

DECEPTION
CONFESSION and JUSTIFICATION

February 17, 2008
Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican
Revision E

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

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

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

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

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

Deceivers Who Are Also Deceived

Paul stated, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). Paul gives an example of who these evil men are: Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian magicians¹ who resisted Moses, “As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the Faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

The Magicians Who Opposed Moses

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

Pharaoh’s heart had hardened and he wouldn’t listen to Moses and Aaron; thus began the ten plagues. Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate the first two plagues (see Table 1), but not the third and following. They reported to Pharaoh that the third and following was “the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19), but Pharaoh wouldn’t listen. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote²,

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

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

Paul comments that people who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, and who have a form of piety, but deny its power will come into contact with Timothy. Like Jannes and Jambres, they will have corrupt minds, having the characteristics Paul described (2 Timothy 3:2-4; 1 Timothy 6:3-5), and will resist the Truth. Paul refers to them as “evil men and impostors,

¹ Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 554.

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

² Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, XI, 6-7.

deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 8:13). Yet, Paul says, “They will advance no farther, for their folly will be clear to everyone as was that of Jannes and Jambres, when Egypt was destroyed by the plagues and in the Red Sea” (2 Timothy 3:9).

Table 1
Egyptian Plagues Duplicated by Jannes and Jambres

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

John Chrysostom pointed out³ that this may seem contradictory, since Paul had just said, “They will increase to more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16).

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

John Chrysostom stated⁴ that God allows magicians and imposters to rise up in order to show their limits compared to those of God. In this way, imposters do us good. In any encounters, we should concentrate on our relationship with God and not concern ourselves with what people might think.

“God allowed the magicians, who opposed Moses, on purpose in order that Moses might not be suspected of being a magician. He let these magicians teach all men to what length magic can go in making a fantastic show; beyond this point they could not deceive, but themselves confessed their defeat. Impostors do us no harm, rather they do us good, if we will apply our mind to the matter. If we are partners with them in the eyes of the people, let us remember

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 9.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XLVI, v. 38.

that the people don't have good judgment, and we should not care what they think. To God we live, not to men; in heaven we have our conversation, not on earth. In heaven are the awards and the prizes of our labors; there we look for our praises, there for our crowns. Let us not trouble ourselves about men, that we do not give them an opportunity against us. If they choose to accuse us thoughtlessly and without discrimination, let us laugh, not weep. 'Provide honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men' (2 Corinthians 8:21); if you provide honorable things, yet that man derides you for it, give yourself no more concern for that. You have your patterns in the Scriptures. Paul said, 'do I now persuade men or God?' (Galatians 1:10), and again, 'We persuade men, but we are well known to God' (2 Corinthians 5:11). Christ spoke of those that take offense, 'Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14); and again, 'Woe to you, when all men speak well of you' (Luke 6:26); and again, 'Let your works shine, that men may see, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). Also, 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea' (Matthew 18:6). These sayings are not contrary; they are very much in agreement. When we offend God, woe to that man who blasphemes the Name of God! (Romans 2:24). What then if I do what is right in anything, but another blasphemes? That is nothing to me, but only to him; for through him God was blasphemed. How is it possible to do what is right in anything, and, yet give an opportunity for blasphemy? I'll give examples. Paul supported Judaism in Jerusalem, but not so in Antioch; he supported Judaism, and they were offended⁵, but they had no right to be offended. Paul is said to have greeted both Nero's cupbearer and his concubine; what do you think they must have said against him because of this? But they had no right to do so. If he drew them to himself for the purpose of loose living or any wicked acts, one might well be offended; but if he drew them to right living, what is there to be offended at?"

The Deception of Adam and Eve

The Church Fathers have referred to the deception of Adam and Eve many times, and this deception set a pattern for future generations. Adam and Eve had been established in Eden, the Paradise of God, among every tree that was beautiful and edible. There, the Lord planted the Tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam's job in Eden was to cultivate it and guard it. Cultivation was not difficult since there were no thorns or briars. The only thing to guard was the Law that God gave him (Genesis 2:16-17). Tertullian described⁶ the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) as having been given in embryo to Adam in Eden. Clothed in the glory of God, theirs was a trouble-free life similar to that of the angels. This is similar to the life of the righteous after the Lord returns, where they will shine with the glory of God (Daniel 12:3, Matthew 13:43). Blessed and created in His image, Adam began his rule over the earth and all things on the earth (Genesis 1:27-30).

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

⁶ Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, iii, 2.

Adam could eat freely from any of the trees in Eden, except one. God set this up⁷ as a test for Adam's faith. God, in His Goodness, gave them all of Paradise so that they were under no constraint to transgress the Law. In His justice, He wanted to give them immortal life from eating of the Tree of Life. If they would willingly reject the temptation to disobey the Lord's commandments, and reject the serpent along with sin, they would have eaten from the Tree of Life and the tree of knowledge would not have been withheld from them. In order that Adam would have to go out of his way to do this, the temptation came via a serpent, who was utterly despicable and hideous, rather than via an angel or some other attractive being. In order that hunger would not be the temptation, temptation came before they knew what hunger was. Therefore, it was out of their own avarice that they followed the counsel of the serpent. If they had been victorious in this one momentary battle, they would have had by Justice all that had been given to them by Grace.

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

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

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

John Cassian stated⁸ that the devil fell from grace twice: once out of pride before Adam and Eve, and a second time out of envy as a result of his deception of Eve. The lesson we learn

⁷ Ephraim of Syria, Commentary on Genesis.

⁸ John Cassian, Second Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, viii, 10-11, 17.

from this is that while deceivers are punished, so are those who yield to the deceit. To guard us against deceit, an angel accompanies every person, such that we always have a choice whether we will yield to the deceit.

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

“We learn a special lesson from the fact that though the author of the deception obtained a fitting punishment and condemnation, yet still the ones who were led astray (Adam and Eve) did not escape punishment, although it was somewhat lighter than the author of the deception. We see this very plainly expressed. For Adam, who was deceived, or rather acquiesced to the wishes of her who was deceived, yielded a consent that was deadly, is only condemned to labor and the sweat of his brow. This was assigned to him not as a curse on himself, but as a curse on the ground, and its barrenness. But the woman, who persuaded him to this, obtained an increase of anguish, pain and sorrow, and also given the yoke of perpetual subjection. But the serpent, who incited them to this offense, is punished by a lasting curse. Therefore we should be on our guard against evil counsels; while they bring punishment on their authors, they do not allow those, who are deceived by them, to go free⁹ from guilt and punishment.”

“Scripture bears witness that two angels, a good and a bad one, cling to each one of us. Of the good ones Jesus said, ‘Do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 18:10); and this also, ‘The angel of the Lord will encamp round about them that fear him, and will deliver them’ (Psalm 34:7). This is also what was said of Peter, that ‘it is his angel’ (Acts 12:15). If we

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

consider about him who attacked the blessed Job we shall clearly learn that it was he who always plotted against him but never could entice him to sin. He therefore asked for power from the Lord, as he was beaten, not by his Job's virtue, but by the Lord's protection, which always shielded him. Of Judas it is also said, 'Let the devil stand at his right hand'" (Psalm 109:6).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁰ that we have been given great blessings to discern the workings of evil. Eve did not have this discernment, and our adversary deceived her by perverting the meaning of the words of God. After deceiving Adam and Eve, he thought he had the entire earth in his hand. But he could not deceive Christ; and now Christ has given us the same abilities. Children now mock him who deceived Eve; those who carry the Sign on their forehead detect his devices.

