

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS PAUL'S WORK AMONG THE CHURCHES

February 7, 2021
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30, (Luke 19:11-27)

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

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The Parable of the Talents was spoken twice (at least) by Jesus: once before Palm Sunday (recorded in Luke 19) and once after Palm Sunday on Tuesday of Holy Week. The two accounts were given to different audiences and the account in Luke uses the Hebrew monetary term mina instead of the Hebrew unit talent. In the West the Parable of the Talents is used either for the 28th Sunday after Trinity or for the 3rd Sunday before Lent, both using the text from Matthew. The reading from Luke is not used at all. In the East, the reading from Luke is not used for Sunday but is read for the Friday of the 27th week after Pentecost.

Background

The Parable of the Talents was part of a series of teachings Jesus gave regarding Judgment Day and about what He will do when He returns. In this series, He went into what He would be looking for and what basis He will use for judgment. There are four distinct lessons regarding judgment, of which the Gospel lesson for today is the third.

The servant who was made ruler of his master's household	Matthew 24:45-51, Mark 13:33-37
Parable of the 10 virgins	Matthew 25:1-13
Parable of the talents	Matthew 25:14-30
The Judgment of works	Matthew 25:31-46

The lesson of the first two is watchfulness; the lesson of the last two is judgment based on works. For more details on the Judgment of Works, see the Gospel lesson for Meat Fare Sunday prior to Lent.

The lesson of servant-made-ruler is watchfulness. “Blessed is that servant whom his master, upon his return, will find giving his household food in due season” (Matthew 24:45-46). However, if the servant thinks his master is delayed and beats his fellow servants and parties with the drunkards, his master will return at a time he doesn't expect. His master will be especially harsh with that servant (cut him in half) and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. John Chrysostom wrote¹ that the servant-made-ruler was one who was overcome by the love of carnal pleasure.

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¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 1.

The lesson of the ten virgins is also watchfulness. The imagery is taken from wedding celebrations of First Century Israel. It was customary for the groom and his family and attendants to go to the bride's house for the ceremony. Afterward, the bride and groom would be led in a procession to the groom's house by singers and musicians. Along the way, they would pick up some people like the friends of the bride who didn't go to the ceremony. Arriving at the groom's house, they would begin a weeklong celebration. It was this week-long celebration that was the setting for Jesus' first miracle when the wine ran out (John 2:1-11).

To be included in the wedding feast, one had to be present in the right place at the right time. If the ceremony wasn't perfectly punctual, one may have had to wait a while. For a week-long celebration, there wasn't the hurry we have today where the bride and groom are anxious to leave. Also, it was customary to leave an oil burning lamp lit all night long in one's bed chamber but with the wick turned down to generate a dim light. While the virgins waited, they turned the wicks down. When they heard the procession coming, they all trimmed their lamps up bright. It was then that the five foolish virgins realized they didn't have enough oil to make it to the groom's house -- and had to go buy more. With no oil or coming late, either way they became indistinguishable from party crashers, and were left out.

John Chrysostom stated² that Jesus used the illustration of virgins in the Parable to direct His remarks to those people dedicated to a very noble and worthwhile cause.

“Great things Jesus had spoken of virginity, saying, ‘There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it’ (Matthew 19:12). He knew also that most men would have a great opinion of it. For indeed the work is by nature great. Yet He did not command this, but left it to the choice of His hearers. Wherefore Paul also said, ‘Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 7:25).

However, even if one³ has dedicated his life to a good cause, yet does not show the fruitfulness of good works such as almsgiving and showing mercy, everything is wasted and the Lord says, “I do not know you!” (Matthew 25:12).

“Since the dedication to virginity is great and has great honor with the multitude, one might feel as though he had attained it all and be careless about other things. Therefore, He put forth this Parable to persuade them that virginity, though it should have everything else, if destitute of the good things arising out of almsgiving, is cast out with the harlots. He called the five virgins foolish for undergoing the greater labor and yet betraying all for want of the lesser. By lamps, He means the gift of virginity, the purity of holiness; and by oil, He means humanity, almsgiving, and aid to them that are in need”.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 1.

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

When the five wise virgins said to the five foolish virgins, ‘Go to those that sell, and buy for yourselves’ (Matthew 25:9), Chrysostom interpreted⁴ the ‘sellers’ as the poor.

“Do you see what great profit arises to us from the poor? Should you take them away, you would take away the great hope of our salvation. Wherefore here must we get together the oil, that it may be useful to us there, when the time calls us. Nothing is more defiled than celibacy that doesn’t have mercy”.

The Judgment of Works is the subject of the 2nd Sunday before Lent in the Eastern Church and describes a scene where a person is judged based on how he treated the Lord Himself. Both the righteous and the cursed expressed surprise at having done anything for the Lord Himself. However, the Lord was speaking in mysteries again, and He spoke of His body, the Church, (which included the least of these my brethren) as being synonymous with Himself. (For more on this topic, see the Union with Christ discussion in Ephesians 4:1-16 for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost.)

The Parable of the Talents

The Hebrew word *kikkar* corresponds to the Greek word *talanton* and is transliterated into English from Greek. It was a measure of weight and in its original usage, denoted the maximum weight a man could carry. For example, the golden lamp stand in the tabernacle was made from a talent of gold. The Greek word *talanton* has its root meaning implying a balance (that is used to weigh precious metals) and may have been a more precise measurement. In the 1st Century, the talent represented a weight of about 75 pounds Troy.

The Hebrew word *maneh* corresponds to the Greek word *mina* and is also transliterated from Greek into English. The *mina* represented a weight of 1.25 pounds Troy. In the context of the Gospel lesson where a master gave his slaves 1, 2 or 5 talents or minas, this refers to that weight in silver, the common currency. In terms of buying power, 84 denarii were minted from one pound of silver and one denarius was a day’s wage for a laborer (Matthew 20:1-13). Thus, translating talents to denarii:

one talent = 6,300 denarii
one mina = 105 denarii

The Parables of the Talents and Minas were told just a few days apart and both relate to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 25:1, 14; Luke 19:11). Table I is a side-by-side comparison of the features of the two parables. In Matthew, Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to a man traveling to a far country (Matthew 25:14). In Luke, He likened the Kingdom to a nobleman who went to a far country to receive a kingdom for himself (Luke 19:12). The reason for telling the parable is given in Luke as “because they thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome (6th Century) said⁵ that the man or nobleman traveling to a far country represents our Lord ascending into heaven in the flesh that He assumed at the incarnation.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

⁵ Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

Cyril of Alexandria concurred and stated⁶ that the scope of the Parable covers the whole purpose of the dispensation to man and of the mystery of Christ from the beginning to the end. To illustrate this, Cyril reviewed what the Scriptures had said regarding the beginning of the Parable: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12). “Christ ascended to the Father, and became a man journeying to a far country; for heaven is a different country from earth; and He ascended that He might receive for Himself a Kingdom. When He ascended into heaven, He sat down at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet (Psalm 110:1)”.

However, “His citizens hated Him and sent a delegation after Him saying, ‘We will not have this Man to reign over us’” (Luke 19:14). Cyril mentioned that Christ had reproached the Jewish leaders: “If I had not done among them the works which no one else ever did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father” (John 15:24).

The prophets had continually told the nation of Israel to expect the King: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Behold your King is coming to you! He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). “Behold a King will reign righteously and princes will rule justly” (Isaiah 32:1). “But I have been made King by Him on Zion, His holy mountain, declaring the ordinance of the Lord” (Psalm 2:6,7 LXX).

“But the Jewish leaders rejected their King. Pontus Pilate asked them, ‘Shall I crucify your King? They answered, ‘we have no king but Caesar!’ (John 19:15). Cyril concluded⁷ that they denied the Kingdom of Christ and fell under the domination of Satan, and brought upon themselves the yoke of sin which cannot be thrown off. ‘Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:34-36). Israel in its madness was not open to instruction, and therefore it has continued in slavery”.

The Talents or minas, that the Lord gave to his slaves represents “the Grace that was given to us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7). Paul then quoted Psalm 68:18 regarding this: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). In the Parable of the Minas, all were given the same gift; in the Parable of the Talents, some were given more than others. This denotes that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of deaconates (Greek: *diakonia*), but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:4-5). And yet also, “for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). In the words of Gregory the Great⁸, this should make a man humbler and inspire him to use his gift more diligently in God’s service.

Cyril pointed out⁹ that the nobleman did not give talents (or minas) to those that hated Him, but only to His slaves. “These have been entrusted with these gifts according to the measure of each one’s readiness and disposition. The distribution was made suitably to the measure of each

⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 128, Studion Publishers, 1983, pp. 508-510.

⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 128, Studion Publishers, 1983, pp. 508-510.

⁸ Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 129, Studion Publishers, 1983, pp. 511-513.

one's faculties. 'These are those who eat solid food (not babies who drink only milk) and are mature, those who by reason of practice have their senses exercised to discern good and evil' (Hebrews 5:13, 14). Examples of these are the wise disciples and those who succeeded them, including those who stand at the head of the holy churches who 'shine as lights in the world holding fast the Word of Life' (Philippians 2:15). These do business with their minas (Luke 19:13) and trade with their talents (Matthew 25:16) and seek spiritual increase. 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward (literally household manager) whom his Master will make ruler of over His household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that slave whom his Master will find so doing when He comes; He will make him ruler over all that He has' (Luke 12:42-44). Giving one's fellow servants food is the distribution of the benefits of spiritual instruction and satisfying those who hunger after righteousness".

Gregory went on to suggest¹⁰ that the gift of the five talents represents external (that is, physical or scientific) knowledge or the use of the five senses. These persons, he said, may not understand interior or mystical things, but yet, "by their desire for their heavenly home, teach sound doctrine to all whom they meet, doctrine concerning those exterior matters which they can understand".

The gift of the two talents as suggested by Gregory represents understanding and action. "They understand the subtleties of the interior life and when they teach by their learning and example, they derive as it were a double profit from their trading".

TABLE I
Comparison of Parables of Talents and Minas

	PARABLE OF TALENTS	PARABLE OF MINAS
master called	"Lord"	nobleman
journey	to a far country	to a far country
purpose	-----	to receive a kingdom
distribution of silver	5, 2, 1 talents	1 mina each
earnings	5 yielded 5 more 2 yielded 2 more 1 yielded 0	1st yielded 10 more 2nd yielded 5 more another yielded 0
rewards	5: ruler over much 2: ruler over much 1: cast into outer darkness	1st: authority over 10 cities 2nd: authority over 5 cities another: mina taken away

Of the one talent hidden in the ground, Gregory said¹¹, "To hide one's talent in the earth is to occupy the intelligence God gives us in purely earthly matters, not to seek spiritual profit, never to lift our heart above worldly considerations. For there are some who received the gift of understanding, but who, nevertheless, understand only the flesh. Of these, the Prophet says (Jeremiah 4:22) 'they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge'".

¹⁰ Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

¹¹ Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

As Gregory interpreted¹² the Parable of the Talents, the one given five talents was not necessarily greater in the Kingdom of God than the one given just two. Each was given gifts according to his ability (Matthew 25:15), but Gregory interpreted them as being for different purposes. In the Parable of the Minas, on the other hand, each slave was given an equal amount. Some members of the Body of Christ may seem to us to be greater in the Kingdom of God than others (like an eye may seem more important than an ear in 1 Corinthians 12:14-18); but that is not our call to judge. After all, the Lord has said that the first will be last and the last, first (Matthew 16:28-30). In the Parable of the Minas, the one rewarded the most was the one who earned the most return (Luke 19:16-17). In some cases, it may be that the person who was forgiven much and therefore loved much (Luke 7:40-47) was the more motivated. This was likely the case of the Apostle Paul, who considered himself the least of the Apostles because of his former persecution of the Church (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

A result common to both parables is that the one talent or mina that was taken away from the slave who didn't use it, was given to the one who had the most (Matthew 25:28, Luke 19:24). In both cases, the slave who didn't use his silver was called wicked, and made excuses as to why he did nothing. His master said that at least he could have deposited his money with the bankers; they would have used it and would have given him interest for the use of the money (Matthew 25:27, Luke 19:23). Chrysostom referred¹³ to the depositing money with the bankers to earn interest as speaking out, admonishing and advising within the Church. How many people who don't use their gifts could have their gifts be used in the Church if only they would come and participate? On the other hand, those who use their gifts have more gifts given to them (Matthew 25:29, Luke 19:26).

Chrysostom commented¹⁴, “Let no man say, ‘I have but one talent’, and can do nothing; for you can even by one talent approve yourself. For you are not poorer than that widow (who gave two mites, or 1/64 of a denarius, which was all she had (Luke 21:1-4). You are not more uninstructed than Peter and John, who were both ‘unlearned and ignorant men’ (Acts 4:13). But nevertheless, since they showed forth zeal, and did all things for the common good, they attained to Heaven. For nothing is so pleasing to God as to live for the common advantage.”

Chrysostom also pointed out¹⁵ that the penalty came with heavy accusation: “Cast the unprofitable slave into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). “Do you see how not only the spoiler and the covetous, not only the doer of evil things but also he that refuses to do good things is punished with extreme punishment”.

¹² Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, IX

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

PAUL'S WORK AMONG THE CHURCHES

February 7, 2021
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

In the West, today's Epistle Reading is used either on Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent) or on All Saints Day (i.e. November 1st or the day after All Hallows Eve). In the Orthodox Church, this Reading is also used for the Feast Day of the Martyr Euphemia on September 16th and for the commemoration of the Miracle of the Martyr Euphemia on July 11th.

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Background for the Church in Corinth

Paul founded the Church in Corinth about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Silas was traveling with Paul at the time along with Luke, Timothy and Andronicus, where all but Paul were of the original Seventy. Luke was left behind to oversee the Macedonian Churches (note switch in

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tenses from “we” to “they” and back to “we” in Acts 16:16, 17:1, 20:6). Silas was left behind in Corinth and was later Bishop of Corinth. (Note that we never hear from Silas again traveling with Paul after he arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:5).

Before Paul arrived in Corinth for an extended stay again in late 55 AD, he wrote four letters to Corinth (two of which are lost) and paid the Church one brief visit. For details on this, see the Epistle lesson for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. In the interval from 52 to 55 AD, the Apostles Apollos and Peter visited Corinth. Apollos was one of the original Seventy, but must have been home in Alexandria at the time of Pentecost. He knew only the baptism of John in 53 AD when he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, the overseers Paul left in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), straightened Apollos out and also wrote to the Churches in Achaia (Athens and Corinth) to receive Apollos when he arrived (Acts 18:27). Apollos proceeded to help out by vigorously refuting the Jews publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:28). Paul said that he and Apollos are one, that is, of one mind in the work of establishing the Churches (1 Corinthians 3:8).

The same can be said for the relationship between Paul and Peter. Peter visited Corinth in the early 50’s AD on his way to Rome. He obviously made a big impression in Corinth since there were factions that had developed by 55 AD (1 Corinthians 1:12) centered around Paul, Apollos, Peter and none of the above (i.e. Christ)! On Peter’s way to Corinth, Paul met him in Macedonia and together they ordained four bishops for the following cities:

Olympas	Philippi
Jason	Thessalonica
Silas	Corinth
Herodion	Petras (SW Greece)

Thus we can definitely say that Peter and Paul were one in the work also.

From a detailed study of Paul’s Missionary Journeys, it is apparent that Paul worked with at least 60 of the original members of the Seventy at some point. Many of them like Luke, Timothy, and Titus traveled with him a lot. In addition, Paul had some contact with Peter, John, Andrew, and Philip.

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

The Epistle lesson begins with a quote from Isaiah, where the Father is speaking to the Son, His Servant. The full text is shown below, and the part that Paul quoted is highlighted:

“And now thus says the Lord that formed Me from the womb to be His own servant, to gather Jacob to Him and Israel. I shall be gathered and glorified before the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said to Me, ‘It is a great thing for You to be called My Servant, to establish the tribes of Israel and to recover the dispersion of Israel. Behold I have given You for the covenant of a race, for a light of the Gentiles, that You should be for salvation to the end of the earth’”.

“Thus says the Lord that delivered You, the God of Israel, ‘Sanctify Him that despises His life, Him that is abhorred by the Gentiles that are the servants of

princes: Kings shall behold Him, and princes shall arise and shall worship Him, for the Lord's sake. For the Holy One of Israel is faithful and I have chosen You".

