoil: What is the Lord doing here? John Chrysostom stated³³ that Jesus did not speak to the woman in insult and He was not trying to get her to grovel. In calling her out, He revealed the treasure laid up in her. Jesus, who knew the woman’s heart, spoke as He did to reveal both the woman’s faith and her humility. Both are precious in the sight of God. Her faith was displayed through her persistence; her humility, through her willingness to ask for mere crumbs.

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“Jesus made her faith clear; and as in the case of the Samaritan woman (John 4:16-26), He showed how not even upon reproof does she desist. He did not want

³² See Mark 7:25, which is a parallel account of the same events.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

that so great virtue in the woman should be hidden. Not in insult then were His words spoken, but in calling her out, and revealing the treasure laid up in her.”

Chrysostom also stated³⁴ that by our own diligence, it is possible (1) that the unworthy can become worthy. (2) That God approves more when called on by ourselves than by others in our behalf. (3) That God often delays the giving, not from the wish that we should be utterly perplexed, or to send us out with empty hands; but in order that he may become the author of greater good things to us.

“The woman of Canaan had come to Christ praying on behalf of a daughter possessed by a demon, and crying out with much earnestness, ‘Have pity on me, Lord; my daughter is badly possessed by a demon’ (Matthew 15:22). This woman was a Gentile, and outside of the Jewish commonwealth. What else was she than a dog, and unworthy of receiving her request? Jesus said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread, and throw it to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). But, all the same, from her diligence, she became worthy. Not only did he admit her into the nobility of children, dog as she was; but also, he sent her off with glowing praise saying, ‘O woman great is your faith; be it done to you as you desire’ (Matthew 15:28). Now when the Christ says, ‘Great³⁵ is your faith’, we don’t need to seek any other demonstration of the greatness of soul which was in the woman. From her diligence the woman, being unworthy, became worthy!”

“We can learn from this also that we accomplish our wish by calling on him by ourselves more than by having others do so for us! She cried out, and the disciples said to Him, ‘Send her away, for she cries after us’ (Matthew 15:23). To the disciples he said, ‘I was not sent, except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’. But when she had come to him by herself and continued crying, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table’ (Matthew 15:27), then he granted the favor, ‘great is your faith; be it done to you as you desire’. When the disciples were entreating him, he repelled; but when she who needed the gift herself cried out, he assented!”

“In the prelude of her request he answered nothing; but when she had come to him three times, then he granted the request. From this we learn that He had delayed the giving, not that He might repel her but that He might display to us the woman’s endurance. If He had delayed in order that he might repel her, He would not have granted it even at the end. Since He was waiting to display to everyone her spiritual wisdom, on this account he was silent. If He had granted her request immediately at the beginning, we would not have known the woman’s virtue. The disciples said, ‘Send her away, for she cries after us’. But the Christ said, ‘You hear a voice, but I see the mind; I know what she is going to say. I choose not to permit the treasure hidden in her mind to escape notice; I am waiting and keeping silence in order that having discovered it, I may lay it down in public, and make it clear to everyone.”

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homily Concerning Lowliness of Mind, 12.

³⁵ There was only one other time when Jesus noted someone with great faith: the Gentile centurion who asked Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant (Matthew 8:5-10).

The Humility of the Canaanite Woman

Chrysostom continued by pointing out³⁶ that Jesus had called the Jews “children”, while the woman referred to them as “masters” (Matthew 15:26-27). In her humility, she agreed with the Lord when He referred to her as “a little dog” (Matthew 15:26), saying “Yes, Lord” (Matthew 15:27).

Comparing her to the Jews, Chrysostom said³⁷, “Hear the proud language of the Jews: ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone’ (John 8:33) and ‘We have one Father - God’ (John 8:41). But not so this woman; rather she calls herself a dog and them masters; so for this she became a child. What then did Christ say? ‘O woman, great is your faith’. With this intent did Christ put her off, for He knew what she would say. For this He (at first) denied the grant, that He might exhibit her high self-command. For if He had not meant to give, neither would He have given afterward”.

Jesus taught persistence in prayer on other occasions also. For example, the Lord gave us the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2-13), then used the illustration of a friend knocking on his neighbor’s door at midnight. The neighbor wouldn’t open the door because of his friend, but he would because of his friend’s persistence. This is also illustrated in the parable of the tenacious widow who persuaded an unrighteous judge to give her justice through her persistence (Luke 18:1-6).