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

"Thus he deceived Eve, artfully adopting the words of God, and perverting their meaning. Thus he suggested evil to the wife of Job, persuading her to pretend affection for her husband, while he taught her to blaspheme God (Job 2:9). Thus does the crafty spirit mock men by false displays, deluding and drawing each into his own pit of wickedness. When he deceived the first man Adam, thinking that through him he would have all men subject to him, he rejoiced and said, 'I will take with my hand all the world as a nest; I will take them as eggs that have been left; and there is no one that shall escape me' (Isaiah 10:14 LXX). But when the Lord came to earth, the enemy was unable to deceive the flesh, which He had taken on Him. Even children mocked the one who promised himself the occupation of the whole world. For now the infant child lays his hand on the hole of the cobra (Isaiah 11:8), and laughs at him that deceived Eve; and all that rightly believe in the Lord tread under foot (Luke 10:19) him that said, 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High' (Isaiah 14:14). Thus he is dishonored, although he still disguises himself; yet now those that carry the Sign on their foreheads detect him; he is rejected by them, is humbled, and put to shame. Even if he transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), his deception will not profit him; for we have been taught that 'though an angel from heaven preach to us any other gospel than what we have received, he is anathema' (Galatians 1:8).

¹⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, I, 1-3.

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

John Chrysostom spoke¹¹ of the deception of Eve as the beginning of the deception of humanity. A similar series of events occurred in Corinth. Paul stated, “But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). Just as Eve was deceived into trying to acquire more, so the heretics coming to Corinth spoke as if the Apostles taught incompletely, and overlaid their poison on top of good teaching.

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

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

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

“Instead of recoiling from these heretics, the Corinthians bore with them (2 Corinthians 11:4). Let us pay attention to this, for the danger is great, and the precipice deep, if men run past this carelessly; what is said here gives an entrance to all the heresies. Those heretics boasted as if the Apostles taught incompletely, and the heretics were introducing somewhat more than they. The heretics were overlaying their doctrines on what the Apostles had taught. Therefore Paul mentioned the serpent and Eve, who was thus deceived by the expectation of acquiring more (i.e. becoming like God). Alluding to this earlier, Paul said, ‘Now you are already rich, you have reigned as kings without us’; and again, ‘we are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ’” (1 Corinthians 4:8, 10).

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XXIII, vv 3-4.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹² that the Arians deceived the Churches just as the serpent deceived Eve; they quote the Scriptures, but interpret them perversely.

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

The Jewish Leaders Opposed Christ

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out¹³ how Cain, Esau, King Saul and the Jewish people perished because they imitated the devil in his jealousy, deceiving and being deceived.

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

“This began the primal hatred of the race of man, hence the abominable fratricides; the unrighteous Cain was jealous of the righteous Abel, in that the wicked persecuted the good with envy and jealousy. The rage of envy prevailed to the consummation of Cain’s wickedness, that he didn’t consider the love of his brother, the immensity of the crime, the fear of God or the penalty of the sin. He was unjustly struck down, who had been the first to show righteousness; he endured hatred who had not known how to hate; he was impiously slain, who did not resist dying. Esau’s hostility to his brother Jacob arose from jealousy also.

¹² Athanasius of Alexandria, Paschal Letters, II, 6.

¹³ Cyprian, Treatises, X, 4-5.

Because Jacob had received his father's blessing, Esau was inflamed to a persecuting hatred by jealousy. Joseph was sold by his brethren, where the reason of their selling him proceeded from envy. As a younger brother, he spoke to them in simplicity about what had been shown to him in visions, but their malevolent disposition broke out in envy. King Saul hated David, so as to seek repeated attempts to kill him — innocent, merciful, gentle, patient in meekness — what else was the provocation except the spur of jealousy? When Goliath was slain, by the aid and condescension of God and so great an enemy was routed, the wondering people broke out with acclamation into praises of David. Saul through jealousy conceived the rage of enmity and persecution. Observe also the destruction of the Jewish people, who perished once for all¹⁴. They perished because they chose to envy Christ rather than believe Him (Matthew 26:3-5). Belittling those great works which He did, they were deceived by blinding jealousy, and could not open the eyes of their heart to the knowledge of divine things.”

Simon Magus: A 1st Century Equivalent of Jannes and Jambres

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

Simon was born in the Samaritan village of Gettai¹⁵. He was by profession a magician, which trade he learned¹⁶ in Alexandria, Egypt, but he didn't begin his self-promotion until after the death of John the Baptist in c. 28 AD. He was even referred to¹⁷ as a disciple of John the Baptist for a while. He was a very learned man, and was exceedingly well trained in Greek literature. As a magician, Simon was very much like Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses (2 Timothy 3:8). Just as Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate some of Moses' miracles, so Simon was very powerful in magic, and Simon learned the black arts from similar sources in Egypt, where Jannes and Jambres had learned them.

Simon produced “miracles” using his secret arts. Clement of Rome wrote¹⁸ of some of these “miracles” that the people of Samaria witnessed.

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

¹⁴ That is, in 70 AD and 135 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem.

¹⁵ There are various spellings of the town of Simon's birth, each phonetically similar to Gettai.

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

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

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

Prior to Christ's baptism, Simon had been a follower¹⁹ of John the Baptist, putting his secret arts on hold for a while, and became one of John's thirty chief men. When John was beheaded, Simon was in Egypt practicing his secret arts. When Simon returned, a man named Dositheus had taken over as leader of John's followers. Simon murdered Dositheus, making it seem like he died of natural causes, and then took over the leadership of John's followers himself.

This didn't last too long, however. Simon revealed his exalted views²⁰ of himself to fellow members of the Thirty, where he claimed to be God, and born of a virgin, just like Christ. The other members of the Thirty did not go along with Simon in this heresy, but instead inquired of him as to the extent of his opinions. They were all aghast at what Simon rushed headlong into, and they were ashamed of their association with him²¹, and counseled him to change. Unlike Simon, they were not after personal glory and honor. All their efforts were to no avail however.

In the 40's AD, following his encounter with the Apostle Peter a second time, Simon went to Rome and he so impressed²² the Emperor Claudius and the Roman Senate by his secret arts that Claudius erected a statue of Simon along the Tiber River with the inscription, "To Simon, the Holy God". Thus Simon was very prominent across the Empire in the 1st Century. Justin Martyr stated²³ that the statue was still there over 100 years later. Simon was so influential that four of the original Seventy Apostles apostatized to follow him.