"Thus says the Lord, **'In an acceptable time I have heard You and in a day of salvation I have helped You.** And I have formed You, and given You for a covenant of the Gentiles, to establish the earth and to cause to inherit the desert heritages'" (Isaiah 49:5-8 LXX).

Thus Isaiah stated that God the Father spoke of His Son, His Servant. He says that His Son will be the New Covenant, and will be a light for the Gentiles. He will gather Israel and will be glorified before the Father; princes shall worship Him. The Holy One of Israel was faithful in that He despised His life in going willingly to the Cross.

An Acceptable Time

The term "Acceptable Time" is also called a favorable opportunity, a time of the Gift, a time of grace and a day of salvation. This acceptable time especially applies to the Gentiles, who are given an amazing opportunity to come out of darkness. This acceptable time will not last forever, but comes to a close with the end of the age. Each of have this window for doing something worthwhile; if we pass it up, we may lose this golden opportunity.

The time when the Lord's Servant is a light to the Gentiles is called an acceptable time. It is a time when pardon is available freely and easily. John Chrysostom called¹⁶ it a "favorable opportunity". He calls it a time of the Gift, a time of the Grace,

"When it is appointed not that an account should be required of our sins, nor a penalty exacted. Besides being delivered, we also enjoy ten thousand good things, righteousness, sanctification and all the rest."

Giving an example, he stated: "For in the case of monarchs here below, at the time of their festivals, and when they appear in the dress of Consuls, he who brings a small offering receives large gifts. But on the days in which they sit in judgment, much strictness, much sifting is required. Let us too, therefore, strive for the mastery in the time of this Gift. It is a day of Grace, of Grace divine; where with ease even we shall obtain the crown".

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁷ that the timing of both the Gospel and the Law and the Prophets was perfect for all men, that all might come out of darkness.

"The proclamation of the Gospel came at the proper time, just as at the proper time the Law and the Prophets were given to the Barbarians¹⁸, and Philosophy to the Greeks, to prepare their ears for the Gospel. 'Therefore', says the Lord who delivered Israel, 'in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. I have given you for a Covenant to the nations; that you might establish the earth, and cause to inhabit the desert inheritance; saying to those in bonds, come out; and to those that are in darkness, show yourselves' (Isaiah

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 1.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI, 6.

¹⁸ Many Gentile nations were aware of the Mosaic Law, and some actually incorporated it into their laws and philosophy.

49:8-9 LXX). If the ‘prisoners’ are the Jews, of whom the Lord said, ‘Come out from bonds, you that want’, meaning the voluntary bound, and who have taken on tough burdens by human injunction. It is plain that ‘those in darkness’ are those who have the ruling faculty of the soul buried in idolatry.”

“To those who were righteous according to the Law (i.e. the Jews), faith was lacking. The Lord, in healing them, said, ‘Your faith has made you well’ (Matthew 9:22). But to those that were righteous according to philosophy (i.e. the Gentiles who had a heart for God), not only faith in the Lord, but also the abandonment of idolatry, was necessary. On the revelation of the truth, they also repented of their previous conduct.”

Justin Martyr stated¹⁹ that the New Covenant applied to the illumined Gentiles, who are Christ’s inheritance, where Christ is the Covenant of God. This was the acceptable time and the day of salvation

“If the Law was able to enlighten the nations and those who possess the Law, what need would there be of a New Covenant? But since God announced beforehand that He would send a New Covenant, and an everlasting Law and Commandment, we will not understand this of the old Law and its adherents, but of Christ and His disciples, namely us Gentiles, whom He has illumined. He says, ‘Thus said the Lord, In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You, and I have given You for a Covenant of the people, to establish the earth, and to inherit the desert inheritance.’ (Isaiah 49:8 LXX) What, then, is Christ’s inheritance? Is it not the Gentiles? What is the Covenant of God? Is it not Christ? As He says, ‘You are My Son; this day I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I shall give You the Gentiles for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession’” (Psalm 2:7-8 LXX).

John Chrysostom emphasized²⁰ that the Throne of Grace is still there and we may approach boldly; that is with no evil conscience and no doubt. The Throne of Grace will not remain such forever.

“How is it that we should ‘come boldly to the throne of grace’? (Hebrews 4:16) Now it is a throne of Grace, not a throne of Judgment. Therefore we should approach boldly, ‘that we may obtain mercy’, just as we are seeking. Now is a time of royal generosity.”

“‘We may find grace to help in time of need for help in due season’. He well said, ‘for help in time of need’. If you approach now, he means, you will receive both grace and mercy, for you approach ‘in due season’; but if you approach then, no longer will you receive it. Then the approach is unseasonable, for it is not then ‘a throne of Grace’. Till that time He sits granting pardon, but when the end has come, then He rises up to judgment. It is said, ‘Arise, O God, judge the earth’ (Psalm 82:8). ‘Let us come boldly’, having no ‘evil conscience’, that is, not being in doubt, for such a one cannot ‘come with boldness’. On this account it is said, ‘I have heard you in an accepted time and in a day of salvation have I helped you’ (2

¹⁹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 122.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, VII, 6.

Corinthians 6:2). Now is the grace of God for those to find repentance who sin after baptism.”

“When you hear of a High Priest, He stands; he leads to the throne; He does not sit. For Christ to be made High Priest is not of nature, but of grace, condescension, and humiliation. Thus is it seasonable for us now to say, ‘Let us draw near’ asking ‘boldly’; let us only bring Faith and He gives all things. Now is the time of the gift; let no man despair of himself. Then will be the time of despairing, when the bride chamber is shut, when the King has come in to see the guests, when they who shall be accounted worthy shall have received as their portion the Patriarch’s bosom. Now it is not yet so! The spectators are still assembled; the contest is still ongoing; the prize is still in suspense.”

Athanasius of Alexandria, in his annual Paschal Letters, compared²¹ the proclamation in Israel with the silver trumpets that announced the Feast Days to the “acceptable time” that Paul mentioned. Like them, we are being called together to a wonderful event, like a Sabbath, to receive the blessings of God.

“As a good physician, Christ exhorts us to obedience in season — the only season in which we may be healed — just as the Father sent Him seasonably, saying, ‘In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You’” (Isaiah 49:8).

“Paul urges us to note this season, saying, ‘Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation’ (2 Corinthians 6:2). At set seasons He called Israel to the Levitical feasts by Moses, saying, ‘Three times in a year you shall keep a feast to Me’ (Exodus 23:14), one of which, my beloved, is that now at hand (Pascha). The trumpets of the priests sounded, urging its observance; as the Psalmist commanded, ‘Blow with the trumpet in the new moon, on the Sabbath Day of your feast!’ (Psalm 81:3, Numbers 10:8). Since the Law required us to blow the trumpets both on the new moons, and on the Sabbath Days, He made a Sabbath day of that in which the light of the moon was beginning; which was then a type of the revealing of Christ, the Light of the world. At one time, the trumpets called to the feasts; at another time to fasting and to war. This was done with solemnity, not by chance; this sound of the trumpets was appointed, so that every man should come to what was proclaimed. When God was revealed to Moses, ‘The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Make two silver trumpets; and they shall be for you to call the congregation’ (Numbers 10:1-2). These things were to be observed so long as the shadow lasted, the whole being appointed for use, ‘till the time of reformation’ (Hebrews 9:10). ‘If you shall go out to battle in your land against your enemies that rise up against you, then you shall proclaim with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the Lord, and be delivered from your enemies’ (Numbers 10:9). Not only in wars did they blow the trumpet, but there was a festal use of the trumpet also. ‘In the day of your gladness, and in your appointed feasts, at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets’ (Numbers 10:10). Let no man think it is a light and contemptible matter, if he hears the command of the Law respecting trumpets; it is a wonderful and awesome thing. Beyond any other voice or instrument, the trumpet is awakening and awe-inspiring; so Israel received

²¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, I, 1-2.

instruction by these means, because Israel was then just a child (spiritually). In order that the proclamation should not be thought merely human, but superhuman, its sounds resembled those which were uttered when they trembled at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16); they were reminded of the Law that was then given them, and they kept it.”

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, stated²² that one aspect of the acceptable time is the opportunity to do good while we have a healthy body. If we miss this opportunity and turn the grace of God into iniquity, we may never have the same opportunity. Instead we may end up just giving our wealth to demons, and be unable later when we desire to do good.

“Differently to be admonished are the whole and the sick. The whole are to be admonished that they employ the health of the body for the health of the soul. If they turn the grace of soundness to the use of iniquity, they may be made worse by the gift, and afterwards merit severer punishment, in that they don’t fear to misuse the more bountiful gifts of God. The whole are to be further admonished that they don’t despise the opportunity of winning health forever. For it is written, ‘Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation’ (2 Corinthians 6:2). They are to be admonished lest, if they will not please God when they may, they may be not able when they want to when it is too late. This is why Wisdom deserts those whom she called before, but who refused too often, saying, I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no one regarded; you have disdained all my counsel, and accepted none of my reproof. I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes (Proverbs 1:24-27). ‘Then shall they call on me, and I will not listen; they will seek Me diligently, but they will not find me’ (Proverbs 1:28). When health of body, received for the purpose of doing good, is despised, it is realized, after it is lost, how precious was the gift. At the end it is fruitlessly sought, having been enjoyed unprofitably when granted at the proper time. Solomon said it well, ‘Don’t give your honor to others and your years to the cruel one, lest strangers be filled with your wealth, and your labors end up in the house of a stranger, and you mourn at the end, when your flesh and your body are consumed (Proverbs 5:9-11). For who are strangers from us but malignant spirits, who are separated from the lot of the heavenly country? What is our honor but that, though made in bodies of clay, we are yet created after the image and likeness of our Maker? Who else is cruel but that apostate angel, who has both struck himself with the pain of death through pride, and though lost, has not ceased to bring death on the human race? He therefore gives his honor to strangers who, being made after the image and likeness of God, devote the seasons of his life to the pleasures of malignant spirits. He also surrenders his years to the cruel one who spends the space of life accorded him after the will of the domineering adversary. If anyone has received a healthy body or wisdom of the mind, yet labors not in the practice of virtues but in the perpetration of vices, he by no means fills his own house, but fills the houses of strangers with his wealth. That is, he multiplies the deeds of unclean spirits, and indeed so acts, in his luxuriousness or his pride, as even to increase the number of the lost by the addition of himself.”

²² Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 12.

Gregory the Theologian stated²³ that the accepted time is every present moment and it will vary from one person to another. We should be cautious to take advantage of the acceptable opportunities we have, and we should focus on real and lasting values.

“I know of three classes among the saved; the slaves, the hired servants, and the sons. If you are a slave, be afraid of the whip; if you are a hired servant, look only to receive your wages; if you are a son, revere Him as a Father, and work that which is good, because it is good to obey a Father. Even though no reward should come of it for you, this is itself a reward, that you please your Father. Let us take care not to despise these things. How absurd it would be to grasp for money and throw away health; to be lavish about cleansing the body, but economical about cleansing of the soul; to seek freedom from earthly slavery, but not to care about heavenly freedom! It would be equally absurd to make every effort to be splendidly housed and dressed, but to never think how you yourself may become very precious; and to be zealous to do good to others, without any desire to do good to yourself. If good could be bought, you would spare no money; but if mercy is freely at your feet, you despise it for its cheapness. Every time is suitable for your baptism, since any time may be your death. With Paul I shout to you with that loud voice, ‘Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation’ (2 Corinthians 6:2). This Now does not point to any one time, but is every present moment. Again ‘Awake, you that sleep, and Christ shall give you light’ (Ephesians 5:14), dispelling the darkness of sin. Again, ‘In the night hope is evil, and it is more profitable to be received in the morning’” (Isaiah 28:19 LXX).

Receiving the Grace of God in Vain

Paul stated, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you’ (Isaiah 49:8). Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). What does Paul mean by receiving the grace of God in vain?

John Cassian stated²⁴ that every man has the ability to choose between good and evil, and angels versus demons are right there to help us go in the direction we want to pursue. Paul encouraged Timothy to choose the good and he did; Peter encouraged Simon Magus to choose the good also, but he didn’t.

“It cannot be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul, planted by the kindness of the Creator. But unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain an increase of perfection. As Paul says, ‘Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:7). Freedom of the will is to some degree in a man’s own power. This is very clearly taught in the book termed the Shepherd²⁵, where two angels are said to be attached to each one of us, i.e., a good and a bad

²³ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 13.

²⁴ John Cassian, 3rd Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, II, xiii, 12.

²⁵ The Shepherd, written by the Apostle of the Seventy, Hermas. See Roberts and Donaldson, ed., Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2,

one, while it lies at a man's own option to choose which to follow. The will always remains free in man, and can either delight in or neglect the grace of God. Paul would not have commanded, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12), had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he adds, 'For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure' (Philippians 2:13). Therefore he warns Timothy, 'Do not neglect the gift that is in you' (1 Timothy 4:14); and again: 'Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you' (2 Timothy 1:6). In writing to the Corinthians he exhorts and warns them not to show themselves unworthy of the grace of God through their unfruitful works, saying, 'We plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain' (2 Corinthians 6:1). The reception of saving grace was of no profit to Simon doubtless because he had received it in vain; for he would not obey the command of the blessed Peter who said, 'Repent of your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you; for I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity'" (Acts 8:22-23).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated²⁶ that we ought no longer to live to ourselves, but, as servants to the Lord. We should not receive the grace in vain, as the time is especially an acceptable one, and the day of salvation has dawned, even the death of our Redeemer.

John Chrysostom noted²⁷ that Paul made the situation urgent for the Corinthians in that not only is the time short, but also this is the only season for salvation. They needed to develop a zeal worthy of the grace they had been given. If someone had been freed from his sins, and yet made a friend wallow in what he had been freed from, he had received the grace of God in vain.

"Paul urged the Corinthians not only from the greatness of the blessings they received and His loving kindness, but also from the shortness of the time. Therefore he said elsewhere, 'For now our salvation is nearer' (Romans 13:11); and again, 'The Lord is at hand' (Philippians 4:5). But here he does something more. Not only is the remainder of the time short, but also this is the only season for salvation available."

"'Look!' Paul said, 'Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!' (2 Corinthians 6:2) Let us not let the favorable opportunity slip away but display a zeal worthy of the grace. Therefore we press forward, knowing both the shortness and the suitability of the time. He also said, 'We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5:20). It is even with God that he speaks of working together; 'we are God's fellow-workers' (1 Corinthians 3:9), in this way to save men. When pleading, Paul advances God's just claims; namely, that He gave His Son, the Righteous One 'Who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Corinthians 5:21), thus displaying such goodness."

"We plead that you would receive the benefit and not reject the gift. Be persuaded therefore by us, and 'receive not the grace in vain' (2 Corinthians 6:1).

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VI, 4.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 1.

Paul didn't want them to think that just believing on Him that calls by itself is 'reconciliation with God'; therefore he added these words 'receive not the grace in vain', repaying that earnestness which respects the life we receive. One who has been freed from sins and yet made a friend to wallow in the former things, has returned to enmity with God, and has 'received the grace in vain' with respect to eternal life. We reap no benefit from 'the grace' towards salvation, if we live impurely. We are even harmed, having this greater aggravation of our sins, in that after such knowledge and such a gift we have gone back to our former vices. This however he does not mention yet, that he may not make his work harsh, but says only that we reap no benefit. Paul then reminded the Corinthians of a prophecy, urging and compelling them to rouse themselves in order to lay hold of their own salvation. 'At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you. Look! Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation'" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Giving No Offense to Anyone

Being zealous to receive the grace of God during the acceptable time is good; but being zealous could also offend people. Out of kindness to others, we need to be aware of others' feelings and sensitivities. Paul stated, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God" (2 Corinthians 6:3-4).

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, writing to the Emperor's sister, Theoctista, encouraged²⁸ her to not to be bothered by the murmuring of foolish men since her witness is in heaven. If there is any way to avoid offending anyone, we ought to do it to avoid any association with sin on our part. Gregory illustrated this with two examples involving the Pharisees. This may mean going considerably out of our way and associating with surly men, but we should do it anyway.