Jesus pointed out other examples of great humility, such as the Centurion with the sick servant. At the request of the Jewish Elders, Jesus began to go to the Centurion’s house, but the Centurion sent word that he was not worthy for Jesus to enter under his roof and requested that Jesus heal from a distance (Luke 7:1-10). The woman with the hemorrhage also had great humility, desiring only to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment (Luke 8:43-48). Similarly, Photini of Samaria (the woman at the well) was not put off even though Jesus rebuked for her adulterous life (John 4:16-26). Not only did she respond by bringing the whole town out to hear Jesus speak, but she became known in the Early Church as “equal to the Apostles” for her evangelism in Carthage and Rome.

We Need to Ask if We Want to Receive

The Syro-Phoenician woman was made stronger by being forced to be persistent. It is similar for us. If we always got everything we wanted right away, we’d never learn to be persistent in our faith. By being persistent and humble in our prayers, our faith will increase also.

John Chrysostom compared³⁸ the persistence used by His own mother to the persistence used by the Canaanite woman. From this we learn that persistence in asking the Lord can be very beneficial.

“Why then after He had said, ‘My hour has not yet come’ (John 2:4), and given her a denial, did He do what His mother desired? He wanted those who opposed Him, and who thought that He was subject to the ‘hour’, to have sufficient

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXII, 2.

proof that He was subject to no hour. Had He been subject to temporal things, how could He, before the proper ‘hour’ was come, have done what He did? He also did it to honor His mother, that He might not seem entirely to contradict and shame her that bore Him in the presence of so many. He also did it that He might not be thought to lack power, for she brought the servants to Him.”

“Similarly, while He said to the Canaanite woman, ‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs” (Matthew 15:26), He still gave the bread, considering her perseverance. In his first reply, He said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15:24); yet even after saying this, He healed the woman’s daughter. From this we learn, that although we may be unworthy, we often by perseverance make ourselves worthy to receive. For this reason, Jesus’ mother stood by, and openly brought the servants to Him, that the request might be made by a greater number; and therefore, she added, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (John 2:5).

Chrysostom also went into detail³⁹ from the Scriptures on why we can always ask of God. If the Syro-Phoenician woman can ask, so can we. As a Gentile, it was not appropriate for her to ask favors of a Jew; but that didn’t stop her. Even if we feel that God is our enemy – for some righteous reason – that shouldn’t stop us either. He looks more at our disposition than at what we deserve.

“God wants us to ask things of Him, and because of this, accounts Himself greatly bound to us. He alone, when the request is made, counts it a favor. If He should see us pressing earnestly in making our request, He grants favors even if He hasn’t received anything in the past from us in the way of prayer. But if we ask sluggishly, He too keeps on making delays; not through unwillingness to give, but because He is pleased to have the request made on Him by us. For this cause, He told us the example of that friend, who came by night, and asked a loaf (Luke 11:5-8); and of the judge that did not fear God, nor regard man (Luke 18:1-8). He didn’t just use similitudes, but signified it also in His very actions, when He dismissed that Syro-Phoenician woman, having filled her with His great gift (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30). Through her He signified, that He gives to them that ask earnestly even the things that don’t pertain to them. ‘It is not good’, said He, ‘to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). He gave all that, because she requested of him earnestly. By the Jews He showed that to those that are careless, He doesn’t give even their own. Accordingly, they received nothing, but lost what was their own. The Jews, because they didn’t ask, didn’t receive even their own; the Canaanite woman, because she assailed Him with earnestness, had power to obtain even what pertained to others, and the dog received what was the children’s. So great a good is earnestness in prayer! Though we are a dog, yet being earnest, we shall be preferred to the child who is negligent. Don’t say, ‘God is my enemy, and He will not listen’. He will immediately answer us, when we continually ask him, if not because we are His friend, yet because of our asking. Neither our enmity, nor the unseasonable time, nor anything else becomes a hindrance. Don’t say, ‘I am unworthy, and do not pray’; for such was the Syro-Phoenician woman too. Don’t say, ‘I have sinned much, and am not able

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXII, 7-8

to entreat Him whom I have angered'; God doesn't look at what we deserve, but at our disposition. If the ruler that did not fear God, nor regard man, was overcome by the widow (Luke 18:1-8), much more will He that is good be won over by continual asking."