When Simon encountered Deacon Philip in the city of Samaria, Simon was struck with the fact that Philip could do things that he could not, just as Jannes and Jambres were struck with the fact that Moses could do things that they couldn't. In order to get a closer look at Philip's technique, Simon asked to be baptized, and became a follower of Philip (Acts 8:13). When Peter and John came from Jerusalem, Simon saw the Holy Spirit conferred on people by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-18). Simon offered to purchase this ability from Peter, but Peter rebuked him saying, in effect, "Take your money and go to hell!" (Acts 8:20)

John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that Peter saw right through Simon Magus. Simon was an unbeliever throughout his contact with Philip, and did everything from malice. His only "belief" was such as is expressed by the demons (James 2:19). Philip's miracles made Simon's sorcery look impotent, and Peter read Simon's thoughts. Simon didn't care to receive the Holy Spirit; he only wanted the ability to confer it on others to show how powerful he was.

"Simon had such a low conception of the gift of God, that he imagined it to be entirely a thing of man. It is not this! Peter well calls the affair a gift, 'You thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money' (Acts 8:20). Notice

¹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Clementine Homilies", II, 23-26, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

²⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, "Recognitions of Clement", II, 14-15, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

²¹ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Clementine Homilies", II, 27-28, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

²² Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI.

²³ Justin Martyr, First Apology, LVI.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v. 18-20.

how on all occasions the Apostles are not interested in money! Peter told Simon, ‘Your heart is not right in the sight of God’ (Acts 8:21). Notice how Simon does everything from malice? To be simple, however, was what was needed. For had it been done with simplicity, Peter would have welcomed Simon’s willing mind. Do you see that to have low conceptions of great things²⁵ is to sin doubly? Accordingly, Peter asks Simon to do two things, ‘Repent and pray, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven’ (Acts 8:22). It was a wicked thought Simon had entertained, and Peter knew him to be incorrigible. ‘For I perceive that you are poisoned by bitterness, and bound by iniquity’ (Acts 8:23). These are words of tremendous wrath! But otherwise Peter did not punish him, that faith may not be of compulsion, and that he may introduce the subject of repentance. Also, it sufficed for correction to convict him, to tell him what was in his heart, to bring him to confess himself. Simon said, ‘Pray for me’; this is a confession that he had done wrong. Notice what an unbeliever he is; when he was convicted, and then he “believed”. When he was convicted again, then he became humble. That is, seeing Philip’s miracles, Simon was amazed (Acts 8:13), and came over. He thought he would be able to escape detection; he thought the thing was an art. But when he didn’t have power to defeat the Apostles, again, he fears the multitude, and is afraid to deny it. He might have said, ‘I did not know; I did it in simplicity’. But he was struck with dismay first because he was blown away by the miracles and secondly, that his thoughts were made clear. As a result, Simon eventually went a long way off, to Rome, thinking that Peter would not soon come there.”

Chrysostom also stated²⁶ that one reason why the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria was to rid the Samaritans of the influences of Simon’s sorcery. After all, Simon had been working his sorcery on the Samaritans for a long time, and his influence was extensive throughout Samaria (Acts 8:9-10).

“Why do they go there where the tyranny was really bad, where those most bent on killing them were? Just as generals do in wars, they occupy that part of the scene of war, which is most distressed. That is, ‘They preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans’ (Acts 8:25). Observe how they do not of set purpose come to Samaria, but driven by the stress of persecution, just as it was in the case of Christ. When the Apostles go there, it is to men now believers, no longer just Samaritans.”

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

We might ask why the Evangelist Luke included mention of Simon Magus at all in Acts. Simon was a major heretical force to be reckoned with in the 1st Century, and the 1st Century was a time of great turmoil due to the extreme heresies that the Church had to deal with. Simon was referred to as the source of all these heresies, and had many followers, where each added a little

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

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v 25.

twist to make their own teachings unique. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, writing at the turn of the 1st Century (c. 107 AD) referred²⁷ to Simon as the firstborn son of Satan. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century) documented²⁸ Simon's heresies, referred to Simon as the father of all heretics and described many of his followers. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century) stated²⁹ that Simon was the source of all the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies.

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

Table 1
The Seventy in Rome in 55 AD

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

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

Table 2
The Seventy Who Apostatized

Name	Reference
Nicolas of Antioch	Revelation 2:6, 15
Demas	Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, 2 Timothy 4:10
Hermogenes	2 Timothy 1:15
Phygellus	2 Timothy 1:15

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

²⁷ Ignatius, "To the Trallians", 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

²⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, Preface.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxvii, 4.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, ix, 1.

²⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.

The Antichrist

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

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

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

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

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

"You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made clear, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:18-19).

John Chrysostom also compared³⁰ the deceivers in the days of the Apostles with the deceit of the Antichrist before the Second Coming.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVI, 2.

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

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

1. “Pay attention³¹ that no man mislead you; for many shall come in My Name, saying, ‘I am Christ’, and shall mislead many” (Matthew 24:5). This has happened in part; already Simon Magus has said this, and Menander³², and some others of the godless leaders of heresy; and others will say it in our days, or after us.
2. “The Apostle Paul gave³³ a clear sign, saying, ‘Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Now is the falling away, where men have fallen away from the right faith. Some preach the identity of the Son with the Father; others dare to say that Christ was brought into being out of nothing. Before the heretics were made clear; now the Church is filled with heretics in disguise.”
3. “When Christ was³⁴ about to take man’s nature, and God was expected to be born of a Virgin, the devil created prejudice against this, by craftily preparing among idol-worshippers fables of false gods, begetting and begotten of women, that, the falsehood having come first, the truth, as he supposed, might be disbelieved. Now, since the true Christ is to come a second time, the adversary, taking advantage of the simple, and especially of those of the circumcision, brings in a certain man who is a magician, and most expert in sorceries and enchantments of beguiling craftiness. He shall seize for himself the power of the Roman empire, and shall falsely style himself Christ; by this name of Christ he will deceive the Jews, who are looking for the Anointed, and seduce those of the Gentiles by his magical illusions.”
4. “Satan will use³⁵ the Antichrist as an instrument, working in his own person through him; for knowing that his judgment shall have no rest, he wages war no more by his servants, but by himself more openly. The father of falsehood will make a show of

³¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 5.

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

³³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 9.

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

³⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 14.

5. “At first he will make³⁶ a pretense of benevolence, but afterwards he will display his relentless temper, chiefly against the Saints of God. Daniel said, ‘I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints’ (Daniel 8:12-13, Revelation 13:7); and again elsewhere, ‘there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation upon earth’ (Matthew 24:21). Dreadful is that beast, a mighty dragon, unconquerable by man, ready to devour.”
6. “The Martyrs of that time excel³⁷ all martyrs. For the Martyrs up to now have wrestled with men only; but in the time of Antichrist they shall do battle with Satan in his own person. In earlier ages, persecuting kings only put to death; they did not pretend to raise the dead, nor did they make false shows of signs and wonders. But in the time of Antichrist, there shall be the evil inducement both of fear and of deceit, ‘so that if it be possible the very elect shall be deceived’ (Matthew 24:24). Let it never enter into the heart of any then alive to ask, ‘What more did Christ do?’ For by what power does this man do these things? If it were it not God’s will, He would not have allowed them. Paul warns us beforehand, ‘For this reason God will send them strong delusion’ (2 Thessalonians 2:11); not that they might make excuse, but that they might be condemned. This refers to those, who won’t believe the truth, that is, the true Christ, but had pleasure in unrighteousness, that is, in Antichrist.”