"As often as you hear foolish men speaking derogatory of you, you shouldn't be touched by even the least sadness of heart. This murmuring of foolish men cannot be pacified by quiet reason, I hold it to be sin if the doing of what can be done is neglected. When we appease insane minds, and bring them back to a healthy state, we ought by no means to cause them offense. There are some offenses that should be altogether despised; but there are others which, when they can be avoided without guilt, should be considered. We learn this from the preaching of the Gospel. The Truth said, 'Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man' (Matthew 15:11). The disciples replied, 'Do You know that that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?' (Matthew 15:12). Immediately Christ replied, 'Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind' (Matthew 15:13-14). Yet, when tribute was demanded, He first gave a reason why tribute should not be paid, then added, 'Lest we should offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, take the fish that comes up first; and when you have opened his mouth, there you shall find a silver

²⁸ Gregory the Great, Epistle to Theoctista, XI, 45.

tetradrachm²⁹. Take that, and give it to them for Me and for you' (Matthew 17:27). Why is it that to some who were offended it is said, 'Let them alone; they are blind, and leaders of the blind'; and that to others, lest they should be offended, tribute is paid by the Lord, even though not due? Why is it that He allowed one offense to remain, but forbade another to be caused? He was teaching us on the one hand to despise offenses which implicate us in sin, but on the other to mitigate in all ways those who we can appease without sin?"

"Therefore your Excellency, with God protecting you, He may quietly deflect the offenses of bad men. The chief of these bad men you should of your own accord call in to speak to you privately and give them reasons, and anathematize certain wrong points, which they suppose to be held by you. If they suspect such anathema to be insincere, you should confirm it even by an oath, affirming that you do not hold, and never have held, those points. Don't let it seem beneath you to satisfy them in such a way; don't let there be in your mind any feeling of contempt against them on account of your imperial race. For we are all brethren created by the power of one Emperor, and redeemed by His blood. So we ought not in anything to despise our brethren, however poor they are."

John Chrysostom stated³⁰ that the Apostles differed from us only in their will and purpose. They were careful not to offend anyone, yet they went beyond the Commandments in humility.

"The Apostles were partakers of the same nature as us; they differed in their will and purpose. So it was that they attracted the great grace that they did. See how many things they ordered by their own knowledge of grace. 'That we don't give offense' to those who wish to take offense, and, 'That our ministry be not blamed' (2 Corinthians 6:3). They had an irreproachable life and also condescension. Paul went beyond the commandments of Christ and on the other hand was the humblest of all. 'I have become all things to all men', he said, 'that I might by all means save some'" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Leo the Great, speaking about the beginning of Lent, stated³¹ that the struggle between our two natures (flesh and spirit) must accompany our fasting. When we do this we will not offend anyone.

"As we are about to enter on those mystic days, which are dedicated to the benefits of fasting, let us take care to obey the Apostle's precepts, cleansing 'ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit' (2 Corinthians 7:1), that by controlling the struggles that go on between our two natures, the spirit, which if it is under the guidance of God, should be the governor of the body, and may uphold the dignity of its rule. Thus we will give offense to no one; nor will we be the target of reproof by anyone. If the conduct of those that fast is at variance with the standard of perfect purity, we shall be rightly attacked with rebukes; through our own fault ungodly tongues will arm themselves to do harm to the Faith. Our fast does not consist in just abstinence from food, nor is it profitable for dainties to be

²⁹ A silver tetradrachm (Greek: stater) was the same weight as the Hebrew Shekel. See Merrill Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 725.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XLIII, v. 16.

³¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XLII, 2.

withdrawn from our bodily appetites, unless the mind is recalled from wrong-doing and the tongue restrained from slandering. This is a time of gentleness and long-suffering, of peace and tranquility, when all the pollutions of vice are to be eradicated and continuance of virtue is to be attained by us.”

Ambrose of Milan gave³² some practical considerations in dealing with people to avoid offending them. One basic principle is to do nothing to advance one’s own cause that puts someone else down. Injustice, real or perceived, is quick to cause offense, and equity should be a characteristic of the Church. Priests should not show favoritism to rich or poor to avoid giving offense; if they have difficulty with this, they should avoid judgment completely. On the other hand, where there is a danger to the whole Church, it is a great sin for a priest to pretend that he saw nothing.

“We must strive to win many by kindness and by the duties that we can do, and to preserve the favor already shown us. People will with good reason forget the benefits of former times if they are now bothered by some great wrong. It often happens that those one has shown favor to are driven away, if one decides in some unworthy way to put another before them. It is appropriate, however, for a priest to show favor in his kindnesses to the other clergy just as he would to parents.”

“If anyone is disobedient to his bishop and wishes to exalt himself and overshadow his bishop’s merits by a pretentious appearance of learning, humility or mercy, he is wandering from the truth in his pride. The rule of truth is to do nothing to advance one’s own cause whereby another loses ground, nor to use whatever good one has to the disgrace or blame of another.”

“Never protect a wicked man, nor allow sacred things to be given over to an unworthy man; on the other hand, do not harass and press a man whose fault is not clearly proven. Injustice quickly gives offense in every case, but especially in the Church, where equity ought to exist, where like treatment should be given to all. We should not let a powerful person claim more, or a rich man appropriate more. Whether we are rich or poor, we are one in Christ. Let him that lives a holier life claim nothing more for himself; for he ought rather to be the more humble for it.”

“In giving judgment let us have no respect for persons. Favor must be put out of sight, and the case must be decided on its merits. Nothing is so great a strain on another’s good opinion, as our giving away the cause of the weaker to the more powerful in cases that comes before us. The same happens if we are hard on the poor, while we make excuses for the rich man when he’s guilty. Men are ready enough to flatter those in high positions. If you are afraid of giving offense, then do not undertake to give judgment. If you are a priest, do not urge a decision; it is OK for you to be silent in the matter. If it is a financial matter, it is always good to be on the side of equity. But in the cause of God, where there is danger to the whole Church, it is no small sin to act as though one saw nothing.”

John Chrysostom stated³³ that Paul was careful even in the use of spiritual gifts not to offend anyone, which contrasted with some in Corinth who were puffed up over their gifts.

³² Ambrose of Milan, On the Duties of the Clergy, II, xxiv, 121, 123-125.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2.

“Observe when it is that Paul mentioned the help of the Holy Spirit: after he had listed many things that he did himself, such as tribulations, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, sleeplessness, fasting. Moreover, he seems to me to be saying another thing. ‘We have been filled with the abundance of the Spirit and also we give proof of our Apostleship in that we have been counted worthy of spiritual gifts.’ If this is grace also, yet still he himself, by his good works and his labors, attracted that grace. We can also say that besides this, he shows that in his use of the gifts of the Spirit he gave no offense. This is in contrast to those who received the gift of tongues among the Corinthians and were puffed up. It is possible for one even in receiving a gift of the Spirit, not to use it right. ‘But we are not like this,’ he said, ‘but in the Spirit also, that is, in the spiritual gifts, we have been blameless’” (2 Corinthians 6:3).

Paul’s Hardships: Those Imposed on Him

Paul had to endure a great deal of hardships such as in Table 1, where these were the hardships imposed on him. The occasions for these hardships are listed in Table 2. There are other hardships that he imposed on himself that we will cover next. Paraphrasing John Chrysostom³⁴, for Paul to bear one or two things is no great matter, but Paul was inflicted with snow storms of trials. Every one of these was intolerable by itself; but when both all, and all at once, attack, consider what a soul is required to put up with it.

Table 1
Definitions of the Difficulties Imposed on Paul

Difficulty	Strong	Greek	References
Tribulations, in the sense of pinching or compression	2347	thlipsis	Revelation 7:14, Philippians 1:17, James 1:27, Acts 20:23
Forced necessity as from violence or torture	318	anagke	Romans 13:5, Hebrews 7:12, 2 Corinthians 9:7
Distress as in narrowness or lack of room	4730	stenochoria	Romans 2:9
Stripes as in wounds	4127	plege	Revelation 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18; Acts 16:23, 33
Imprisonment, including guards and watches	5438	phulake	Acts 12:4-17, Mark 6:48
Instability, including riots	181	akatastasia	Luke 21:9, James 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:33

Thlipsis or tribulation is the same word used for “those who came out of the Great Tribulation” at the end times (Revelation 7:14). In this context, it implies a hounding, where everyone is after you to capture or kill you. Orphans and widows can also experience this in their poverty trying to support themselves (James 1:27).

Anagke is a necessity that is forced on us, such as from obedience to governments (Romans 13:5). At the Advent of Christ there was a necessity, *anagke*, for a change in the Law (Hebrews 7:12); similarly we are encouraged not to give alms of necessity, *anagke*, but out of cheerfulness (2 Corinthians 9:7).

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2.

Stenochoria refers to a distress that comes from a closed-in situation. The only place in the New Testament where the use of *stenochoria* helps clarify its meaning is where Paul describes the Last Judgment: there will be tribulation, *thlipsis*, and distress, *stenochoria*, on every soul that does evil (Romans 2:9).

Plege refers to the wounds that come from whipping or beating and can include the whipping process. The “plagues” that come in the Last Days are stripes, *plege*, on the enemies of God (Revelation 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18) where the English word “plague” was taken directly from the Greek word. In Philippi, Paul was inflicted with many stripes, *plege*, and the converted jailor afterward washed these stripes (Acts 16:23, 33).

Phulake refers to confinement in prison, complete with guards and watches throughout the night. Peter was in prison, *phulake*, chained between two guards, with other guards watching the doors (Acts 12:4, 5, 6, 17). Jesus came walking on the Sea of Galilee during the 4th watch, *phulake*, of the night (Mark 6:48).

Akatastasia refers to riots, disturbance, disorder and confusion. There will be wars and riots, *akatastasia*, prior to the 2nd Coming of Christ (Luke 21:9), since envy and self-seeking lead to riots, *akatastasia*, and every evil thing (James 3:16). Yet God is not the author of riots, *akatastasia*, but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Table 2
Times When Some of Paul’s Hardships Occurred

Difficulty	Strong	References
Tribulations, in the sense of pinching or compression	2347	In Asia (2 Corinthians 1:8); Pisidia (Acts 13:50); Iconium (Acts 14:5); Lystra (Acts 14:19); Philippi (Acts 16:23); Jerusalem (Acts 20:23)
Forced necessity as from violence or torture	318	Forced to leave Pisidia (Acts 13:50; Iconium (Acts 14:5), Lystra (Acts 14:20), Philippi (Acts 16:39), Thessalonica (Acts 17:10). Appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Murder Plots (Acts 9:29, 23:12).
Distress as in narrowness or lack of room	4730	In Iconium (Acts 14:5); Lystra (Acts 14:19); Philippi (Acts 16:24); Jerusalem (Acts 21:31); Rome (Acts 28:16)
Stripes as in wounds	4127	In Philippi (Acts 16:23); Many other times (2 Corinthians 11:23)
Imprisonment, including guards and watches	5438	In Philippi (Acts 16:23); Jerusalem (Acts 21:31); Rome (Acts 28:17).
Instability, including riots	181	Riots in Philippi (Acts 16:22), Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), Berea (Acts 17:13), Ephesus (Acts 20:28-41), Jerusalem (Acts 21:27)

John Chrysostom was totally impressed³⁵ with the life of the Apostle Paul. With all the extreme hardships Paul had to put up with, one might think that Paul would prefer to retire from action to be with the Lord. But Paul chose to continue in the flesh longer, even with the hardship, for the sake of his Churches and his brethren.

“Nothing can be more blessed than the spirit of Paul, for the reason that nothing is nobler. We all shudder at death, some by reason of our many sins, and others from love of life or cowardice. While we all shudder at death, Paul prayed for it, saying, ‘To depart is far better’ (Philippians 1:23). However, when he was about to depart from earth to heaven, and to be with Christ, he does not choose it. Why didn’t he immediately seize it? What is Paul saying?”

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, IV, vv. 22-26

“Paul lived an exceeding tough life, ‘in watching, in shipwrecks, in hunger and thirst, and nakedness, in cares and anxiety. ‘With the weak’ he was ‘weak’, and for those who ‘were made to stumble’ he ‘burned with indignation’ (2 Corinthians 11:25-29). Five times he received 39 stripes, three times was he beaten with rods, once was he stoned, a night and a day he has been in the deep, in many, many perils (2 Corinthians 11:24-26). His grief was really severe, and still he desired this perishing life! If none of these things had happened to him, but he still had his success, shouldn’t he hurry to some harbor, from fear of the uncertain future? What trader, whose vessel is full of untold wealth, when he is able to return to port and be at rest, would prefer to be still at sea? What wrestler, when he might be crowned, would prefer to contend? What boxer, when he might put on his crown, would choose to enter again into the contest, and offer his head to wounds? What general is there, who when he might end the war with good report and trophies, and refresh himself with the king in the palace, would choose still to labor, and to stand in battle array? How then does Paul, who lived such a tough life, wish to still remain here? Did he not say that he had concern that having preached to others, he himself should become disqualified?’ (1 Corinthians 9:27) If for no other cause, yet surely for this, he ought to desire his release.”

“That spirit of Paul; nothing was ever like it, nor ever will be! He feared the future, he was surrounded by innumerable dreadful things, and he does not ask to be with Christ. For Christ’s sake, he asked to be allowed to make the plot which he planted bear more fruit (1 Corinthians 3:9). Paul declared that he didn’t seek ‘his own profit’ (1 Corinthians 10:33), but his neighbor. He stated, ‘I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren’ (Romans 9:3). Paul chose that part, with pleasure harming himself by this delay, that they may be saved. ‘Who can utter Your mighty acts, O Lord’ (Psalm 106:2), because You revealed such a man to the world?”

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁶ that Paul’s trials demonstrated the weapons of God and that the power was of God and not of him. This is clear evidence of the Resurrection. One of the reasons Paul detailed this was out of love for the Corinthians so that they might develop more respect for what he had done.

“Paul detailed his own afflictions, showing that the thing was a great good, and called those things ‘weapons’, for he said, ‘as chastened and not killed’ (2 Corinthians 6:9). He personally represented God’s abundant care and power, for he said, ‘that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not of us’ (2 Corinthians 4:7). As Paul recounted his labors, saying, ‘We always bear about His dying’, this is a clear demonstration of the Resurrection, ‘that the life of Jesus may be demonstrated in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10). This is further demonstrated by the things that he was made partaker of, and by what he had been entrusted with. ‘We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ as though God were entreating by us’ (2 Corinthians 5:20), and by the things that he is delivering, namely, ‘not the letter, but the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:6). Paul was entitled to respect not only on this account, but also for his trials, for, ‘Thanks be to God’, he said, ‘who always leads us in triumph in Christ’ (2 Corinthians 2:14). Paul

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, 1

proceeded to rebuke the Corinthians as not being very grateful towards himself (2 Corinthians 6:11-12). He does not immediately come to this, but discusses other things first. Even if he that rebukes is entitled to respect from his own good deeds, yet still, when he displays the love that he bears towards those who are censured, he makes his speech less offensive. Therefore Paul steps out of the subject of his own trials and passes on to speaking of his love; in this way he touches them deeper.”

John Chrysostom noted³⁷ the life of Jesus compared to the life of Paul after his conversion: they both faced considerable persecution. If we intend to follow the Master, we can expect the same kind of life if we wish to be worthy of Him.

“Jesus was a continual fugitive, sometimes in Galilee, and sometimes in Judea, and His trial was great, even from the swaddling clothes. When He was a young child, did not His mother take Him and go down into Egypt? For all these reasons Paul says, ‘Looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God’” (Hebrews 12:2).

“Let us look to Christ then, and also to the sufferings of His disciples, reading the writings of Paul; for if the sufferings of those near us arouse us, what zeal those of our Master will give us! What will they not work in us!”

“Paul expressed the whole by the word ‘Contradiction’; that is, the punches on the cheek, the laughter, the insults, the reproaches, the mockeries. Not these only, but also the things which happened to Him during His whole life of teaching.”

“Truly great consolations are both the sufferings of Christ, and those of the Apostles. He so well knew that this is the better way of virtue, as even to go that way Himself, even though He had no need to do so. He knew so well that tribulation is expedient for us, and that it becomes rather a foundation for repose. Hear Him saying, ‘He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:38). If you are a disciple, He means, imitate the Master; for this is being a disciple. If He went by the path of affliction, and you go by that of ease, you no longer take the same path, but another. How shall you be a disciple, not following the Master? This Paul also says, ‘We are weak, but you are strong; we are despised, but you are honored’ (1 Corinthians 4:10). How is it reasonable, he means, that we should be striving after opposite things, and yet that you should be disciples and we teachers?”