"We may not be His friend; we may not be asking as children; we may have devoured our Father's substance, and have been a long time out of sight; we may be without honor, we may approach Him angrily; only be willing to pray and to return. We shall receive everything, and shall quickly extinguish the wrath and the condemnation."

"But some say, 'I do pray, and there is no result'. Do we pray like the Syro-Phoenician woman, the friend that came late at night, the widow that was continually troubling the judge, and the son that consumed his father's goods? If we prayed like these, we would quickly obtain. Though we have been defiant toward Him, yet He is a Father; and though He has been provoked to anger, yet He is He fond of His children. One thing only does He seek, not to take vengeance for our insults, but to see us repenting and asking Him. All we need is a beginning; if we give it a little spark, we kindle a full flame of benefit. He is not bothered because He has been insulted. If we, who are evil, grieve on account of our children when they annoy us; much more does God, who cannot so much as suffer insult. We love by nature; He is kindly affectionate beyond nature. He said, 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely, they may forget, yet I will not forget you'" (Isaiah 49:15).

"Let us therefore draw near to Him and say, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' (Matthew 15:27). Let us draw near 'in season, and out of season'; or rather, one can never draw near out of season, for it is always seasonable to approach God. Since He desires to give, it is always seasonable to ask. Since breathing is always in season, so prayer is always in season. Just as we need this breath, so we also need the help that comes from Him; and if we are willing, we shall easily draw Him to us."

To Receive Mercy, We Need to be Worthy of It

Worthiness to receive the mercy of God implies a coming to the Faith. This is not a cut-and-dried legalistic process, but it depends on a relationship with God. The Canaanite woman came to this relationship, and Jesus cleverly brought out the best in her.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁴⁰ that the Canaanite woman's experience with Jesus was one of coming to the Faith. That is, she was an unbeliever when she came, but she came to Faith as a result of Jesus' rebuttals.

"When Jesus called all men to him, He said, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink'. He spoke of the faith without which a man cannot receive such food; 'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:37-38). To this end He continually nourished His believing disciples with His words, and gave them life by the nearness of His divinity. But to the Canaanite woman, because she was not yet a believer, He didn't

⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, VII, 7.

grant even a reply, although she stood greatly in need of food from Him. He did this not from scorn, far from it; for the Lord loves men and does good to them; and on that account He went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon (where the Canaanite woman lived). He did this because of her unbelief, and because she was of those who didn't have the Word. He did it righteously; for there would have been nothing gained by her offering her supplication before believing, but by her faith she would support her petition. 'He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him'; and that 'without faith it is impossible to please Him' (Hebrews 11:6). That she was before this an unbeliever, one of the profane, He shows, saying, 'It is not good to take the children's bread, and to throw it to the little dogs' (Matthew 15:26). She then, being convinced by the power of the Word, and having changed her ways, also gained faith; for the Lord no longer spoke to her as a dog, but conversed with her as a human being, saying, 'O woman, great is your faith!' (Matthew 15:28) Since she therefore believed, He granted to her the fruit of faith, and said, 'Let it be to you as you desire'. Her daughter was healed from that very hour" (Matthew 15:28).

John Chrysostom noted⁴¹ the distinct advantage of continuous prayer and continuous asking. Many barriers have been overcome with continual prayer, including the Canaanite woman's Gentile background. This applies to all of us, whether we need a little or a lot.

"Prayer is a mighty weapon if it is made with suitable mind. To learn its strength, continual asking has overcome shamelessness, injustice, savage cruelty, and overbearing rashness. Jesus said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said' (Luke 18:6). It has overcome sloth also; what friendship did not accomplish, this continual asking did. 'Although he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend; yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs' (Luke 11:8). Continued diligence made the Canaanite woman worthy when she was unworthy. 'It is not good', Jesus said, 'to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs'. 'Yes! Lord!' She says, 'yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' (Matthew 15:26-27). Let us apply ourselves to Prayer. It is a mighty weapon if it is offered with earnestness, without vainglory, and with a sincere mind. It has turned back wars, it has benefited an entire nation though undeserving. 'I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning', He said, 'and I have come down to deliver them' (Acts 7:34). It is itself a saving medicine, and has power to prevent sins, and to heal misdeeds. In this the desolate widow was diligent, continuing night and day in supplications and prayers (1 Timothy 5:5). If then we pray with humility, smiting our breast as the publican, if we utter what he did, if we say, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner' (Luke 18:13), we shall obtain everything. For though we are not publicans, yet have we other sins as great as his."