The Demons Are Involved with Deceit

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

Cyprian of Carthage stated³⁸ that the kingdoms of the earth do not rise to supremacy through merit, but usually start with criminals founding a state to promote their own agenda. Some are aware of the workings of God, but it is mostly the workings of Satan that affect their daily lives and try to turn them away from God.

“The principle is the same with every nation, which misleads and deceives a credulous and foolish rabble with tricks that darken the truth. Impure and wandering spirits, steeped in earthly vices and ruined themselves, do not cease to seek the ruin of others. They infuse into others the error of their own degradation. The poets acknowledge these demons, and Socrates declared that he was instructed and ruled at the will of a demon. The Magi have a power either for mischief or for mockery, of whom, the chief Hostanes³⁹ says that the form of the true God cannot be seen, and declares that true angels stand round about His throne. Plato concurs, maintaining one God, and calls the rest angels or demons.

³⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 15.

³⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 17.

³⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, VI, 6-7.

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

Moreover, Hermes Trismegistus⁴⁰ speaks of one God, and confesses that He is incomprehensible, and beyond our estimation.”

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

Cyprian gave⁴¹ an example of the workings of a demon in an Egyptian prophetess in his day, where she imitated the things of the Church, including Baptism and celebrating the Eucharist, but who also seduced a presbyter and a deacon into intercourse.

“A certain woman arose among us, announced herself as a prophetess, and acted as if she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She was so moved by the principal demons, that for a long time she deceived the brotherhood, accomplishing certain wonderful things, and promised that she would cause the earth to be shaken. The power of the demon was not so great that he could shake the earth, but sometimes a wicked spirit, perceiving that there will be an earthquake, pretends that he will do what he sees will happen. By these lies he had so subdued the minds of individuals that they obeyed him and followed whatever he commanded. He would make that woman walk barefoot in the winter with bare feet over frozen snow, and not to be troubled or hurt in any degree by that walking. She would say that she was hurrying to Jerusalem, pretending as if she had come from there. She deceived one of the presbyters and a deacon, so that they had intercourse with her, which was soon detected. All of a sudden there appeared to her one of our exorcists, an approved man who, stimulated by the exhortation also of very many brethren, raised himself up against that wicked spirit to overcome it. The demon,

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

⁴¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXXIV, 10.

by its subtle fallacy, had predicted this a little while before, that a certain adverse and unbelieving tempter would come. Yet that exorcist, inspired by God's grace, bravely resisted, and showed that that, which was thought holy, was indeed a most wicked spirit. That woman, by deceitfulness of the demon, was attempting many things for the deceiving of the faithful. She had deceived many, and had frequently dared to pretend that she celebrated the Eucharist, and offered sacrifice to the Lord. She also baptized many, making use of the usual words of the Church, that nothing might seem to be different from that of the Church."

John Chrysostom noted⁴² that it is extreme delusion to think that the unrighteous will be included in the Kingdom of God.

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

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

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

The Result of Deceivers: Persecution of Christians

There is a partially hidden agenda with deceivers. The key is, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12) i.e. like Moses and like Paul himself. The Lord spelled out the reasons for this: some people simply hate God! (John 15:18-

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XVI, 8.

16:4) Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”, and “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18, 20).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bishop Nicholai Velimirovic adds⁴³ that heresies are usually closer to the worldly point of view:

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

⁴³ Nicholai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

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

Addressing times when the evil men seem to prevail, John Chrysostom added⁴⁴ that we should not be disturbed by any of this.

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

Bishop Nicholai Velimirovic added⁴⁵ that the Lord and the Apostles demonstrated this by their own example.

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

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

Antidotes to Deception:

There are a number of antidotes to deception, where each one provides some means to disconnect us from the operations of the demons. Knowing the Scriptures is a good first step, and the application of the Scriptures requires some thought and guidance. Living a godly life is also critical as an antidote as is being wise for salvation in knowing some of the methods the demons use.

Knowing the Scriptures

The Scriptures are an immensely valuable resource against deception, but there are other resources also. Abraham managed to be a model of godliness for all future generations before Moses had drafted⁴⁶ the Pentateuch, but not everyone has the faith to do what Abraham did. We desperately need to know what others before us did to avoid deception and seduction by demons.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy*, VIII, v.13.

⁴⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

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

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁷ that paying attention to the Scriptures not only helps us avoid entanglement in deceit, but can also protect our friends. The Scriptures have been preserved for our benefit; not knowing them results in our accomplishing nothing profitable.

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

“And look at it from the beginning, that you may learn the unspeakable love of God. He inspired the blessed Moses; He engraved the tablets; He detained him on the mountain forty days, then forty days additional to give the Law. After this He sent prophets who suffered innumerable hardship. Wars came; many people were killed, and the books were burned. He inspired another admirable man, Ezra, to publish them, and caused them to be put together from the remains. After this He arranged that the Seventy should translate⁴⁸ them. Christ came and received the Scriptures; the Apostles dispersed them among men.”

“After so great painstaking, the Apostles wrote, ‘they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come’ (1 Corinthians 10:11). Christ said, ‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures’ (Matthew 22:29); Paul said, ‘That we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope’ (Romans 15:4). Again, ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable’ (2 Timothy 3:16). And ‘let the word of Christ dwell in you richly’ (Colossians 3:16). David said, ‘he shall meditate in His Law day and night’ (Psalm 1:2), and Solomon said, ‘Let your talk be with the wise and all your communication be in the Law of the Most High’ (Ecclesiasticus 9:15 LXX). Again, ‘How sweet are Your words to my⁴⁹ throat’; ‘more than honey and the honeycomb to my mouth’ (Psalm 119:103 LXX). Moses said, ‘You shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up’ (Deuteronomy 6:7). Paul said, ‘Continue in them’ (1 Timothy 4:16). Innumerable things one might say concerning them. But after so many things, there are some who do not even know that there are Scriptures at all. For this cause, believe me, nothing sound, nothing profitable comes from us.”

What Are the Scriptures?

When the New Testament writers referred to “The Scriptures”, they were referring to the Old Testament, since the canon of the New Testament was not established until the late 4th century. Among the Christian communities, it was the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) that was used exclusively, except for the Hebrew-speaking communities in Judea. The Septuagint translation (or LXX from the Seventy Jewish scholars who did the translating) was done in Alexandria between the 3rd and the 1st centuries BC, and had become

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, VIII, 9.

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

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

very highly respected among Jewish communities throughout the world. When the Christians began using the LXX exclusively, however, it fell⁵⁰ into disfavor among the Jewish communities beginning in the early 2nd century AD.

Today the oldest complete copies of the Old Testament date from the 10th century AD for Hebrew texts (the Masoretic Text) and from the 4th century AD for LXX texts. Fragments of LXX texts date from the 2nd century AD, and fragments of both Hebrew and LXX texts are included in the Dead Sea Scrolls collection (1st century BC to 1st century AD). As a result of detailed studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there has been renewed interest in the LXX since it seems to have been based on an earlier text⁵¹ than the existing copies of the Masoretic Text available today. Many of the fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls agree⁵² with the LXX and not with the Masoretic Text.