Paul’s Hardships: Those He Imposed on Himself

Paul mentioned many aspects of his ministry using just a few words, and the meaning of these few words may not be immediately obvious. We will take each of these aspects one at a time. Some of the Church Fathers have pointed out that there is an order to these aspects of Paul’s ministry. Paul is not just blowing his own horn; he is telling us where to start in order to acquire these virtues.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVIII, 6.

Paraphrasing John Chrysostom³⁸, Paul imposed a very high standard on himself: fasting, purity, knowledge (i.e. the wisdom of God), etc. He was straightforward with the word of truth, neither being deceitful nor trying to adulterate it. The power of God had been obvious in their midst. Shortly before coming to Corinth the first time, “God worked unusual miracles by the hand of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11-12). Rather than being weakened by his trials, the weapons of righteousness made him even stronger.

Bearing dishonor is indeed a great thing; but to partake of honor requires an exceedingly great soul, that he who enjoys it may not be thrown and break his neck. In contrast, the Jewish leaders had difficulty in this regard. Jesus rebuked them saying, “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). Too much honor can deter even a good man from following what he knows is right. Because of this, Paul was “unknown”; or rather, some people refused to know him at all.

Paul asked whether there was an evil report of his work or a good report, and this even during afflictions. Some may have thought he was a deceiver, yet he remained true to his calling. Not only did he bear those things nobly which happen to the body, the afflictions and all that he enumerated, but those also which touch the soul. As an example, Chrysostom spoke³⁹ of Job, to whom the reproaches of his friends appeared worse than the worms and the sores. There is nothing more intolerable to those in afflictions than a word capable of stinging the soul.

Paul Imposed the Following on Himself:	
in much patience	in long-suffering
in labors	in kindness
in sleeplessness	in the Holy Spirit
in fasting	in sincere love
in purity	in the word of truth
in knowledge	in the power of God
He Met These Challenges:	
through the weapons of righteousness for both the left and the right hand	
through honor and dishonor	
through evil report and good report	
Yet He Had Been Characterized:	
as a deceiver, yet true	as sorrowful, yet rejoicing
as unknown, yet well known	as poor, yet enriching many
as dying, yet alive	as having nothing, yet possessing all things
as chastised, yet not killed	

In many places, Paul was under a sentence of death, condemned and chastised, which was also a matter of dishonor. He was stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19); he barely escaped from Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50), and Iconium (Acts 14:5). As far as those who plotted against him were concerned, he died; and this is what many supposed. But by God’s aid, he escaped the dangers.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2.

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

To those that were outside the Church and knew he was still alive, Paul was suspected of being in despair. But he gave paid no attention to them and had his pleasure to the full because of his hope. While he was constantly lacking in basic necessities: food, clothing, shelter (1 Corinthians 4:11), yet he was making many rich with treasure in heaven.

Paul inspired a great loyalty among many in the Churches. The Galatians were described as receiving him as an angel of God and were ready to pluck their own eyes out and give them to him (Galatians 4:14-15). Priscilla and Aquila risked their own necks for him (Romans 16:4). Remembering the miracles that Paul performed and realizing that he was accompanied by the power of God, one can truly say that he may have had nothing in worldly possessions, yet he did possess all things.

Clement of Alexandria stated⁴⁰ that the point of Paul's self-imposed hardships was that he and others with him were the temples of God, purified 'from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit' (2 Corinthians 7:1). 'And I will receive you; and I will be to you for a Father, and you shall be to Me for sons and daughters, said the Lord Almighty' (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). 'Let us then', he says, 'perfect holiness in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1). Though fear generates pain, 'I rejoice', he says, 'not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death' (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Much Patience

Paul imposed much patience on himself. Patience is an asset to the man of God far more than one might imagine. John Cassian noted⁴¹ that evil cannot be brought on the man of God who has patience by another man unless the man of God becomes slothful or feeble of heart. Paul calls fortunate circumstances those "on the right hand" and misfortune, those "on the left hand". Both become the weapons of righteousness to the man who is patient, since a man is more easily overcome by prosperity than by misfortune.

"The patience of Job did not bring any gain to the devil; it made Job a better man as a result of his temptations, by enduring them bravely. Judas was not granted freedom from eternal punishment, even though his act of betrayal contributed to the salvation of mankind. We must not regard the result of the deed, but the purpose of the doer. We should always cling to this assertion; that evil cannot be brought upon a man by another, unless a man has admitted it by his sloth or feebleness of heart. Paul confirms this opinion, 'But we know that all things work together for good to them that love God' (Romans 8:28). By saying, 'All things work together for good', he includes everything alike, not only things fortunate, but also those which seem to be misfortune."

"Things, which are considered fortunate, are called the ones 'on the right hand', which Paul designates by the terms honor and good report. Those which are counted misfortunes, which he clearly means by dishonor and evil report, he describes as 'on the left hand' (2 Corinthians 6:7). Both become to the perfect man 'the weapons of righteousness', if when they are brought on him, he bears them

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 21.

⁴¹ John Cassian, *Conference of Abbot Theodore*, I, vi, 9.

bravely. As he fights with these weapons, with which he seems to be attacked, he is protected by them as by bow, sword and shield against those who bring these things upon him. He secures the advantage of his patience and goodness, and obtains a grand triumph of steadfastness by means of those weapons of his enemies, which are hurled against him. He must not be elated by success or cast down by failure, but march straightforward on the king's highway, and not swerve from that state of tranquility as it were to the right hand, when joy overcomes him. He must also not let himself be driven to the left hand, when misfortunes overwhelm him, and sorrow governs him. 'Much peace have they that love Your Law, and to them there is no stumbling block' (Psalm 119:165 LXX). Of those who shift about according to the character and chances that happen to them, we read, 'But a fool will change like the moon' (Ecclesiasticus 27:11 LXX). Just as it is said of men who are perfect and wise, 'To them that love God all things work together for good' (Romans 8:28), so of those who are weak and foolish it is declared that 'everything is against a foolish man' (Proverbs 14:7 LXX), for he gets no profit out of prosperity, nor does adversity make him any better. It requires as much goodness to bear sorrows bravely, as to be moderate in prosperity; one who fails in one of these, will not bear up under the other. A man can be more easily overcome by prosperity than by misfortunes. Misfortunes restrain men against their will and make them humble and through wholesome sorrow cause them to sin less, and make them better. Prosperity puffs up the mind with soothing but pernicious flatteries and, when men are secure in the prospect of their happiness, dashes them to the ground with a greater destruction."

Labors

By "labors", Paul was referring to the kind of work that a person does for the kingdom of God. Ambrose of Milan spoke⁴² of a man's labors as his life's work for which he receives a crown at the Lord's return. As an example, he mentioned Moses, who spoke when he was silent and who labored when he was at ease.

"When can the upright man be alone, since he is always with God? When is he left forsaken who is never separated from Christ? 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am confident that neither death nor life nor angel shall do so' (Romans 8:35, 38). When can he be deprived of his labor, who never can be deprived of his merits, wherein his labor receives its crown? By what places is he limited to whom the whole world of riches is a possession? By what judgment is he confined, who is never blamed by anyone? He is 'as unknown yet well known, as dying and behold he lives, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things' (2 Corinthians 6:9-10). The upright man regards nothing but what is consistent and virtuous. Although he seems poor to another, he is rich to himself, for his worth is taken not at the value of the things which are temporal, but of the things which are eternal."

"Moses knew that he was not alone when he was alone and that he was least at leisure when he was at leisure. When silent, he was crying out as he parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16); when he stood at ease, he was fighting; not merely fighting but triumphing over enemies, whom he had not come near. So much was

⁴² Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, III, i, 7, 2.

he at ease, that others held up his hands; yet he was no less active than others, for he with his hands at ease was overcoming the enemy, whom they that were in the battle could not conquer (Exodus 17:11-13). Thus Moses spoke in his silence and in his ease labored hard. His labors were greater than his times of quiet, who received the whole Law, being on the mountain for forty days (Exodus 24:17-18). In that solitude there was One not far away to speak with him. David says, 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me' (Psalm 86:8 OSB LXX). How much greater a thing is it for God to speak with anyone, than for a man to speak with himself!"

Sleeplessness, Watching and Vigils

Paul stated that he was involved often in watching and fasting (2 Corinthians 11:27). The Lord Himself often spent most of the night in prayer (Matthew 14:23-25), just like He did in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to the Crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-45).

Athanasius of Alexandria spoke⁴³ of Pascha as a time for fasting and watchfulness in prayer, and not a time for delights of the belly like the heathen. It is a time for exercise and the practice of temperance as we contend with one another in observing the purity of the fast.

"When we come to the Paschal Feast, no longer come as to old shadows, neither as to common feasts, but let us hasten as to the Lord, Who is Himself the feast (1 Corinthians 5:7). Do not look on it as an indulgence and delight of the belly, but as a revealing of virtue. For the feasts of the heathen are full of greediness, and utter indolence, since they consider they celebrate a feast when they are idle; and they work the works of perdition when they feast. But our feasts consist in the exercise of virtue and the practice of temperance; prophetic word testifies in a certain place, saying, 'The fast of the fourth, the fifth, the seventh, and the tenth month shall be to the house of Judah for gladness, rejoicing, and for cheerful feasts' (Zechariah 8:19). Since this occasion for exercise is set before us and the prophetic voice has gone out that the feast shall be celebrated, let us give all diligence to this good proclamation. Like those who contend on the race course, let us vie with each other in observing the purity of the fast (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), by watchfulness in prayers, by study of the Scriptures, by distributing to the poor, and let us be at peace with our enemies. Let us bind up those who are scattered abroad, banish pride, and return to lowliness of mind, being at peace with all men, and urging the brethren to love. The blessed Paul was often engaged in fasting and watching, and was willing to be accursed for his brethren (Romans 9:3). Blessed David, having humbled himself by fasting, used boldness, saying, 'O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrongdoing in my hands, if I dealt back evil to those dealing evil to me, then may I fall empty because of my enemies' (Psalm 7:4-5 OSB LXX). If we do these things, we shall conquer death; and receive a guarantee (Ephesians 1:13-14) of the kingdom of heaven."

John Cassian noted⁴⁴ that all our efforts at fasting, watching, and dumping worldly pursuits will not help us if we don't root out anger from our life.

⁴³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, XIV, 5.

⁴⁴ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 22.

“The athlete of Christ ought to root out the feeling of wrath thoroughly. A sure remedy for this disease, in the first place, is making up our mind that we ought never to be angry at all, whether for good or bad reasons. If the main light of our heart has been darkened by its shadows with anger, we shall immediately lose the light of discernment, the security of good counsel, our uprightness, and the temperate character of righteousness. Next, the purity of our soul will be clouded, such that it cannot possibly be made a temple for the Holy Spirit while the spirit of anger resides in us. Lastly, we should never pray or pour out our prayer to God while we are angry. Above all, having before our eyes the uncertain condition of mankind, we should realize daily that we are soon to depart from the body. Our continence and chastity, our renunciation of all our possessions, our contempt of wealth, our efforts in fasting and vigils will not help us at all, if solely on account of anger and hatred, eternal punishments are awarded to us by the judge of the world.”

Fasting

Fasting has been proscribed as a part of the life of the people of God since the days of Moses⁴⁵. There are short (one-day) fasts and longer fasts for various reasons. The Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12) on a Monday and a Thursday to remember Moses climbing Mt. Sinai twice to receive the Law. Even some of the Gentiles fasted as part of their religious activities. Like other people of God, Paul fasted often (2 Corinthians 11:27). The Twelve and later Paul took to heart the Lord’s words, “this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21).

Besides keeping the appointed fast days such as the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9), Paul and Barnabas fasted and prayed over the ordination of presbyters (Acts 14:21-23). As the Lord instructed (Matthew 6:16-18), Paul did not trumpet his fasting to sound spiritual, but we get hints that he did it a lot (2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27).

Jerome described⁴⁶ the history of fasting among the people of God. Adam (not eating meat), Moses, Elijah, Daniel, David, Samson, Samuel, Anna, John the Baptist and Cornelius all benefited greatly from some type of fasting. Others who refused to fast were led away into ungodliness. The pattern here seems to be that those who are willing to deprive themselves for a greater purpose are rewarded in some way.

One of the points of fasting is to subdue the fleshly desires. In the Mosaic Law, the Hebrew word *tsoom* (meaning “to cover the mouth” or to fast) is not used at all. Instead the people were instructed to “humble their souls” at the Day of Atonement. Fasting was just a means of doing so (see Ezra 8:21, Daniel 9:3, 10:12).

There were times when the Lord’s people just went through the motions of fasting and made it look like they were humbling their souls (Joel 2:12-18, Jeremiah 14:10-12). The fast, which the Lord chooses, includes “loosening the bonds of wickedness, freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked (Isaiah 58:3-8). This sounds

⁴⁵ For more details on the history of fasting among the people of God, see the Study for the 4th Sunday of Lent.

⁴⁶ Jerome, Against Jovinianus, II, 15-16.

much like the Lord's words in the Gospel relating to the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus the fast that the Lord chooses prepares us for Judgment Day.

Purity of Heart

Paul also imposed on himself purity of heart. John Cassian summarized⁴⁷ purity of heart as our immediate goal in our journey to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the end of our way of life, but without purity of heart, we won't get there. Paul calls purity of heart "sanctification", and it is something we must continually focus on with all our strength.

"The end of our way of life is the kingdom of God. But we must ask what is our immediate; for if we don't discover it, we shall wear ourselves out to no purpose. A man who is traveling in a wrong direction has all the trouble and gets none of the good of his journey. The end of our profession indeed is the kingdom of God; but the immediate aim or goal, is purity of heart, without which no one can gain that end. Fixing our gaze then steadily on this goal, as if on a definite mark, let us direct our course as straight towards it as possible. If our thoughts wander somewhat from this, let us revert to our gaze upon it, and check them accurately as by a sure standard, which will always bring back all our efforts to this one mark, and will show if our mind has wandered ever so little from the direction marked out for it."

"That our end is eternal life, Paul declares, 'You have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life' (Romans 6:22). Purity of heart, which is our immediate goal, Paul calls 'sanctification' (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). Of which goal he teaches us, 'Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those that are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3:13-14). With this aim, with which I forget those things that are behind, i.e., the faults of earlier life, I strive to reach as the end the heavenly prize. Whatever then can help to guide us to purity of heart, we must follow with all our might, but whatever hinders us from it, we must shun as a dangerous and hurtful thing. For this we endure all things, for this we make light of our kinsfolk, our country, honors, riches, the delights of this world, and all kinds of pleasures, in order that we may retain a lasting purity of heart. When this object is set before us, we shall always direct our actions and thoughts straight towards the attainment of it. If it is not constantly before our eyes, it will not only make all our work vain and useless, and force them to be endured to no purpose and without any reward, but it will also excite all kinds of thoughts opposed to one another. For the mind, which has no fixed point to which it may return, is sure to wander about from hour to hour. Those things which come to it from outside will constantly change it into that state which first offers itself."

Knowledge

The spiritual knowledge that Paul was referring to comes solely from purity of heart, and it is not necessarily related to worldly wisdom or even a great knowledge of the Scriptures. John Cassian described⁴⁸ the means to acquiring spiritual knowledge: first one must obtain purity of heart. Spiritual knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit will not dwell in a

⁴⁷ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Moses, I, 1, 4-5.

⁴⁸ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 16.

body subject to sin. Some people have a show of knowledge, and even know the Scriptures well. But their knowledge is false.