"Don't tell me, that you have gone wrong in some small matter. A man is equally called homicidal whether he has killed a child or a man; so also he is called overreaching whether he overreaches in much or in little. Remembering injuries done to us too is no small matter, but is a great sin. It is said, 'the ways of those who remember wrongs lead to death' (Proverbs 12:28 LXX). 'He that is angry with

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVII, 9.

his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment', and he that 'calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell fire' (Matthew 5:22). We sometimes partake of the tremendous mysteries unworthily; we envy, and we revile. Some of us have often been drunk. Each one of these things, by itself, is enough to cast us out of the kingdom, and when they come all together, what comfort shall we have? We need much penitence, beloved, much prayer, much endurance, much perseverance, that we may be enabled to attain the good things which have been promised to us."

Chrysostom also noted⁴² that we may have mercy awaiting us, but we need to "unlock" it by prayer in asking for it, like the Canaanite woman and the servant who owed 10,000 talents.

"If God does anything in mercy, prayer contributes greatly to it. Paul attributed his salvation to His mercies: 'The God of mercies', he says, Himself 'delivered us' (2 Corinthians 1:9-10); but here to the prayers also. On him too that owed the 10,000 talents He had mercy after he fell at His feet (Matthew 18:24-27); 'being moved with compassion, He loosened him'. To the Canaanite woman, it was after that long attendance and appeal of hers, (Matthew 15:22-28) that He finally granted the healing of her daughter, even though of His mercy He healed her. Thus, we learn that even though we are to receive mercy, we must first make ourselves worthy of the mercy; for though there is mercy, yet it seeks out those that are worthy."

Chrysostom further noted⁴³ that by the time that Paul wrote to the Philippians (c. 62 AD), the roles had reversed and the Jews were now the "dogs", while the Gentile Christians were the children of God. "Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers; beware of the ⁴⁴mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit" (Philippians 3:2-3)

"Paul says to the Philippians, 'For me to write the same things to you *are* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe' (Philippians 3:1). 'Beware of the dogs'. But who does Paul style 'dogs'? There were at this place some of those, whom he hints at in all his Epistles, base and contemptible Jews, greedy of vile lucre and fond of power, who, desiring to draw aside many of the faithful, preached both Christianity and Judaism at the same time, corrupting the Gospel. Since they were not easily discernible, therefore he says, 'beware of the dogs'; the Jews are no longer children. At one time the Gentiles were called dogs, but now the Jews are. Why? The Gentiles had been strangers both to God and to Christ; but the Jews have become this now. Paul shows their shamelessness, violence, and their infinite distance from the relationship of children. That the Gentiles were once called 'dogs', hear what the Canaanite woman says, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' (Matthew 15:27). But the Jews do not have even this advantage now; dogs are at the master's table looking for crumbs, the Jews are aliens and separate, where Paul said, 'Beware of the evil workers' (Philippians 3:2).

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, II, 5.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, X, v. 1.

⁴⁴ The Greek word is *katatome*, meaning loosely an incision, which was a pun and a play on words with *peritome*, meaning "circumcision". The Church was now the true *peritome*, while the Jews were something else that dealt just with the flesh, and had no spiritual dimension to it.

They work, he means, but for a bad end; it is a work that is much worse than idleness, plucking up what is laid in goodly order.”

Why Was Jesus Sent Only to Israel?

We might have a problem with Jesus’ statements that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. To us this may seem unfair that He did not come for all mankind at the beginning. We need to see this in the perspective of all that He did in the Old Testament. Israel was supposed to be the Light of the World, a city set on a hill to bring all the Gentiles to knowledge of the Kingdom of God. But they weren’t doing this! Jesus’ mission was as He described to the Chief Priests and elders in the parable of the landowner, who planted a vineyard and leased it to vinedressers. Jesus came as the Son of the Landowner to collect the fruit of the vineyard, but the vinedressers killed Him. The Chief Priests then pronounced their own fate when Jesus asked them what the Landowner would do to them (Matthew 21:33-45). Jesus’ mission was finished with the Crucifixion (John 19:30); after that He sent His disciples to the Gentiles (Matthew 28:19). Jerusalem and everything in it was utterly destroyed by 70 AD.