A problem with corruption of Hebrew texts in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries resulted from the opposition by the Jewish leaders to the spread of Christianity throughout the world. Since the Christians were using the LXX, Jewish leaders stopped using the LXX, and retranslated⁵³ the Hebrew text into Greek. In addition, Jewish leaders dropped some books from the Hebrew canon; these deletions became known as the “Apocrypha” or “hidden” books⁵⁴. At about the same time, Jewish scholars also began to modify the Hebrew text to delete obvious references to Christ and thus secure their theological position. Justin Martyr mentioned some of these deletions⁵⁵ in his *Dialog with the Jewish philosopher, Trypho*, in the mid 2nd century. The Masoretic text today has been restored to include the deletions that Justin objected to, but there are other obvious references to Christ that remain deleted from the Masoretic text, but are present in the LXX. One example of this can be seen from an Old Testament quote from the LXX that appears in the New Testament. If we compare Hebrews 1:6 with Deuteronomy 32:43, it is a word-for-word quote from the LXX, but this significant reference to Christ is completely missing from the Masoretic Text. [Almost all English translations of the Old Testament today are from the Masoretic Text.] This can be seen from the following quotes:

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

⁵⁰ See http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history_of_lxx.pdf

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

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

⁵³ See http://www.lxx.org/pdfs/history_of_lxx.pdf

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

⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Tyrpho*, 71-74.

As the New Testament writers drafted their respective writings, most of their quotes came from the LXX, and only a few came⁵⁶ from the Hebrew text. The Orthodox Church has always used the LXX as the Old Testament text, while the Western Church began using a version of the Hebrew text starting with Jerome in the late 4th century. However, Jerome's Hebrew text was apparently different⁵⁷ from today's Masoretic Text.

Abraham: Godliness Prior to the Scriptures

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

Yet Abraham didn't live in a vacuum; he lived according to the Law that had been handed down from Adam. Tertullian stated⁵⁸, "In this law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, 'You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; you shall not kill', etc. John Cassian added⁵⁹ that the saints prior to Abraham observed the commands not only of the Law but even anticipated those of the Gospel. In Abraham this "law of love" produced a close relationship with God, and Abraham was called "The friend of God" (James 2:23, 2 Chronicles 20:7). Similarly with Moses: God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). Christ illustrated this further. Speaking to His disciples, the Lord said, "No longer do I call you slaves, for a slave does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

As drafted, "The law is not made for a righteous person" (1 Timothy 1:9). Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote⁶⁰, "The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves". The Early Church taught that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law but the bonds and the collar⁶¹.

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

⁵⁷ R. Grant Jones, Notes on the Septuagint, February 2006.

⁵⁸ Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

⁵⁹ John Cassian, Conferences I, viii, 23.

⁶⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

⁶¹ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 20-21.

The purpose of the Law was as our pedagogue to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Yet Jesus said of Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). As a result, Abraham is referred to as “The father of all those who believe” (Romans 4:11). Those who obey the Law as Abraham did are now sons of Abraham and heirs according to the promise and are blessed with the believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29). John Chrysostom added⁶², “Paul showed that Faith was prior to the Law, as is evident from Abraham’s case, who was justified before the giving of the Law. He showed too that later events fell out according to prophecy. ‘The Scripture’, Paul said, ‘foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham’ (Galatians 3:8-9). Before He gave the Law, He Himself had decreed that the Gentiles should be justified by Faith. For He said, referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, ‘In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed’ (Genesis 12:3); this was at a time when Faith existed, but not the Law. ‘So then, those, who are of faith, are blessed with the faithful Abraham’ (Galatians 3:9). Comparing Israel to the Church, Chrysostom continued⁶³, “If now they were chosen by God, not for their own good deeds, it is clear that by grace they obtained this honor. And we too all are saved by grace, but for objects much greater and higher. By this grace we have become the beloved of God, no longer as servants, but as sons and friends”.

The Scriptures Are More Trustworthy Than an Angelic Appearance

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

John Chrysostom noted⁶⁴ that the Lord and the Apostle Paul preferred the Scriptures over both the raising of the dead and over an angelic appearance. An angel is only a servant; but the Lord Himself sent the Scriptures.

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

⁶² John Chrysostom, Commentary On Galatians, Chapter 3.

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John XIV, 2

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 8-9.

He showed that in the discussion of truth, the dignity of persons is not to be considered.”

The Treasures of the Scriptures

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

John Chrysostom spoke⁶⁵ of reading the Scriptures as getting a look at a treasure, where Satan tries to keep us away from this.

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

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

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

Chrysostom also compared⁶⁶ reading the Scriptures to mining for gold. Even the smallest clue could reveal great wealth.

“As in gold mines, skilled miners would not dare to overlook even the smallest vein as possibly producing much wealth. So in the Scriptures; we may miss great wealth if we pass by the smallest letter or stroke (Matthew 5:18); we

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, II, 10-11.

⁶⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVI, 1.

must investigate them all. For they are all uttered by the Holy Spirit, and nothing useless is written in them.”

Chrysostom also spoke⁶⁷ about how Jesus tried to get the Jewish leaders of His day to dig below the surface to find the treasure He was speaking of. However, they were content to a reading of the Scriptures by rote and without faith.

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

Ambrose of Milan looked⁶⁸ at the Scriptures as a feast of wisdom and the individual books as the dishes prepared. We need to carry out in action what we receive in order to show the grace that was granted to us.

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

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XLI, 1.

⁶⁸ Ambrose of Milan, The Duties of the Clergy, I, xxxii, 165.

The Mind of the Scriptures

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

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁹ that some people insult God by saying that the Readings of the Scriptures are always the same. Yet they don't mind seeing the same shows over and over in the theater. It is not possible ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures in these Readings.

“Just as our mouth is the mouth of our soul, though the soul has no mouth, so the mouth of the Prophets is the mouth of God. The deacon cries out, ‘Let us attend to the Reading’. It is the common voice of the whole Church, the voice that he speaks, and yet no one listens. After him the Reader begins, ‘The Prophecy of Isaiah’, and still no one listens, although Prophecy has nothing of man in it. Then after this, the Reader says, ‘Thus says the Lord’, and still no one listens. After this comes punishment and vengeance, and still even then no one listens. What is the common excuse? ‘It is always the same things over again’. Most of all, this is what ruins you. Suppose you knew the Readings, even so you certainly should not refuse to listen. In the theatres, isn't it always the same things acted over again, and still you are not disgusted? How do you dare complain about ‘the same things’? You don't even know the names of the Prophets whose writings are read! Aren't you ashamed to say that this is why you don't listen, because it is ‘the same things over again’, while you do not even know the names of those who are read, and this, though always hearing the same things? Do not you exhort your son? If he should say, ‘Always the same things!’ wouldn't you count it an insult? It would be good to talk of ‘the same things’, when we both knew them, and incorporated them into our life. Even then, these Readings would not be superfluous. Paul wrote to the Apostle Timothy, ‘Give attention to Reading, to exhortation’ (1 Timothy 4:13). It is not possible, ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well that has no bottom. ‘I said’, said the Preacher, ‘I have become wise and then it departed from me’ (Ecclesiastes 7:23). How many persons have preached on the Gospels? All have spoken in a way, which was new and fresh. For the more one dwells on them, the more insight one gets, the more he beholds the pure light.”