“Men who only possess skill in public speaking cannot penetrate to the heart of Scripture and the mysteries of its spiritual meanings. True knowledge is only acquired by true worshippers of God; and certainly this people does not possess it to whom it is said, ‘Hear, O, foolish and senseless people; you who have eyes but don’t see, and have ears, but don’t hear’ (Jeremiah 5:21 LXX). Again, ‘Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from acting as My priest’ (Hosea 4:6). In Christ ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden’ (Colossians 2:3). The man, who has scorned finding Christ, or blasphemes Him with impious lips when he finds Him, or defiles the Faith by his impure deeds, has not acquired spiritual knowledge. ‘The Spirit of God doesn’t dwell in a body that is subject to sin’ (Wisdom 1:4-5 LXX). There is then no way of arriving at spiritual knowledge but the way described by Hosea, ‘Sow for yourselves righteousness; gather in for the fruit of life. Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge’ (Hosea 10:12 LXX). First we must sow righteousness; i.e., by works of righteousness we must extend practical perfection. Next we must reap the hope of life; i.e., by the expulsion of carnal sins we must gather the fruits of spiritual virtues; and so we shall succeed in enlightening ourselves with the light of knowledge. The Psalmist says, ‘Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that search out his testimonies’ (Psalm 119:1-2 LXX). He does not say in the first place, ‘Blessed are they that seek His testimonies’, and afterwards add, ‘Blessed are they that are blameless in the way’. But he begins by saying, ‘Blessed are they that are blameless in the way’; and by this clearly shows that no one can properly come to seek God’s testimonies unless he first walks blameless in the way of Christ by his practical life. The impure cannot attain spiritual knowledge, but have what is falsely so called. Paul speaks of this, ‘O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge’ (1 Timothy 6:20). Regarding those then who seem to acquire some show of knowledge or regarding those who while they devote themselves diligently to reading the sacred volume and to committing the Scriptures to memory, yet don’t forsake carnal sins, it is well said in Proverbs, ‘Like a golden ring in a swine’s snout so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion’” (Proverbs 11:22).

John Cassian proceeded⁴⁹ to state that there is something to the order of the virtues as Paul listed them. Paul is not just blowing his own horn, but is telling us where to start in order to acquire these virtues: which follows what and which gives birth to what.

“When Paul wanted not merely to draw up a list of his own virtues, but rather to describe their order, that he might explain which follows what, and which gives birth to what, after some others he proceeds, ‘In watching, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long suffering, in gentleness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned’ (2 Corinthians 6:5-6). By this enumeration of virtues he meant to teach us that we must come from watching and fasting to chastity, from chastity to knowledge, from knowledge to long suffering, from long suffering to gentleness,

⁴⁹ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 16.

from gentleness to the Holy Spirit, from the Holy Spirit to the rewards of love unfeigned. When you have come in this order to spiritual knowledge, you will certainly not have barren or idle learning, but what is vigorous and fruitful. The seed of the word of salvation which has been committed by you to the hearts of your hearers will be watered by the plentiful showers of the Holy Spirit that will follow. As Isaiah promised, 'He will give the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful'" (Isaiah 30:23).

Long Suffering and Kindness

Paul said, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness" (2 Corinthians 6:3-4, 6).

Gregory the Theologian encouraged⁵⁰ us to imitate the mercy of God in all our dealings with our fellow man. He is very long-suffering for all our misdeeds and extremely kind to us in spite of all the things we do.

"Having so many examples let us imitate the mercy of God, and not desire to learn from ourselves how great an evil is retaliation of sin. You see the sequence of goodness. First it makes laws, then it commands, threatens, reproaches, holds out warnings, restrains, threatens again, and only when forced to do so strikes the blow, but this little by little, opening the way to amendment. Let us then not strike suddenly, for it is not safe to do so, but being self restrained in our fear let us conquer by mercy. Let us make them our debtors by our kindness, tormenting them by their conscience rather than by anger. Let us not dry up a fig tree which may yet bear fruit, nor condemn it as useless and hindering the ground, when possibly the care and diligence of a skillful gardener may yet heal it (Luke 13:7-9). Do not let us so quickly destroy so great and glorious a work through what is perhaps the spite and malice of the devil. But let us choose to show ourselves merciful rather than severe, and lovers of the poor rather than of abstract justice. Let us not make more account of those who would stir us up than of those who would restrain us, considering, if nothing else, the disgrace of appearing to contend against beggars, who have this great advantage that even if they are in the wrong, they are pitied for their misfortune."

The Holy Spirit

When Paul spoke of "By the Holy Spirit", he was referring to a whole range of activities of the Holy Spirit such as is recorded in Acts. John Chrysostom noted⁵¹ that the Gospels are generally a history of what Christ did, while the Acts are a history of what the Holy Spirit did.

"The Gospels are a history of what Christ did and said; but the Acts are a history of what 'the Comforter' said and did. The Holy Spirit did many things in the Gospels also; just as Christ in the Acts still works in men as He did in the Gospels. In the Gospels the Spirit worked through the Temple, now through the Apostles. Then, He came into the Virgin's womb, and fashioned the Temple; now,

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nazianzen, "Letter to Theodore", *Miscellaneous Letters*, III, 7, Ep. 77.

⁵¹ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, I, vv. 1-2.

into Apostolic souls. Then He came in the likeness of a dove; now, in the likeness of fire. Why? In the Gospels He showed the gentleness of the Lord, but in the Acts He began taking vengeance also, to put them in mind of the judgment. When there was need for forgiveness, there was need for much gentleness; but now that we have obtained the gift, it is a time for judgment and examination. Why does Christ say, 'You shall be baptized' (Acts 1:5), when there was no water in the upper room? Because the more essential part of Baptism is the Spirit, through Whom the water has its operation. In the same manner our Lord is said to be anointed, not that He had ever been anointed with oil, but because He had received the Spirit. We do in fact find them receiving a baptism with water, and a baptism with the Spirit, and these at different moments. In our case both take place under one act, but then they were divided. In the beginning they were baptized by John; if harlots and publicans went to that baptism, much rather would they who thereafter were to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Christ had already spoken much to the Apostles concerning the Spirit, that they should not imagine It to be an impersonal Energy or Operation. That the Apostles might not say that they were always having it held out to them in promises (John 14:15, 16), He added, 'not many days hence' (Acts 1:5). He did not explain when, that they might always watch; but, that it would soon take place, He told them, that they might not faint. Yet the exact time He refrained from adding, that they might always be vigilant."

Gregory Thaumaturgus stated⁵² that Paul was defining the Trinity in describing the work of God. That is, the Holy Spirit, the Word of Truth (the Son) and the Power of God (the Father). We on the other hand, are the Temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit in turn gives different gifts to each person.

John Chrysostom noted⁵³ that the Holy Spirit would not have come to take up residence in our human bodies, unless sins had first been remitted.

Cyril of Jerusalem encouraged⁵⁴ people to take advantage of the opportunities during Lent in order to receive grace more abundantly. Forgiveness is given equally to all, but the Holy Spirit is given in proportion to each man's faith and labor.

"The present is the season of confession; confess what you have done in word or in deed, by night or by day. Confess in an acceptable time, and in the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2) receive the heavenly treasure. Devote your time to the Exorcisms; be persistent at the Catechizing, and remember the things that are spoken, for they are spoken not for your ears only, but that by faith you may seal them up in the memory. Blot out from your mind all earthly care, for you are running for your soul. In utterly forsaking the things of the world little are the things, which you are forsaking; great is what the Lord is giving. Forsake things present, and put your trust in things to come. Have you been so busy in vain about the world, and have you not forty days to be free for prayer (that is, during Lent), for your own soul's sake? Be still, and know that I am God, (Psalm 46:10). Excuse

⁵² Gregory Thaumaturgus, "A Sectional Confession of Faith", *Dubious or Spurious Works*, II, 21.

⁵³ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts, XIII*, v. 32.

⁵⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, I, 5.

yourself from speaking many idle words; don't backbite or lend a willing ear to backbiters, but rather be prompt to prayer. Show in ascetic exercise that your heart has the nerve to persevere. Cleanse your vessel, that you may receive grace more abundantly. Though remission of sins is given equally to all, the communion of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in proportion to each man's faith. If you have labored little, you receive little; but if you have worked much, the reward is great."

Jerome noted⁵⁵ of old, 'My Spirit shall not abide in those men, because they are flesh' (Genesis 6:3). The Apostle Paul, speaking of the corrupt doctrine and works of the Jews⁵⁶, says, 'I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood' (Galatians 1:16). To the Saints, who, of course, were in the flesh, he says, 'But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you' (Romans 8:9). By denying that they were in the flesh, who clearly were in the flesh, he condemned not the substance of the flesh but its sins.

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁷ that the appointment of Teachers (Bishops) and Priests was done among the Apostles by the Holy Spirit and without human passion. This is part of what Paul meant in saying "By the Holy Spirit", and the Twelve did this even before they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

"The office of a Teacher and of a Priest is of great dignity, and to bring forward one that is worthy requires a divine election. So it was of old, and so it is now, when we make a choice without human passion, not looking to any temporal consideration, swayed neither by friendship or enmity. Though we are not partakers of so great a measure of the Spirit as the Apostles, yet a good purpose is sufficient to draw to us the election of God. The Apostles, when they elected Matthias, had not yet received the Holy Spirit, but having committed the matter to prayer, they chose him into their number. They didn't look to human friendships. So now it ought to be with us. But we have advanced to the extreme of negligence; and even what is clearly evident, we let pass. When we overlook what is clear, how will God reveal to us what is unseen? As it is said, 'If you have not been faithful in that which is little, who will commit to you that which is great and true?' (Luke 16:11) When nothing human was done, the appointment of Priests was by prophecy. What is 'by prophecy'? By the Holy Spirit! For prophecy is not only the telling of things future, but also of the present. It was by prophecy that Saul was discovered and chosen 'hidden among the equipment' (1 Samuel 10:22). For God reveals things to the righteous. So it was said by prophecy, 'Separate for me Barnabas and Saul' (Acts 13:2). In this way Timothy was chosen, concerning whom Paul speaks of prophecies in the plural; when he ordained him, as he himself says in his Epistle, 'Do not neglect the gift that is in you' (1 Timothy 4:14). Therefore to elevate him, and prepare him to be sober and watchful, he reminds him by whom he was chosen and ordained, as if he had said, 'God has chosen you.

⁵⁵ Jerome, "To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem", 28, Treatises.

⁵⁶ We sometimes think that Paul "not conferring with flesh and blood" refers to his not conferring with the other Apostles. Jerome interprets Paul's words differently, saying that they refer to the Jewish leaders who had sent Paul to Damascus.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, V, vv. 18-19.

He gave you your commission; this was not done by human vote. Do not therefore abuse or bring into disgrace the appointment of God”.

Leo the Great stated⁵⁸ that prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the things that were handed down from the Apostles that are most characteristic of Christianity. They bring other virtues into focus, display the image of God and unite us inseparably with the Holy Spirit.

“There are three things which most belong to Christian actions: namely prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In doing these things, while every time is accepted, yet they ought to be more zealously observed, since we have received them as hallowed by tradition from the Apostles. As the Day of Atonement comes around again to us, we have the opportunity according to the ancient practice to give more diligent heed to those three things. By prayer we seek to propitiate God, by fasting we extinguish the lusts of the flesh, and by alms we redeem our sins. At the same time the image of God is throughout renewed in us, if we are always ready to praise Him, unfailingly intent on our purification and unceasingly active in cherishing our neighbor. This threefold round of duty brings all other virtues into action; it attains to the image and likeness of God and unites us inseparably with the Holy Spirit. This happens because in prayer faith remains steadfast; in fasting life remains innocent; in almsgiving the mind remains kind. On Wednesday and Friday therefore let us fast: and on Saturday let us keep vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter, who will come to aid our supplications and fast and alms with his own prayers.”

Unfeigned Love

Paul stated, “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God...by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by unfeigned love” (2 Corinthians 6:3-4, 6). Many times we see love that expects something in return or love that is limited to times and circumstances. Paul is stating that his service to his Churches goes way beyond this.

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁹ that unfeigned love was the cause of all those good things we find in the Apostle Paul. This made him what he was; this caused the Spirit also to abide with him, by Whose aid all things were done so spectacularly by him.

Cyprian of Carthage encouraged⁶⁰ the righteous Cornelius in exile to maintain his love for the brethren, since love is our heavenly weapon and defense. Because of this we should be constant in fasting, watching and prayer.

“We earnestly exhort as much as we can, dearest brother, for the sake of the mutual love by which we are joined one to another. We are instructed by the providence of the Lord, who warns us, and we are admonished by the wholesome counsels of divine mercy, that the day of our struggle is already approaching. We should not cease to be instant with all the people in fasting, in watching, in prayers. Let us be urgent, with constant groaning and frequent prayers. These are our

⁵⁸ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XII, 4.

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2.

⁶⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Cornelius in Exile, LVI, 5.

heavenly weapons, which make us to stand fast and to persevere bravely. These are the spiritual defenses and divine weapons which defend us. Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if any one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go home first, our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy. I bid you, dearest brother, ever heartily farewell."

John Cassian stated⁶¹ that bodily exercise, such as fasting, is profitable for a little but the love of the brethren will continue forever in true unfeigned love. Bodily ascetic practices produce a beginning of progress, but not the perfection of love, which is needed to overcome the wickedness of men.

"Paul clearly spoke, when he said that 'bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness (by which he certainly means love) is profitable for all things, having the promise of this present life and of that which is to come' (1 Timothy 4:8). This clearly shows that bodily exercise won't be practiced for all time, and by itself cannot possibly confer the highest state of perfection on the man who slaves at it. For the term 'for a little' may mean either of the two things: (1) It may refer to the shortness of the time, because bodily exercise cannot possibly continue with man both in this life and in the world to come. (2) It may refer to the smallness of the profit which results from exercising the flesh. Bodily ascetic practices produce some sort of beginning of progress, but not the actual perfection of love, which has the promise of this present life and of that which is to come. Therefore we judge that the practice of works is needed, because without them we cannot climb the heights of love. Works of faith and mercy are needed in this life while these inequalities and differences of conditions still prevail. We don't expect them to be performed unless a large proportion of poor, needy, and sick folk abound, which is brought about by the wickedness of men. This refers to those who have grasped and kept for their own use those things which were granted to all by our Creator. As long as this inequality lasts in this world, this sort of work will be needed and will be useful to the man that practices it, as it brings to a good purpose the reward of an eternal inheritance. But it will come to an end in the life to come, where equality will reign, when there will be no longer inequality. All men will someday pass from these manifold practical works to the love of God, and contemplation of heavenly things in continual purity of heart. Those men, who are urgent in devoting themselves to knowledge and purifying the heart, have chosen to give themselves up with all their might, committing themselves, while they are still in the flesh, to that duty, in which they are to continue, when they have laid aside corruption. When they come to that promise of the Lord, they will know, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'" (Matthew 5:8).

The Word of Truth

Paul stated, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God...by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere

⁶¹ John Cassian, 1st Conference with Abbot Moses, I, 1, 10.

love, by the word of truth, by the power of God (2 Corinthians 6:3-4, 6-7). What are the implications of the “Word of Truth”?

Jesus had said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Thus the Truth is a person and we are His offspring. “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures” (James 1:18). As the first fruits of Christ, the Church is connected to Christ as a body is connected to a head (Colossians 1:18). Thus the Church is referred to as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). As the Church preaches, she proclaims the Truth.

The Truth is also the teachings of the Church, as being the teachings of Christ. Paul stated, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). “Since we have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, we love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22). As we obey the Truth, we are armed with the Truth. We “stand therefore, having girded our waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14). Of this Paul had said, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).

Clement of Alexandria stated⁶² that some people are given the gift to teach, expressing themselves verbally, while others are given the gift to study, expressing themselves in writing. One acts more like a herald while the other acts more like a messenger; both can expect a return for their effort. One proclaims the Word of Truth, the other divides the Word of Truth.

“Christ showed Himself, out of His abundance, dispensing goods to His servants according to their ability, that they may increase them by activity. He approved those that had increased His money, those faithful in little, and commanded them to have charge over many things, as He welcomed them into the joy of the Lord. But the servant with one talent hid the money, where He expected him to lend it out at interest; the servant gave it back as he had received it, without increase. He called this servant ‘wicked and lazy’; the useless servant ‘shall be cast into outer darkness’ (Matthew 25:26-30). Regarding this, Paul said, ‘Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men, who will be able to teach others’ (2 Timothy 2:1-2). Again, ‘Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2:15). If those who teach and those who study both proclaim the Word — the one by writing, the other by speech — are not both to be approved, making faith active by love? It is the business of some to lay out the word at interest, and of others to test it. There is that species of knowledge which is characteristic of the herald, and that which is characteristic of a messenger, and it is useful in whatever way it operates, both by the hand and tongue. ‘He who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. Let us not grow weary while doing good’ (Galatians 6:8-9). Divine Providence confers the impulse towards the truth, a movement of inquiry, a

⁶² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 1.

trace of knowledge; it gives the means of salvation. Those who have been rightly reared in the words of truth, and received provision for eternal life, wing their way to heaven.