John Chrysostom put into perspective⁴⁵ how Jesus was waiting until after the Crucifixion before sending His disciples to the Gentiles. He was waiting for the Jews to reject Him finally and completely. He recognized the desire of the Gentiles to approach, but He was holding back.

“Jesus said a number of times, ‘My hour is not yet come’. What did He mean? He had said, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans’ (Matthew 10:5), thus cutting away all excuse of ignorance from the Jews; He had restrained His disciples. When the Jews continued disobedient, and the others desired to come to Him, ‘Now’, He said, ‘it is time to proceed to My Passion, since all things are fulfilled. If we were to continue to wait for those who are disobedient and not admit these Gentiles who desire to come, this would not fit with our tender care’. Since then He was about to allow the disciples to go to the Gentiles after the Crucifixion, and beheld the Gentiles springing on earlier, He said, ‘It is time to proceed to the Cross’. He would not allow them to go sooner, that it might be for a testimony to the Jews. Until the Jews rejected Him by their deeds, until they crucified Him, He wouldn’t say, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19). Instead He said, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles’, and, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15:24), and, ‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). But when they hated Him, and so hated as to kill Him, it was superfluous to persevere while they repulsed Him. They refused Him, saying, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (John 19:15). Finally, He left them, when they had left Him. Therefore, He said, ‘How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!’” (Matthew 23:37)

Chrysostom noted⁴⁶ how truly amazing it was for the Gentiles to come to Christ in massive numbers. Because of what their religious background had been, this was what no one expected.

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVI, 2.

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IX, 1.

“It is a thing indeed worthy of our amazement: the Jews were nurtured in knowledge of the prophetic books, and heard Moses every day telling them concerning the coming of the Christ, and the other prophets afterwards. Moreover, they saw Christ Himself daily working miracles among them, giving up His time to them alone, not allowing His disciples to depart into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into a city of Samaritans, nor doing so Himself. Everywhere He declared that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5). How, I say, while they saw the signs, heard the Prophets, and had Christ Himself continually reminding them, could they make themselves once for all so blind and dull, as by none of these things to be brought to faith in Christ? Those of the Gentiles had enjoyed none of these things; they had never heard the oracles of God, not so much as in a dream. Ever ranging among the fables of madmen (for heathen philosophy is this); having ever in their hands the silliness of their poets; ever nailed to stocks and stones in worshipping idols; they didn’t possess anything good or sound in doctrines or in conversation. Their way of life was more impure and more accursed than their doctrine. When they saw their gods delighting in every kind of wickedness, worshipped by shameful words, and more shameful deeds, they reckoned this festivity and praise; moreover, when their gods were honored by foul murders, and child-slaughters, how should not they emulate these things? Still, fallen as they were as low as the depth of wickedness, all of a sudden, as by the agency of some machine, they have appeared to us shining from on high, and from the summit of heaven”.

Speaking to the Gentiles in Ephesus, Paul stated, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14). Chrysostom noted⁴⁷ that this had been the plan all along; there was no change to the purpose of God. This is all attributed to the foreknowledge of God.

“Note how on all occasions Paul takes pains to point out, that it is not the result of any change of purpose on the part of God, but that these matters had been thus modeled from the very first. We are in no wise inferior to the Jews in this respect; in consequence, Paul does everything with this view. How then is it that Christ Himself said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?’ (Matthew 15:24) And again to his disciples, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans’ (Matthew 10:5). Paul himself says, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46). These expressions are used with this design that no one may suppose that this work came to pass incidentally. ‘According to the purpose’, Paul says, ‘of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will’ (Ephesians 1:11). That is to say, He had no after workings; having modeled all things from the very first, thus he leads forward all things ‘according to the counsel of His will’. So that it was not merely because the Jews did not listen that He called the Gentiles, nor was it of necessity, nor was it on any inducement arising from them.”

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, II, v. 11.