John Cassian wrote⁷⁰ of a monk, Abbot Theodore, who was very astute in understanding the Scriptures, yet he could barely read. Theodore's secret was in acquiring purity of heart in order to understand the mind of the Scriptures. He would obtain understanding by revelation after prolonged prayer and fasting. Theodore's advice to others was to first seek to purify one's mind and heart from carnal vices before trying to gaze on the mysteries of Scripture.

“Abbot Theodore was a man gifted with utmost holiness and with perfect knowledge not only in practical life, but also in understanding the Scriptures. He had not acquired so much by study and reading, or worldly education, as by purity of heart alone. He could with difficulty understand and speak only a few words of the Greek language. One time when he was seeking an explanation of some most

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XIX, vv. 26-27.

⁷⁰ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, V, 33-35.

difficult question, he continued without ceasing for seven days and nights in prayer until he discovered by a revelation from the Lord the solution of the question that he sought an answer for.”

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

“Theodore once came unexpectedly to my cell in the dead of night, with paternal inquisitiveness seeking what I, an unformed anchorite as I was, might be doing by myself. He found me there, just as I finished Vespers, beginning to refresh my weary body, lying down on a mat. He sighed from the bottom of his heart, calling me by name, and said, ‘John, many are at this hour communing with God, embracing Him, and detaining Him, while you are deprived of this great light, and enfeebled with lazy sleep!’”

John Chrysostom stated⁷¹ that the Scriptures give us a practical wisdom, but also lets us know the limits of man’s ability to know. God dispenses all things, but He does not will evil to be done; evil comes from us. Righteous men are afflicted in order that they may be crowned; the wicked are afflicted as punishment for their sins.

“Speaking of the Holy Scriptures, Paul added, ‘Which are able to make you wise’ (2 Timothy 3:), that is, they will not allow you to be foolish, like most men. For he who knows the Scriptures, as he ought, is not offended at anything that happens; he endures all things manfully, referring them partly to faith, partly to the incomprehensible nature of the divine dispensation, and partly knowing reasons for them, finding examples in the Scriptures. It is a great sign of knowledge not to be curious about everything, nor to wish to know all things. I will explain myself by an example. Consider rivers; all are not of the same depth. Some have a shallow bed; others are deep enough to drown someone unacquainted with it. In one part there are whirlpools, and not in another. It is good therefore to refrain from exploring all of them, and it is no small proof of

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 14.

knowledge not to wish to explore all the depths. He that wants to venture onto every part of the river is really most ignorant of the peculiar nature of rivers and will often be in danger of perishing from venturing into the deeper parts with the same boldness with which he crossed the shallows. So it is in the things of God. He that desires to know all things, and ventures to intrude into everything, is most ignorant of what God is. The greater part of rivers is safe, and the depths and whirlpools are few; but with respect to the things of God, the greater part is hidden, and it is not possible to trace out His works. Why then are you bent on drowning yourself in those depths? Know this, however, that God dispenses all things, that He provides for all, that we are free agents, that some things He works, and some things He permits. He wills nothing evil to be done; all things are not done by His will, but some are done by our will. All evil things are done by our will alone; all good things are done by our will jointly with His influence; and nothing is done without His knowledge. Therefore He works all things. Knowing this we can reckon what things are good, what are evil, and what are indifferent. Virtue is good, vice is evil; but riches and poverty, life and death, are indifferent things. If you know this, you will know that the righteous are afflicted in order that they may be crowned; the wicked are afflicted, that they may receive the punishment of their sins. But all sinners are not punished here, lest people should generally disbelieve the Resurrection; not all the righteous are afflicted, lest men should think that vice, and not virtue, is approved.”

Study of the Scriptures

The Early Church tended to emphasize holiness of life as a prelude to the study of the Scripture. The Scriptures were read in Churches every Sunday according to a pattern, called a lectionary, which emphasized the basics that everyone would need to know. In this vein, Cyril of Jerusalem stated,

“In learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to you by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. Everyone cannot read the Scriptures; some are hindered by lack of learning, and others by a lack of leisure. In order that the soul may not perish from ignorance, we have condensed the whole doctrine of the Faith in a few lines⁷². This summary I want you to commit to memory.

Jerome warned⁷³ that we are able to make no progress in the Scriptures unless we have a guide to show us the way. This does not refer to grammarians, philosophers, logicians or musicians. All men everywhere claim to be masters in the art of interpreting the Scriptures. Most take the Scriptures in hand, but tear them in pieces and teach them before they have learned them.

To illustrate this, Gregory of Nazianzen, like the other Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, lived⁷⁴ an ascetic life in solitude. They tried to tame the passions, like wild beasts, by gentle treatment, to lull them to sleep, to disarm them. By turning away the soul from the enticements of sense, and withdrawing into one’s self for the contemplation of God

⁷² That is, the Nicene Creed.

⁷³ Jerome, Letter to Paulinus, LIII, 6-7.

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

and of Eternal Beauty, they thought that it is possible to raise man to a forgetfulness of natural wants, and to a spiritual freedom from care. The means to this spiritual elevation were the reading of Scripture, which sets before us rules of life, but especially the pictures of the lives of godly men. They gave themselves especially to the study of Scripture, and to the practice of devotional exercises. In their study their great principle was to interpret the holy writings not by their own individual judgment, but on the lines laid down for them by the authority of ancient interpreters.

Another aspect of the Early Church's use of the Scriptures is illustrated by John Cassian, who cautioned⁷⁵ his people not to concentrate on oratory and public speaking in the understanding of the Scriptures. True understanding can only be attained by purity of soul and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Humility of heart is very important to avoid being puffed up by enlightenment; otherwise vain arrogance leads to our destruction. As we study the Scriptures in holiness, we become like the Ark of the Testimony, guarded by two Cherubim, who protect the mercy seat of God, Who dwells there. We become like the Old Testament priests, dwelling in the Tabernacle, unable to be taken captive by the snares of bad thoughts. Some things that we don't understand will be revealed to us, even in our sleep, when we don't expect it. Scripture thus takes on a new face that cannot be comprehended by carnal people.

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

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

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

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

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

The study of the Scriptures can be very helpful in controlling evil thoughts. Delving into the dynamics of our thoughts, John Cassian asked⁷⁶ how is it that thoughts can come to us so subtly and secretly that it is hard to even grasp them, never mind to drive them away. Frequent reading and meditation on the Scriptures can help, and it is in the power of every man to either accept these thoughts or to reject them. In this way, the heart can be compared to a mill wheel driven by the rush of water. We can’t stop the wheel from turning, but we can decide what it will grind, whether good or bad. The origins of our thoughts come from three sources: God, the devil and ourselves. We need to be able to analyze our thoughts to track their origin, and thus deal with them appropriately.

“It is impossible for the mind not to be approached by thoughts, but it is in the power of every man either to admit them or to reject them. Their rising up

⁷⁶ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Moses, I, i, 17-20.