Athanasius of Alexandria had⁶³ to fight for the Truth much of his life against the Arians, very much like Paul on his various missionary journeys. Athanasius spoke of singing Psalms when afflicted just like Paul (Acts 16:25) because the Lord considered him worthy to labor for the Truth. In our labor for the Truth, the Paschal Feast represents sincerity and truth, whereas heretics are strangers to the truth. Our struggles for truth are similar to the struggles of Israel at the time of the Exodus.

“The Jews at that time, although suffering an assault from the Edomites, and oppressed by the enemies of Jerusalem, did not give themselves up, but all the more sang praises to God. Similarly we, though hindered from speaking the word of the Lord, will the more proclaim it, and being afflicted, we will sing Psalms (James 5:13), in that we are accounted worthy to be despised, and to labor anxiously for the truth. Being grievously vexed, we will give thanks. Paul, who gave thanks at all times, urges us in the same manner to draw near to God saying, ‘Let your requests, with thanksgiving, be made known to God’ (Philippians 4:6). Being desirous that we should always continue in this resolution, he says, ‘At all times give thanks; pray without ceasing’ (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). He knew that believers are strong while employed in thanksgiving, and that rejoicing they pass over the walls of the enemy, like those saints who said, ‘Through You shall I be delivered from a troop; and by my God I will pass over a wall’” (Psalm 18:29 LXX).

“At all times let us stand firm, but especially now, although many afflictions overtake us, and many heretics are furious against us. Let us celebrate with thanksgiving the holy feast of Pascha which now draws near to us, ‘girding up the loins of our minds’ (1 Peter 1:13), like our Savior Jesus Christ, of Whom it is written, ‘Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His reins’ (Isaiah 11:5). Each one of us having in his hand the staff which came out of the root of Jesse, and our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15), let us keep the feast as Paul said, ‘Not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Corinthians 5:8). We reverently trust that we are reconciled through Christ, and do not depart from faith in Him. Nor do we defile ourselves together with heretics, and strangers to the truth, whose conversation and whose will degrade them. We rejoice in afflictions, we break through the furnace of iron (Deuteronomy 4:20) and darkness, and pass, unharmed, over that awesome Red Sea. Thus when we look upon the confusion of heretics, we shall, with Moses, sing that great song of praise, ‘We will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!’ (Exodus 15:1) Thus, singing praises, and seeing that the sin which is in us has been cast into the sea, we pass over to the wilderness. Being first purified by the fast of forty days, by prayers, fasting, discipline, and good works, we shall be able to eat the holy Passover in Jerusalem.”

⁶³ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, III, 5.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁴ that the things of the Old Testament were a fore shadow and a type, which all pointed to the Lord's Supper, which is the truth that sets the world free.

“As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and broke it’ (Matthew 26:26). Why can it have been that He ordained this sacrament then, at the time of the Passover? That you might learn from everything, both that He is the lawgiver of the Old Testament, and that the things contained therein are a fore shadow of these things. Therefore, I say, where the type is, there He puts the truth.

But the evening is a sure sign of the fullness of times, and that the things had now come to the end.

He gave thanks, to teach us how we ought to celebrate this sacrament, to show that He comes to the passion willingly, and to teach us whatever we may suffer to bear it thankfully, also suggesting good hope. If the type was a deliverance from such bondage, how much more will the truth set free the world, and how much more will He be delivered up for the benefit of our race. I would add that He didn't appoint the sacrament before this, but He appointed it when the rites of the Law were about to cease. Thus the chief of the feasts He brings to an end, moving them to another most awesome table, as He said, ‘Take, eat, This is my body, Which is broken for you’” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

The Power of God

Paul stated “that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). We have a need for humility in our relationship with God; we need to let Him work things out as He wills. Paul did this with great humility, and the result was outstanding miracles, where even handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from Paul's body to heal the sick (Acts 19:10-20) in a demonstration of the power of God.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁵ that Paul's life after his conversion truly exhibited the power of God, but there was more to it than just that. While the power he exhibited was beyond human diligence, it was the blamelessness of his life that brought everything about. The power without the blamelessness would not have attracted believers; similarly the blamelessness without the power would not have done much either. But the combination was potent!

“Paul stated, ‘I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God, which was given to me by the effective working of His power’ (Ephesians 3:7). He had said, ‘I am a prisoner’ (Ephesians 3:1); but now he says, that all is of God, ‘according to the gift of His grace’; for according to the power of the gift is the dignity of this privilege. But the gift would not have been enough, had it not also implanted in him power.”

“It was a work of mighty power and such as no human diligence was equal to. Paul brought three qualifications to the preaching of the word: a zeal that was fervent and bold, a soul ready to undergo any possible hardship, and knowledge and wisdom combined. His love of difficult projects, his blamelessness of life, would have done nothing, had he not also received the power of the Spirit. Look at it as seen first in himself, or rather hear his own words, ‘That our ministry might not be blamed’ (2 Corinthians 6:3). Again, ‘For our exhortation is not of error, nor

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXII, 1

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 7, Moral.

of uncleanness, nor in deceit, nor a cloak of covetousness' (1 Thessalonians. 2:3, 5). Thus you have seen his blamelessness.”

“Again, ‘We take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men’ (2 Corinthians 8:21). Besides these, ‘I affirm, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily’ (1 Corinthians 15:31). Again, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, anguish, or persecution?’ (Romans 8:35) Again, ‘We give no offense in anything, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in watching’ (2 Corinthians 6:3- 5). Then again, his prudence and management, ‘To the Jews I became as a Jew, to those that are without Law as without Law, to them that are under the Law as under the Law’ (1 Corinthians 9:20-21). He shaved his head also, (Acts 21:24-26). But the crown of all is in the power of the Holy Spirit. ‘I will not dare to speak’, he said, ‘of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me’ (Romans 15:18). Again, ‘What is it in which you were inferior to other churches?’ (2 Corinthians 12:13) Again, ‘In nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing’ (2 Corinthians 12:11). Without these things, the work would have been impossible.”

“It was not then by his miracles that men were made believers; nor was it upon the ground of these that he claimed his high calling, but upon those other grounds. A man must be both irreproachable in conduct, prudent and discreet in his dealings with others, regardless of danger, and apt to teach. It was by these qualifications that the greater part of his success was achieved. Where there were these, there was no need of miracles.”

Paul Met These Challenges in Different Ways

Paul’s ministry had an enormous impact on everyone who had contact with him. Unusual miracles accompanied him everywhere, such that a cottage industry even developed, with Jewish exorcists casting out demons by “the Jesus whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:11-17). But yet Paul did not maintain a high profile and a high consumption lifestyle, even though he had ample reason and opportunity like many evangelists today. Instead Paul humbly worked with his hands at his tent-making trade to provide financial support for himself and those who were traveling with him. Thus he worked six days a week and taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath and in the evening (Acts 17:2, 18:3-4). As he was hounded from city to city (Acts 14:19, 17:13), this left him no time at all to defend himself from the false charges that were spread around about him. He had to depend entirely on the working of the Holy Spirit to accomplish what he did.

By the Weapons of Righteousness

Paul stated, “But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God by the weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (2 Corinthians 6:7). The Greek word *hoplon* means a weapon, implement or tool. Paul also wrote to the Ephesians encouraging them to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11), where the Greek word there is *panoplia* (i.e. *pas* + *hoplon*), meaning all or every weapon, implement or tool. What Paul meant by this is not immediately obvious.

John Cassian gave⁶⁶ a very good and detailed summary of what Paul meant by the right hand and the left hand. He defined things on the right hand as spiritual achievements, while things on the left hand are spiritual trials, where some examples are shown in Table 1. Cassian used the term “ambidextrous” to refer to a man who could benefit equally well from either things on the right or things on the left. The Patriarchs Job and Joseph are good examples of “ambidextrous” men. The result of being “ambidextrous” is the acquisition of the weapons of righteousness.

“Ehud was described as being ambidextrous ‘equally adept with both of his hands’ (Judges 3:15 OSB LXX). We also can spiritually acquire this power, if by making a proper use of those things which are fortunate, and which seem to be ‘on the right hand’, as well as of those which are unfortunate and as we call it ‘on the left hand’. We can make them both belong to the right side, so that whatever turns up proves in our case, ‘the weapons of righteousness’ (2 Corinthians 6:7). The inner man consists of two parts, like two hands; none of the saints can do without what we call the left hand; by means of it the perfection of virtue is shown, where a man by skillful use can turn both hands into right hands. To make this clearer, the saint has for his right hand his spiritual achievements, and for his left hand, his spiritual failings (such as in Table 1). Anyone who is not puffed up through vainglory by any of those things on the right hand, and who struggles manfully against those on the left hand, and does not yield to despair, but rather seizes the armor of patience to practice himself in virtue — this man can use both hands to fight. In each action he proves triumphant and carries off the prize of victory from that condition on the left hand as well as that on the right.”

“Blessed Job was rewarded for a victory on the right hand. He was the father of seven sons and walked as a rich and wealthy man, yet offered daily sacrifices to the Lord for their purification, in his anxiety, that they might prove dear to God rather than dear to himself. He did this when his gates stood open to every stranger, when he was ‘feet to lame and eyes to blind’ (Job 29:15), when the shoulders of the suffering were kept warm by the wool of his sheep (Job

Table 1
Definition of Things on the Right and Left Hands

Right Hand	Left Hand
Spiritual Achievements	Spiritual Trials
Overcome desires and passions	Entangled in the labor of temptation
Free from all attacks of the devil	Inflamed with the heat of desire of lust
Easily rejects and cuts off all carnal sins	Set on fire by emotion towards rage and anger
Regards all earthly things as vain shadows	Overcome by being puffed up with pride
Longs for the future and actually sees it clearly	Loss of all spiritual warmth

⁶⁶ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Theodore, I, vi, 10.
See also Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 3.
John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2-3.
John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, XI, 4.
John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Moses, I, ii, 16.

Effectually fed on spiritual contemplations	Oppressed by a sorrow that works death
Heavenly mysteries are more brightly laid open	Shaken to pieces by the contrivances and attacks of accidental circumstances
Prayers to God with great purity and readiness	Grows indifferent with an unreasonable grief
Inflamed with fervent spirit; can pass with the utmost readiness of soul to things invisible and eternal, so as scarcely to believe that one any longer remains in the flesh	Forsaken by good thoughts; psalms, prayer, readings are uninteresting; all virtuous exercises seem by an intolerable and horrible loathing to have lost their savor

31:20), when he was a father to orphans and a husband to widows (Job 29:12), when he did not even in his heart rejoice at the fall of his enemy. With still greater virtue he triumphed over adversity on the left hand, when deprived in one moment of his seven sons he was not as a father overcome with grief, but as a true servant of God rejoiced in the will of his Creator. Instead of being a wealthy man he became poor, naked instead of rich, pining away instead of strong, despised and contemptible instead of famous and honorable. Yet he preserved his fortitude of mind unshaken, when robbed of all his wealth, and he took his place on the dunghill. Like some stern executioner of his own body, he scraped with a potsherd the pus that broke out, plunging his fingers deep into his wounds and dragging out on every side masses of worms from his limbs. In all this he never fell into despair and blasphemy or murmured against his Creator.”

“Job was not overcome by such a weight of bitterness. The cloak, his only remaining possession, which was saved from destruction by the devil only because he was clothed with it, he tore off; he covered his nakedness with it, which he voluntarily endured. The hair of his head, which was the only thing of his former glory left untouched, he shaved and threw to his tormentor. In addition, he mocked his savage foe with that celestial cry of his, ‘If we have received good at the hand of the Lord, should we not also receive evil? Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; as it has pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord’ (Job 1:21, 2:10).

Joseph was also ‘ambidextrous’; in prosperity he was very dear to his father, affectionate to his brethren, acceptable to God. In adversity he was chaste, and faithful to the Lord. In prison he was kind to the prisoners, forgetful of wrongs, generous to his enemies; to his brethren who were envious of him and as far as lay in their powers, his murderers, he proved not only affectionate but actually generous” (Genesis 42-45).

“These men then and those who like them are rightly called ambidextrous. They can use either hand as the right hand, and passing through those things which Paul enumerates can fairly say, ‘Through the weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, through honor and dishonor, through evil report and good report etc.’” (2 Corinthians 6:7-8).

“We shall then be ambidextrous, when neither abundance nor lack affects us, and when abundance does not entice us to the luxury of a dangerous carelessness, while lack of goods does not draw us to despair, and complaining. Giving thanks to God in either case alike, we gain one and the same advantage out

of good and bad fortune. Paul, that truly ‘ambidextrous’ man, the teacher of the Gentiles, testifies for himself, ‘For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know both how to be brought low and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’” (Philippians 4:11-13).

John Chrysostom spoke⁶⁷ to the people of Antioch during their fast⁶⁸ that they are sailors, soldiers, farmers, travelers and wrestlers. As sailors we ride the waves of extravagant desires; as soldiers we put on the spiritual armor of God; as farmers we cultivate our souls, cutting away thorns and producing much fruit; as travelers we are on the path that leads to heaven; and as wrestlers we strip ourselves of worldly entanglements.

“When the winter is over and the summer is appearing, the sailor takes his vessel out to the deep; the soldier polishes his armor, and makes ready his horse for battle; the farmer sharpens his sickle; the traveler boldly undertakes a long journey, and the wrestler strips himself for the contest. So too, when the fast makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers polish our weapons; as farmers let us sharpen our sickle; as sailors let us order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires; as travelers let us set out on the journey towards heaven; and as wrestlers let us strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a farmer, a sailor, a soldier, a wrestler, and a traveler. Paul said, ‘We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers. Put on therefore the whole armor of God’ (Ephesians 6:12-13). Have you observed the wrestler? Have you observed the soldier? If you are a wrestler, it is necessary for you to engage in the conflict naked. If a soldier, it behooves you to stand in the battle line armed at all points. How then are both these things possible, to be naked, and yet not naked; to be clothed, and yet not clothed! Divest yourself of worldly business, and you have become a wrestler. Put on the spiritual armor, and you have become a soldier. Strip yourself of worldly cares, for the season is one of wrestling. Clothe yourself with the spiritual armor, for we have a heavy warfare to wage with demons. Therefore we need to be naked, so as to offer nothing that the devil may take hold of, while he is wrestling with us; and to be fully armed at all points, so as on no side to receive a deadly blow. Cultivate your soul. Cut away the thorns. Sow the word of godliness. Propagate and nurse with much care the fair plants of divine wisdom, and you have become a farmer. Paul says to you, ‘The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops’ (2 Timothy 2:6). He himself practiced this art. Therefore he said, ‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:6). Sharpen your sickle, which you have blunted through gluttony — sharpen it by fasting. Lay hold of the pathway which leads towards heaven; rugged and narrow as it is, lay hold of it, and continue on your journey. How may you be able to do these things? By subduing your body, and bringing it into

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues*, III, 7.

⁶⁸ There had been a riot in Antioch, where statues of the Emperor and his wife were pulled down and dragged through the streets. The Emperor was about to send several Roman legions to massacre Antioch as punishment, and the Bishop of Antioch had gone to Rome to try to dissuade him. Meanwhile the people of Antioch were fasting and praying for mercy.

subjection. For when the path grows narrow, the corpulence that comes from gluttony is a great hindrance. Keep down the waves of unregulated desires. Repel the tempest of evil thoughts. Preserve the boat; display much skill, and you have become a pilot. We have the fast for a groundwork and instructor in all these things.”

By Honor and Dishonor

Paul stated, “But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God by honor and dishonor” (2 Corinthians 6:8). John Chrysostom stated⁶⁹ that where God is honored, there is nothing evil; as, on the contrary, where He is not honored, there is nothing good. But there is more to Paul’s reference to honor and dishonor than just this.

Chrysostom also spoke⁷⁰ of honor and dishonor from the worldly and from the godly point of view. The worldly man seeks honor and may or may not get it. The godly man doesn’t seek honor, and has his joy in dishonor, yet may receive honor anyway. The latter produces the greatest enjoyment.

“The Apostles were scourged, and they rejoiced; they were bound, and they gave thanks; they were stoned, and they preached. This is the joy I too would like to have; its origin comes from nothing bodily, but from spiritual things. It is not possible for him who joys after the fashion of the world, to rejoice also after a godly sort; for everyone who joys after the world’s fashion, has his joy in riches, luxury, honor, power, and arrogance. But he who rejoices after the mind of God, has his joy in dishonor for God’s sake, in poverty, want, fasting, and humbleness of mind. Do you see how opposite are the grounds for joy? To go without joy in this life, is to be without grief also; and to be without grief here, is to go without pleasure too. These are the things which produce real joy, since the others are joy in name only, but on the whole they consist of pain. What misery the arrogant man endures! He is cut short in the midst of his arrogance, calling down on himself numberless insults, hatred, enmity, spite, and many an evil eye! If he is insulted by greater men, he grieves; if he cannot make his stand against everybody, he is embarrassed. Whereas the humble man lives in much enjoyment, expecting honor from no one; if he receives honor, he is pleased, but if not, he is not grieved. He takes it contentedly that he is honored; but above all, no one dishonors him. Now not to seek honor, and yet to be honored, this is great enjoyment. But vice versa, it is just the reverse; he seeks honor, and is not honored. The pleasure that the honor gives is not the same to him who seeks it, as it is to him who doesn’t seek it. The one, however much he receives, thinks he has received nothing; the other, though you give him ever so little, takes it as though he had received everything.”

Thus the godly man can benefit from either honor or dishonor. He benefits from honor when does well in times of peace; he benefits from dishonor if he bears up well when everyone is against him.

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v. 25.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVI, vv. 6-7.

Chrysostom further stated⁷¹ that virtue living in a pious soul is not perturbed by worldly concerns such as honor and dishonor. The Apostles experienced this throughout their lives. As a rock he stands unmoved by either raging seas or perfect calm. Dishonor has no effect since the world has been crucified to him.

“Nothing can obtain the mastery over virtue; not wealth or poverty, dominion or subjection, preeminence in affairs, disease, contempt or abandonment. But having left all these things below on the earth, it hurries towards Heaven. Only let the soul be noble, and nothing can hinder it from being virtuous. When he who works is vigorous, nothing external can hinder him. In the arts, when the craftsman is experienced and persevering, thoroughly acquainted with his art, if disease overtakes him, he still has his ability; if he becomes poor, he still has it; whether he has his tools in his hand or not, whether he works or not, he doesn't lose his art at all, for the science of it is still contained within him. Thus too the virtuous man, who is devoted to God, displays his art, if you cast him into wealth or into poverty, into disease or into health, into dishonor or into great honor.”

“The Apostles were always working ‘by honor and dishonor, by good report and evil report’ (2 Corinthians 6:8). A true athlete is prepared for everything; such is also the nature of virtue. If you say, ‘I am not able to preside over many; I ought to lead a solitary life’, you insult virtue. Virtue can make use of every state, and shine through all. Only do this through the soul and not through the flesh! Is there a famine or is there abundance? It shows forth its own strength, as Paul said, ‘I know how to abound, and how to be in want’ (Philippians 4:12). He worked for two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) and was not ashamed. Did he have to undergo hunger? He didn't sink under it or waver. Did he have to bear death? He didn't become dejected; in everything he exhibited his noble mind. Let us imitate him and we shall have no cause of grief! Nothing will have power to grieve such a one. Suppose a good man has a wife, children, riches, and great honor; with all these things he remains virtuous. Take them away and again he will be virtuous, neither overwhelmed by his misfortunes, nor puffed up by prosperity. As a rock stands equally unmoved in the raging sea and in calm, neither broken by the waves nor influenced at all by the calm, thus too the solid mind stands firm both in calm and in storm. What can disturb the pious soul? Can death? This is the beginning of a better life. Can poverty? This helps her on toward virtue. Can disease? She doesn't pay attention to its presence. She regards neither ease, nor affliction; having dealt with it earlier, she has afflicted herself. Can dishonor? The world has been crucified to her. Can the loss of children? She doesn't fear it, when she is fully persuaded of the Resurrection. What then can surprise her? None of all these things! Does wealth elevate her? By no means, she knows that money is nothing. Does glory? She has been taught that ‘all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass’ (Isaiah 40:6 LXX). Does luxury? She has heard Paul say, ‘She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives’ (1 Timothy 5:6). The pious soul is neither inflamed nor cramped; what can equal such health as this?”

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XII, v. 17.

By Evil Report and Good Report

Paul stated, “In all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,⁸ by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report” (2 Corinthians 6:4, 7, 8).

John Chrysostom pointed out⁷² that the blameless lives of the Apostles stopped the mouths of their enemies. To attack them, their enemies created false and evil reports about their preaching, calling them deceivers and imposters. We would do well to imitate Paul since we are also lights in the world.

“Might not Paul’s enemies speak evil of his life without a cause from envy, especially since they were heathen? One wouldn’t expect this since even they reverence a man of blameless life. Why then does Paul say, speaking of himself, ‘Through evil report and good report?’ (2 Corinthians 6:8) It was not his life that they attacked, but his preaching. Therefore he says, ‘through evil report’. The Apostles were slandered as deceivers and impostors, on account of their preaching, and this because their enemies could not attack their moral character and their way of life. Why did no one say of the Apostles that they were fornicators, unclean, or covetous persons, but that they were deceivers, which relates only to their preaching? It has to be that their lives were irreproachable! This is clear!”

“Therefore let us too live this way, and no enemy, no unbeliever, will be able to speak evil of us. He, whose life is virtuous, is revered even by them. For truth stops the mouths even of enemies.”

“Let us then so live, that the name of God is not blasphemed. Let us not, on the one hand, look to human reputation; nor on the other hand, subject ourselves to an evil report, but on both sides let us observe moderation. Paul said, ‘Among whom you shine as lights in the world’ (Philippians 2:15). On this account He left us here, that we may be as luminaries, that we may be appointed teachers of others; that we may be as leaven. He desires us to converse as angels among men, as men with children, as spiritual men with natural men, that they may profit by us, that we may be as seed, and may bring forth much fruit. There would be no need of words, if we so shone forth in our lives; there would be no need of teachers, if we exhibited proper works. There would be no heathen, if we were such Christians as we ought to be. If we kept the commandments of Christ, if we allowed injury, if we allowed advantage to be taken of us, if being reviled we bless, if being persecuted we endure (1 Corinthians 4:12). If this were the general practice among us, no one would be so brutal as not to become a convert to godliness. To show this, Paul was but one man, yet how many did he draw after him? If we were all such as he, how many worlds might we not have drawn to us?”

Ambrose of Milan compared⁷³ the evil report and good report that Paul mentioned to the lives of Abraham, Job and David. The most important point is to be pleasing to Christ.

“Paul teaches us how to dung it, saying, ‘I count all things but dung, that I may gain Christ’ (Philippians 3:8), and he, through evil report and good report, attained to pleasing Christ. He had read that Abraham, when confessing himself to

⁷² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, X, v. 7.

⁷³ Ambrose of Milan, Two Books Concerning Repentance, II, 1, 4.

be but dust and ashes, in his deep humility found favor with God. He had read how Job, sitting among the ashes, regained all that he had lost (Job 42:10). He had heard in the utterance of David, how God ‘raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dunghill’ (Psalm 113:7).

Paul Was Characterized in Many Strange Ways

If Paul’s ministry was creating an enormous impact on everyone who had contact with him, and his enemies were attacking his ministry by calling him a deceiver, one can expect that there would be many strange ways that people perceived him. If he was hounded from city to city (Acts 14:19, 17:13), how was he characterized both to those who didn’t know him well and to those who did?

As a Deceiver, Even Though He Was True

A good example of what Paul was saying can be illustrated by Gregory the Great, writing to the Emperor’s sister, Theoctista. Gregory stated⁷⁴ that Christians can expect slander from the world. The enemies of God create an evil report on Christians since they cannot attack their righteous conduct. God allows this as a check on pride that might spring up in the hearts of Christians. If Christ Himself and the Apostle Paul were called deceivers, yet they were true, it is logical that we might experience this also.

“Seeing then that we know from the witness of Scripture that in this life the good cannot be without the bad, your Excellency ought by no means to be disturbed by the voices of fools. There is then sure confidence in Almighty God, when for well-doing any adversity is given us in this world in order that a full reward may be reserved for us in the eternal retribution. The Truth says, ‘Blessed shall you be when men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My Name’s sake’ (Matthew 5:11). For our consolation He cited as an example His own reproaches, saying, ‘If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household’” (Matthew 10:25).

“There are many who perhaps praise the life of the good more than they ought. Lest any pride should creep in from praise, Almighty God allows bad men to break out into slander and rebuke, in order that, if any sin springs up in the heart from the mouth of them that praise, it may be choked by the mouth of them that revile. Paul testifies that he continues in his preaching ‘through evil report and good report’ (2 Corinthians 6:8); saying also, ‘As deceivers and yet true’. If then there were such as laid an evil report on Paul, and called him a deceiver, what Christian now should account it a hard thing in behalf of Christ to hear injurious words? We know of how great virtue was the precursor of our Redeemer (i.e. John the Baptist), who in the Scriptures is called not only more than a prophet, but even an angel⁷⁵. As the history of his death testifies, after his death his body was burned by his persecutors⁷⁶. Why do we say these things of holy men? Let us speak of the Holy of Holies Himself, that is of God Who was made man for us, Who before His

⁷⁴ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, *Epistle to Theoctista*, XI, 45.

⁷⁵ In Malachi 3:1, the Forerunner (John) is called a messenger or angel, where the word can be translated either way.

⁷⁶ See Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, c. 6. The burned body of John the Baptist was taken by his disciples at night and buried.

death heard the injurious charge that He had a demon, and after His death was called a deceiver by His persecutors. They said, ‘We know that that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again’ (Matthew 27:63). How much, then, must we sinners bear from the tongues and hands of wicked men, we who are to be judged at the coming of the eternal Judge, if He Who will come as Judge endured so much both before and after His death?”

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁷ that the demons lay snares especially for Christians who exhibit a blameless life. They may try to paint us as deceivers as we let our light shine, and they will trumpet this if we fall into sin. But generally the heathen will admire a virtuous life.

“Let us too live like the Apostles Paul and Timothy, and no enemy, no unbeliever, will be able to speak evil of us. For he whose life is virtuous, is revered even by them. For truth stops the mouths even of enemies.”

“Paul stated regarding prospective Bishops, ‘He must have a good report among those who are outside (the Church); lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the demons’ (1 Timothy 3:7). But how does he ‘fall into a snare?’ He does this by falling often into the same sins as those who are outside the Church. If he is like this, the evil one soon lays another snare for him, and they soon cause his destruction. But if he has a good report from his enemies, much more will he have it from his friends. It is not likely that he, whose life is blameless, should have an evil report on his life. We may infer this from the words of Christ; ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in Heaven’ (Matthew 5:16). But what if one is falsely accused, and slandered from peculiar circumstances? This is a possible case; but such accusations ought not to be supported within the Church. Therefore it is said he should have ‘a good report’, for your good works are to shine. No one will say that the sun is dark, not even the blind, for he will be ashamed to oppose the opinion of everyone; so him that is of remarkable goodness, no one will blame. On account of his teaching, the heathen will often slander a good man; yet they will not attack his virtuous life, but will join with others in admiring and revering it.”

As Unknown, Even Though He Was Well Known

Being unknown and well-known at the same time may seem like a logical impossibility. John Cassian noted⁷⁸ that Christians can very easily be both unknown and well-known at the same time. They may be unknown regarding worldly pursuits, and yet well-known for their love for one another.

“Never forget these words of the Lord, ‘By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, that you love one another’ (John 13:36). By this, as by a special mark, Christ willed that the flock of His sheep should be known in this world, and be separated from all others by this stamp, so to speak.”

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁹ that Paul’s words, “As unknown and yet well-known” refer back to his words, “By honor and dishonor” (2 Corinthians 6:8-9). By some people (the Christians),

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, X, v. 7.

⁷⁸ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Joseph, II, xvi, 6.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 4.

the Apostles were well-known and much sought after. Others (the Jews and the heathen) preferred not to know them at all.

As Dying, and Behold We Live

Paul had written earlier in this letter to Corinth, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. We, who live, are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake; that the life of Jesus also may be revealed in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:8-11).

Regarding Paul’s concern for the Corinthian Church, he said, “I affirm, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). Paul thought the world of the love that the Corinthians had for one another, and he boasted of this to others even though the Corinthians had many problems. Later Paul stated regarding all his efforts, besides weariness, watching, hunger, fasting, “besides these other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the Churches” (2 Corinthians 11:27-28). Thus one aspect of Paul’s reference to dying is an inward death.

John Chrysostom, speaking to the people of Antioch after the riot over the statues⁸⁰, where people feared Roman retaliation, encouraged⁸¹ the people to focus on righteousness instead of focusing on avoiding death.

“If we do not wish to live so as to please God, it is better to die. Otherwise what is the gain? What more will we have? Every day we see the same sun, the same moon, the same winter, the same summer, the same course of things. ‘That which has been is what will be. That which is done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun’ (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Let us not then pronounce those happy, who are alive, and bewail the dead, but let us weep for those who are in their sins, whether they are dead or alive. On the other hand, let us call those happy in whatever condition they are, who are in a state of righteousness. We fear and lament ‘one’ death; but Paul, who was dying daily (1 Corinthians 15:31), was so far from shedding a tear on that account, that he rejoiced and exulted even though dying!”

Chrysostom also stated⁸² that Paul’s comment about “dying and behold we live” referred to death sentences imposed on him⁸³, which he escaped by God’s help.

“Paul was under sentence of death and condemned numerous times; which was itself also a matter of dishonor. Paul said this to show both the unspeakable power of God and the patience of the Corinthians. So far as those who plotted against them were concerned, they died; and this is what everyone supposed; but by God’s aid they escaped the dangers.”

⁸⁰ This series of homilies were addressed to the people of Antioch after a popular uprising tore down the statues of the Emperor and his wife, and dragged them through the city. The people were expecting a Roman Division to massacre the city to put down the revolt.

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues*, VI, 8.

⁸² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XII, 4.

⁸³ For example, at Damascus (Acts 9:23-25), at Jerusalem (Acts 9:29-30, 23:12), at Iconium (Acts 14:5), at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20), at Rome (2 Timothy 4:6-7)

As Chastened, and Yet Not Killed

Paul stated that he was unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:9-10). In many ways, Paul’s life was similar to that of King David, who said, “The Lord has chastened me severely⁸⁴, but He has not given me over to death” (Psalm 118:18).

John Chrysostom pointed out⁸⁵ that Paul’s enemies were actually doing him a service by hounding and persecuting him, because all their efforts were directed to revealing Paul’s godliness.

“To make clear why God permits these things, Paul added, ‘As chastened, and not killed’ (2 Corinthians 6:9). Paul showed that the gain he received from his enemies from their temptations was great, even before the rewards at the Second Coming, and that his enemies against their will did him service.”

Athanasius of Alexandria applied⁸⁶ Paul’s words, “chastened but not killed” to the fasting and watching customary in the Church during Holy Week.

“It is so fitting for the feast, a turning from wickedness, a pure conversation, and prayer offered without ceasing to God, with thanksgiving. Therefore let us, my brethren, looking forward to celebrate the eternal joy in heaven, keep the feast here also, rejoicing at all times, praying incessantly, and in everything giving thanks to the Lord. I give thanks to God, for those other wonders He has done, and for the various helps that have now been granted us. Though He has chastened us severely, He did not deliver us over to death, but brought us from a distance, as from the ends of the earth, and has united us again with you. I have been mindful while I keep the feast, to give you notice of the great feast of Pascha, that so we may go up together, as it were, to Jerusalem, and eat the Passover, not separately but as in one house. Let us not as saturated in water, water down the word of God; neither let us, as having broken its bones, destroy the commands of the Gospel. But as roasted with fire, with bitterness, being fervent in spirit, in fasting and watching, with lying on the ground, let us keep the Feast with penitence and thanksgiving.”

As Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁷ that those outside the Church got a wrong impression of Paul’s character. They thought that he was sad and in despair because he had lost all his possessions.

“To those that are outside the Church, we are suspected of being in despair; but we don’t pay any attention to them. We have our pleasure at the full. Paul said not ‘rejoicing’ only, but added also its perpetuity, ‘always rejoicing’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). What then can come up to this life? Although dangers so great assaulted him, the joy became greater.”

⁸⁴ Psalms 113 to 118 were used for the Old Testament Passover Liturgy, and Psalm 118 is also used at many times in Orthodox services. According to tradition, this Psalm was the one sung by Jesus and His disciples before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 4.

⁸⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XIX, 8.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 4.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁸⁸ that the world is like a rough sea to us and we float on it with the wind of our own freewill. Piloted by the Word we reach rest; directed by pleasure, we are in danger and may suffer shipwreck. We may be tempted like Abraham, suffer like Job or become oppressed like Joseph; in all this, we rejoice and leap over the wall of wickedness.

“Let us, in the faith of the disciples, frequently speak with our Master. The world is like the sea to us, of which it is written, ‘On this is the great and wide sea, there go the ships, and this dragon, whom You have made to play in it’ (Psalm 104:25-26 LXX). We float on this sea, as with the wind, through our own freewill, for everyone directs his course according to his will. Either piloted by the Word, he enters into rest, or seized by pleasure, he suffers shipwreck, and is in peril by storm. As in the ocean there are storms and waves, so in the world there are many afflictions and trials. The unbeliever therefore ‘when affliction or persecution arises is offended’ (Mark 4:17), as the Lord said. Not being confirmed in the faith, and focusing on temporal things, he cannot resist the difficulties that arise from afflictions. Like that house, built on the sand by the foolish man (Luke 6:49), so he, being without understanding, fails at the assault of temptations, as if by the winds. But the saints, having their senses exercised in self-possession (Hebrews 5:14), and being strong in faith, and understanding the word, do not faint under trials. Although, from time to time, circumstances of greater trial are set against them, yet they continue faithful; awaking the Lord, Who is with them, they are delivered. Passing through water and fire, they find relief and keep the Feast; offering up prayers with thanksgiving to God Who has redeemed them. Either being tempted they are known, like Abraham; or suffering they are approved, like Job; or being oppressed and deceitfully treated, like Joseph, they patiently endure it; or being persecuted, they are not overtaken. As it is written, through God they ‘leap over the wall’ (Psalm 18:29) of wickedness, which divides and separates between brethren, and turns them from the truth. In this manner Paul, when he took pleasure in infirmities, in reproach, in necessities, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ, rejoiced, and wished all of us to rejoice saying, ‘Rejoice always; in everything give thanks’” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

As Poor Yet Making Many Rich

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁹ that one aspect of being poor, yet making many rich is the hospitality that the Apostles received on their missionary journeys in the homes of the faithful.

“Some say that spiritual riches are spoken of here; but I would say that the carnal riches are spoken of also; for the Apostles were rich in these, having the houses of everyone opened to them (Matthew 10:11-13, Luke 10:8). And this too he signified by what follows, saying, ‘As having nothing, and yet possessing all things’” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

John Chrysostom also stated⁹⁰ that there was great spiritual benefit for the Apostles at being poor, and there is also benefit for us. The Apostles were honored by kings and by their fellow

⁸⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, XIX, 7.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XII, 4.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, XI, Moral.

Christians for despising wealth; they became truly rich from His grace. Worldly things are merely on loan to us; the only things that are truly ours are the things like almsgiving and charity that we send ahead of us to the next world.

“Was not the whole world opened to the Apostles more than to kings? Were not all things laid at their feet? Were they not appointed rulers and lords, directing the affairs of the Church? Did not men commit their lives into their hands, suspend themselves wholly on their counsel, and enlist in their service? Do we not see many similar occurrences now? Many men of poor and humble means have been celebrated above all others, and honored by kings, even though they only handle the spade, and have just barely enough food, but have the character of monks. Consider that the things of this life are only an addition to us as an afterthought, the principal sum being stored up for the life to come. Despise riches, if you want to have riches; if you want to be truly rich, become poor. Such are the paradoxes of God. He does not want you to be rich from your own care, but from His grace. Leave these things to Me, He says; make spiritual things your concern, that you may know My power. Run from that yoke of slavery that riches impose. As long as you cling to them, you are poor. When you despise them, you are doubly rich, in that such things shall flow in upon you from every side, and in that you shall want none of those things, which the multitude wants. Not possessing much, but needing little, is to be really rich. The king, so long as he lacks nothing, doesn't differ from the poor man. This is poverty, to stand in need of others; and by this argument the king is poor, in so far as he stands in need of his subjects. But he that is crucified to the world is not so; he lacks nothing; for his hands are sufficient for his subsistence, as Paul said, ‘These hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me’ (Acts 20:34). These are his words, ‘As having nothing, yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). This is he who was thought a God by the inhabitants of Lystra (Acts 14:10-11). If you want to obtain worldly things, seek Heaven; if you want to enjoy things here, despise them. ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’, He said, ‘and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). Why do you admire these trifles? Why do you long for things of no real worth? Raise your eyes to heaven, think of the riches there, and smile at gold; think of how little use it is; the enjoyment of it lasts but for the present life. Compared with eternity, the present life is as a grain of sand, or as a drop of water to the boundless ocean. This wealth is not a possession, it is not property, it is a loan for use. When you die, willingly or unwillingly, all that you have goes to others, and they again give it up to others. We are all travelers; and the tenant of the house is more truly the owner of it; for the owner dies, and the tenant lives, and still enjoys the house. And if the tenant leases it, the owner might be said to lease it also; for he built it, took great pains with it, and fixed it up. We are all owners in fact of other men's possessions. Those things only are our own, which we have sent ahead of us to the other world. Our goods here are not our own; they fail us during our lives. Only the virtues of the soul are properly our own, like almsgiving and charity. Worldly goods are called external things, because they are external to us. But we can make them internal. We cannot take our wealth with us when we depart, but we can take our charity. Let us send that ahead of us, that it may prepare for us a dwelling in the eternal mansions” (Luke 16:9).

In addition, Chrysostom addressed⁹¹ the difference between wealth under the Old Covenant, which was tied to faithfulness as a nation, and poverty under the New Covenant. Godliness is the focus of both, but godliness as a nation of the world is missing under the New Covenant. We can see the same way of life among the Prophets and Patriarchs taken up by the Apostles, where they may be poor, but they are able to make many rich. Poverty becomes not a disgrace, the way it was identified with unfaithfulness under the Old Covenant, but a path that leads to heaven.

“Solomon said, ‘the wisdom of the poor man is despised’ (Ecclesiastes 9:16). Again, ‘Give me neither poverty nor riches’ (Proverbs 30:8), and, ‘Deliver me from the furnace⁹² of poverty’. Again, if riches and poverty are from the Lord, how can either poverty or riches be an evil? Why were these things said? Under the Old Covenant, much account made of wealth, and there was great contempt of poverty; poverty was a curse and wealth was a blessing⁹³. But it is no longer so.”

“Listen to the praises of poverty! Christ sought after it, ‘The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’ (Matthew 8:20). Again He said to His disciples regarding their missionary journeys, ‘Provide neither gold nor silver in your money belts, nor a spare tunic’ (Matthew 10:9, 10). Paul wrote, ‘As having nothing and yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). Peter said to him who was lame from his birth, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you’ (Acts 3:6). Under the Old Covenant, where wealth was a blessing, who was admired? Was not Elijah, who had nothing except the sheepskin? Was not Elisha and John the Baptist?”

“Let no man then be humiliated on account of his poverty! It is not poverty that humiliates, but wealth, which compels us to have need of many, and forces us to be under obligations to many.”

“What could be poorer than Jacob, who said, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on’ (Genesis 28:20). Were Elijah and John the Baptist lacking in boldness? The one reproved Ahab, and the other reproved Herod. John said, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother Philip’s wife’ (Mark 6:18). Elijah said to Ahab boldly, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord’ (1 Kings 18:18). Poverty especially produces boldness. While the rich man is a slave, being subject to loss, and to everyone wishing to hurt him; he who has nothing, doesn’t fear confiscation or fine. If poverty had made men to lack boldness, Christ would not have sent His Apostles with poverty on missionary journeys requiring great boldness. The poor man is very strong, and has nothing from which he may be wronged or treated evil. But the rich man is attacked on every side, just like someone could easily catch a man, who was dragging long ropes after him. On the other hand, one could not easily catch a naked man. So here also in the case of the rich man: slaves, gold, lands,

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XVIII, 4-5.

⁹² Isaiah refers to the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10); Chrysostom extends affliction to poverty.

⁹³ Under the Old Covenant, the Lord’s blessing was on the Land of Israel so long as the people were faithful and didn’t go after idols. Prosperity was part of this blessing, and generosity to the poor was required. The penalty for not being faithful was a lack of prosperity and a curse.

innumerable business affairs, innumerable cares, difficult circumstances, necessities, make him an easy prey to everyone.”

“Let no man then regard poverty a cause of disgrace. If virtue is present, all the wealth of the world is not even a speck in comparison to it. Let us follow after this if we want to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). Again, ‘It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 19:23). Even if we don’t have poverty, we ought to draw it to us; so great a good is poverty. It guides us by the hand, as it were, on the path which leads to Heaven; it is an anointing for the combat, a great and admirable exercise, a quiet harbor.”

As Having Nothing Yet Possessing All Things

In the Early Church right after Pentecost, “The multitude of believers was of one heart and soul; neither did any of them say that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32). “Each person who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the Apostles’ feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:34-35). In this spirit, the notion of having nothing yet possessing all things represented the life of the Church from the beginning.

Jerome gave⁹⁴ other examples of “having nothing but possessing all things”. The Patriarch Jacob left home with nothing to seek a godly wife 800 miles away and returned with great wealth. The Apostles traveled around with nothing, yet they saw things and did things that no amount of wealth could accomplish.

“Jacob in his flight from his brother left behind in his father’s house great riches and made his way with nothing into Mesopotamia. Moreover, to prove to us his powers of endurance, he took a stone for his pillow (Genesis 28:11). Yet as he lay there he saw a ladder set up on the earth reaching to heaven and saw the Lord standing above it, and the angels ascending and descending on it. The lesson taught is that the sinner must not despair of salvation, and the righteous man must not rest secure in his virtue. To pass over much of the story, after twenty years, he who before had passed over Jordan with his staff returned into his native land with three droves of cattle, rich in flocks and herds and richer still in children.”

“The Apostles likewise traveled throughout the world without either money in their purses, or staff in their hands, or shoes on their feet; they could speak of themselves as ‘having nothing and yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). ‘Silver and gold’, they say, ‘we none, but what we do have we give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk’ (Acts 3:6). They were not weighed down with the burden of riches. Therefore they could stand, as Moses, in the crevice of the rock (Exodus 33:21-22), they could pass through⁹⁵ the needle’s eye, and behold the back parts of the Lord” (Exodus 33:23).

⁹⁴ Jerome, Letter to Ageruchia, CXXIII, 15.

⁹⁵ Jesus gave an illustration of camels and needles (Matthew 19:24-26) that has been little understood in our generation. The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and flame proofing. At night, the gates were closed and locked with a bar on the inside and not opened until morning. Travelers that arrived late in the day after the gates were closed were forced to spend the night outside the city unless

Ambrose of Milan noted⁹⁶ in the lives of the Apostles how they had nothing in earthly possessions but possessed all things via the riches of faith.

“The Apostles wandered over the whole earth, ‘having nothing and yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). Wherever they were sent, they considered it a place full of delights, for nothing was lacking to them in whom the riches of faith abounded. They enriched others, being themselves poor as to earthly means, but rich in grace. They were tried but not killed, in fasting, labors, watching, and vigils. Out of weakness they came out strong (2 Corinthians 12:9). They did not wait for the enticements of pleasure, who were satiated by fasting; the burning summer did not parch those whom the hope of eternal grace refreshed. The cold of icy regions did not break them down, whose devotion was always budding with glowing devotion; they didn’t fear the chains of men whom Jesus had set free; they didn’t desire to be rescued from death, who expected to be raised again by Christ.”

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁷ that unbelievers, who see only physical things, can get a mistaken impression of the true Christian, seeing the work but not the rewards. Paul, who had nothing, was treated like an angel by the Churches; any physical thing he needed they would gladly give him. Because of his faithfulness, the Lord gave him incredible spiritual riches also.

“Paul spoke of ‘having nothing, and yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). How can this be? We might rather ask, how can the opposite be? He that possesses many things has nothing; and he that has nothing possesses the goods of everyone. To understand this, let us bring out Paul into our midst, who commanded the world and was lord not only of their substance, but even of their eyes. ‘If possible’, he says, ‘you would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me’ (Galatians 4:15). Now these things he says, to instruct us not to be disturbed at the opinions of the many, though they call us deceivers, though they don’t know us, though they count us condemned, appointed for death, in sorrow, in poverty, having nothing. Even the sun is not clear to the blind; the pleasures of the sane are unintelligible to the mentally ill. The faithful are the only proper judges of these matters, and are not pleased and pained at the same things as other people. Suppose someone who knew nothing of the Olympic Games were to see a boxer, with wounds on him but wearing a crown. He would think the boxer would be in

there was some provision for them to get into the city. Outside the city, law and order did not exist at night and travelers were at the mercy of outlaws. This is still the case today in some third world countries.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a “needle’s eye gate” which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed⁹⁵ on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus. See Weiss, *Insight into Bible Times and Customs*, pp. 24-25. A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weigh up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

The statement Jesus made, that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle’s eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, made use of this imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden.

⁹⁶ Ambrose of Milan, *Letter to Limenius, Bishop of Versellae*, LXIII, 69.

⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XII, 4.

pain on account of the wounds; not understanding the pleasure the crown would give him. Because unbelievers know what we suffer but do not know why we suffer them, naturally they suspect that there is nothing besides these; they see the wrestling and the dangers, but not the prizes and the crowns.”

“Possessing all things involves temporal things and spiritual things. Paul, whom the cities received as an angel, for whom they would have plucked out their own eyes and have given them to him (Galatians 4:14, 15), for whom they laid down their own necks (Romans 16:4), how had he not all things that were theirs? If you desire to see his spiritual things, you will find him rich in these things also. He that was so close to the King of all as even to share in unspeakable things with the Lord of the angels (2 Corinthians 12:4). Devils had been so subject to him that suffering and disease had fled away” (Acts 19:11-17).

Words of Reconciliation

Reconciliation was very apropos for Corinth because of all that Paul had been through with them. This letter came following a period of apostolic discipline and Paul was writing, in part, to reconcile all the factions. For more details on the factions, see the Study of the Epistle lesson for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost.

Having been through a great deal with the Corinthians, Paul’s aim was to reconcile all the factions back to himself and back to a good relationship with God. First he quickly passed over his dedication to the work of God. Paul would come back to this giving more details toward the end of this Epistle (2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Having said all this regarding his dedication to the work of God, Paul went on to say, “O Corinthians, we have spoken openly to you; our heart is wide open. You are not crushed (or restricted) by us, but by your own feelings. For a mutually rewarding situation, it would help if you also were wide open” (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). Chrysostom paraphrased⁹⁸ this:

“We cannot endure to be silent toward you but we always desire and long to speak to you, which is the desire of those who love. We speak to you on all points with freedom as to beloved people, suppressing nothing, reserving nothing. For virtue is warm and fervent. He that is beloved can walk with great unrestraint within the heart of him that loves. I ask no great thing if, being your father, (1 Corinthians 4:15) I wish to be loved by you”. Thus Paul addressed them as his own children (2 Corinthians 6:13).

Before Paul wrote this letter, he had left Ephesus for Macedonia figuring to visit Corinth after visiting the Churches in Macedonia. Yet he was uncertain as to how the Corinthians had received his previous admonitions. While in Macedonia, Paul met Titus who was returning from Corinth; Titus gave Paul the good news that the Corinthians had received his last letter very well. Thus relieved, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in a spirit of reconciliation and his subsequent visit to Corinth was a particularly joyful reunion of father and children.

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, 1.