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

"This movement of the heart can be compared to a mill wheel, which the headlong rush of water whirls around, and which can never stop its work so long as it is driven around by the action of the water. But it is in the power of the man who directs it to decide whether he will have wheat, barley or darnel⁷⁷ ground by it. The mill wheel will certainly crush everything put under it by the man who has charge of that business. Similarly the mind, through the trials of the present life, is driven around by the torrents of temptations pouring in upon it from all sides, and cannot be free from the flow of thoughts. But the character of the thoughts, which it either throws off or admits for itself, will be provided by the efforts of its own earnestness and diligence. If we constantly meditate on the Holy Scriptures and raise our memory towards the recollection of spiritual things, the desire for perfection and the hope of future bliss, spiritual thoughts are sure to rise from this, and cause the mind to dwell on those things. But if we are overcome by sloth or carelessness and spend our time in idle gossip, or are entangled in the cares of this world and unnecessary anxieties, the a species of tares will spring up, and injure our hearts. As our Lord says, wherever the treasure of our works or purpose may be, there our heart is sure to continue" (Matthew 6:21).

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

1. "Our thoughts come from God when He grants us the illumination of the Holy Spirit, lifting us up. Where we have made little progress or act slothfully, He chastens us with guilt. Sometimes He discloses heavenly mysteries to us, or turns our purpose to better actions. An example is the case where the King Ahasuerus, chastened by the Lord, was prompted to ask for the books of the records. By doing this he was reminded of the good deeds of Mordecai, and promoted him to highest honor, recalling his cruel sentence concerning the slaughter of the Jews (Esther 6:1-10). Other examples are when the prophet says, 'I will hear what the Lord God will say concerning me' (Psalm 85:8). Another tells us, 'the angel who spoke with me said to me' (Zechariah 1:14); or when the Son of God promised that He would come with His Father, and make His home in us (John 14:23); and 'It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you'" (Matthew 10:20).

⁷⁷ Darnel is a weedy grass that is not used for human consumption.

2. “Also a whole range of thoughts spring from the devil, when he endeavors to destroy us either by the pleasures of sin or by secret attacks. In his crafty wiles he deceitfully shows us evil as good, and transforms himself into an angel of light to us (2 Corinthians 11:14). An example is the Apostle Judas, ‘When supper was ended, when the devil put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray the Lord’; again ‘after the sop, Satan entered him’ (John 13:2, 27). Peter also said to Ananias, ‘Why has Satan tempted your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?’ (Acts 5:3). Another was said to God against Ahab in the character of an unclean spirit, ‘I will go and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets’” (1 Kings 22:22).
3. “But they arise also from ourselves, when in the course of life we recollect what we are doing, what we have done or what we have heard. David spoke, ‘I considered the days of old, and remembered ancient years. And I meditated; I communed with my heart by night, and diligently searched my spirit’ (Psalm 77:5-6 LXX). Again ‘the Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vain’ (Psalm 94:11 LXX), and ‘the thoughts of the righteous are true judgments’ (Proverbs 12:5 LXX). Also the Lord said to the Pharisees, ‘why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (Matthew 9:4)

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

John Cassian also stated⁷⁸ that there is a way for the Holy Scriptures to lie open to us with greater clearness as if their veins and marrow were exposed. Hindering us is a wandering mind that prevents us from fully considering each part of Scripture. We become one who touches and tastes spiritual meanings but does not possess them. Watching, meditation and prayer can correct this, and no one is kept away by not being able to read.

“When our experience not only perceives but actually anticipates their meaning, the sense of the words is revealed to us not by talking about them but by practical proof. As an example of this, he used, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). What greater or holier poverty

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

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

"A difficulty we have is that our mind wanders. As we consider the meaning of any Psalm, our mind thoughtlessly passes on to a text of some other Scripture. When it has begun to consider this, the recollection of some other passage springs up, and shuts out the consideration of the former subject. From this it is transferred to some other, and the soul always turns about from Psalm to Psalm, from a passage in the Gospels to read one in the Epistles, and from this on to the prophetic writings, and so it wanders about vaguely and uncertainly through the whole body of the Scriptures, unable, either to reject or keep hold of anything, or to finish anything by fully considering and examining it. So it becomes only one who touches or tastes of spiritual meanings, not an author and possessor of them."

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

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

Ignorance of the Scriptures

John Chrysostom had a great deal to say about the dangers of ignorance of the Scriptures. They are like daylight to our lives, being the Oracles of God. Not knowing them is like going to war without any weapons. We need to take care of our souls with the Scriptures; without them

we are unarmed and naked. Those who don't read the Scriptures are poverty-stricken and open to being ripped off by heretics.

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁹ that ignorance of the Scriptures is like ignoring the daylight and always walking in the dark, resulting in constant sin, a plague of heresy and useless labor.

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

John Chrysostom encouraged⁸⁰ everyone to read the Scriptures with great earnestness, since they are the oracles of God. If we don't buy any other books, we should buy the New Testament. Not knowing the Scriptures is the cause of all evils; not having them is like going to battle without any weapons.

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

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

“You have the oracles of God; no man teaches you as they do. Listen, I entreat you, all you that are careful for this life, and buy books that will be medicine for the soul. If you will not buy any other, at least get the New Testament: the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts and the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If you encounter grief, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take comfort from them for your trouble, whether it is loss, death, or bereavement. Or

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, The Argument Before Homily 1.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, IX.

rather don't just dive into them, but take them wholly to yourself; keep them in your mind."

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

"This reproach God spoke against the Jews: 'I have been carried you from the womb; even to *your* old age, I will carry and I deliver *you*' (Isaiah 46:3-4 LXX). If some of you had finished learning, and others were about to have finished, our work could have continued; you would have advanced, others would have taken your place, and you would have been able to help us. Tell me, if some were to go to a grammarian and continue always learning punctuation, would not this bother their teacher? In the Apostles' times it was not like this; they continually leaped from place to place, appointing those who first learned to be the teachers of others. Thus they were able to circle the world, not being bound to one place."

John Chrysostom stated⁸¹ that it is a great evil to be ignorant of the Scriptures. We take care of our houses and our horses, but we often neglect our souls.

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

John Chrysostom also said⁸² that a man who doesn't know the Scriptures is unarmed and naked; though he fall among the weak, though he is the stronger, he will easily be beaten. If we had paid attention to the Scriptures, if we had sharpened ourselves each day, I would not have advised you to flee the combat with them, but would have counseled you to grapple with them; for the truth is strong. But since we don't know how to use the Scriptures, I fear the struggle, lest they take us unarmed and cast us down. For there is nothing weaker than those who are bereft of the aid of the Spirit

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXIV, v. 41.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVI, 3.

John Chrysostom stated⁸³ that someone who reads the Scriptures is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. Those who don't read the Scriptures subject themselves to great harm and extreme poverty.

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

“As many as are ignorant of the Scriptures cannot be ‘householders’; they neither have of themselves, nor do they receive from others, but neglect their own case, perishing with famine. Not these only, but the heretics also, are excluded from this blessing. They don't bring out things new and old. They don't have the old things, and neither do they have the new; they are deprived of both. For these are bound up and interwoven one with another.”

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

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁴ that the Scriptures are very important in discerning the errors of heretics, and we need to exercise our senses to discern this. The Church has set the standard by which heretics are measured.

“When you hear that a man is not a Heathen or a Jew, do you immediately believe that he is a Christian? Examine all the other points; for Manichaeans⁸⁵, and all the heresies, have put on this mask in order to deceive the simple. If we ‘have the senses’ of the soul ‘exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Hebrews 5:14), we will be able to discern such teachers. Our ‘senses’ become ‘exercised’ by continual hearing; by experience with the Scriptures. When we document the error of those heretics, and prove that it is not right, we have learned a lot; even if we don't understand today, we will understand tomorrow.”

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

“One man says, that there is no Resurrection; and another looks for none of the things to come; another says there is a different God; another says that

⁸³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XLVIII, 4.

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, VIII, 8, 10.

⁸⁵ Mani was a cult leader in the mid to late 3rd century who claimed to have been born of a virgin, tempted by the devil, heal the sick and who chose twelve disciples. Augustine of Hippo was a Manichaean before he converted, and Augustine got his teaching on original sin from Mani. Manichaean churches were at one time a major force in the East from Syria to China, and they were strongly opposed by the Orthodox Church. The Manichaeans largely died out prior to the 16th century. For more information see the article by Alan G. Hefner, “The Mystica” at <http://www.themystica.com>.

Christ has His beginning from Mary. They have all fallen away from lack of moderation, either by excess or by defect. A major heresy was that of Marcion⁸⁶ (110 to 160 AD), who introduced another God, who has no existence. After this came of Sabellius⁸⁷, saying that the Son, the Spirit and the Father are one. After that Marcellus⁸⁸ and Photinus⁸⁹ said the same things. Paul of Samosata⁹⁰ said that He had His beginning from Mary. After these came the heresy of Arius⁹¹. There are others too. We have received the Faith that we might not be compelled to attack innumerable heresies, whatever any man might have endeavored either to add or take away from the Faith. Just like those who keep standards⁹² do not oblige people to use innumerable kinds of measurement, but only ask them keep to what is standardized; so also the case with our doctrines.”

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

The Application of the Scriptures

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

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

For Teaching Children

Paul counseled parents to bring up their children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Ignatius of Antioch advised⁹³ fathers to do two things additionally for their children: (1) teach them the Scriptures; and (2) teach them a trade. Learning a trade was part of Hebrew tradition, where all Hebrew boys had to learn a trade⁹⁴, no matter how smart they

⁸⁶ Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament was not the true God but rather that the true and higher God had been revealed only with Jesus Christ. Marcion was excommunicated from the Church in Rome c. 144 AD, but he succeeded in establishing churches of his own to rival the Church for the next two centuries. Marcion's canon consisted of a portion of the Gospel of Luke and ten Epistles of Paul, where he rejected Matthew, Mark and John. Marcion was condemned by contemporary apologist Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons. For more information, see the site <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/marcion.html>.

⁸⁷ Sabellius lived in the early 3rd century and was excommunicated for heresy in 220 AD.

⁸⁸ Marcellus was Bishop of Ancyra in Galatia in the early 4th century and taught that Christ was not God.

⁸⁹ Photinus was Bishop of Sirmium in the mid 4th century and claimed that Jesus was a mere man.

⁹⁰ Paul of Samosata (200 to 275 AD) was bishop of Antioch from 260 to 268 AD. He taught that Jesus was a mere man who was infused with the Divine Logos at His baptism.

⁹¹ Arius (250 to 336 AD) was a priest in Alexandria who claimed that the Son was not consubstantial with the Father. Arius' heresy was the main subject matter for the 1st Ecumenical Council in 325 AD.

⁹² For example, at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, there are standards for a length of 1 meter and a volume of 1 gallon.

⁹³ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 5.

⁹⁴

were or how much their education was on a fast track for the University. For example, Paul excelled his classmates in his education (Galatians 1:14), yet he still learned the trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3).

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

Piety or devoutness is something that the Scriptures teach throughout the Old and New Testaments. This begins with our deep respect for God and the things God has told us about Himself and the things that He would have us do. Ambrose of Milan summarized⁹⁵ this by saying, “Our first duty is to have a measured respect in our speech. In this way we offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, and we show a godly fear when the Scriptures are read.”

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

Some people take offense at the mere mention of heretics, preferring to treat everyone equally and kindly. John Chrysostom noted⁹⁶ that heretics had been around from the beginning of time, and they have always been singled out and separated from the flock as a shepherd separates a wolf from the sheep.

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁷ that children can be led to the Lord by becoming a diligent hearer of the Scriptures. Their age is full of foolishness, and the heathen amplify more foolishness. Hannah dedicated her son, the Prophet Samuel, to God and to live in the Temple. Because of her faith, other children were granted to her. Everything else about the raising of our children is secondary to teaching them to despise the glory that belongs to this life.

“Paul stated, ‘Do not provoke your children to wrath’ (Ephesians 6:4), as many do by treating them overbearingly, not as free, but as slaves. Paul shows how they will be led to obedience, referring the whole source of it to the head and chief authority. And in the same way as he has shown the husband to be the cause of the wife’s obedience, where he addresses the greater part of his arguments to the husband, advising him to attach her to himself by the power of love (Ephesians 5:25-30). Where there are spiritual ties, the natural ties will follow. Do you wish your son to be obedient? From the very first, ‘Bring him up in the training and admonition of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). It is absolutely necessary that he should be a diligent hearer of the Scriptures. For there the first thing he hears will be this, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ (Deuteronomy 5:16). It is necessary for laymen to be acquainted with the lessons derived from this source; but especially for children. Theirs is an age full of foolishness; and to this

⁹⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, x, 35.

⁹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy*, VIII, vv. 1-4.

⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XXI, v. 4.

foolishness are added the bad examples derived from the heathen, where they are acquainted with those heroes, slaves of their passions, and cowards regarding to death. It is absurd to send children out to school and to learn trades, and yet, not to 'bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord'. For this reason we are the first to reap the fruits, because we bring up our children to be insolent, spendthrifts, disobedient, and indecent fellows. Let us listen to Paul's admonition; let us give them a pattern; let us make them apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures from the earliest age. So constantly as I repeat this, I am looked upon as trifling! Still, I shall not cease to do my duty."

"You women, especially, emulate Hannah's example (1 Samuel 1:22-28); look at what she did. She brought him up at once to the temple. Who wouldn't rather prefer his son to become a Samuel than that he should be king of the whole world ten thousand times over? 'How', you will say, 'is it possible he should become like this?' We do not choose to commit him to the care of those who are able to make him such. Hannah put him into the hands of God, for not even Eli himself was one of those in any great degree qualified to form him. How could he be; he was not able to form even his own children. It was the faith of the mother and her earnest zeal that brought about the whole thing. He was her first child, and her only one, and she didn't know whether she would ever have any others. Yet she did not say, 'I will wait till the child is grown up, that he may have a taste of the things of this life in his childish years'. No, all these thoughts she repudiated; she was absorbed in one object, how from the very beginning she might dedicate the spiritual image to God. She offered him up to God, and there she left him. Therefore her married state was more glorious, in that she had made spiritual objects her first care, in that she dedicated the first fruits to God. Therefore her womb was fruitful, and she obtained other children besides (1 Samuel 2:20-21). Therefore she saw Samuel honorable even in the world. If men, when they are honored, render honor in return, will not God much more do this, since He does this even without being honored at all?"

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

As Examples for Teaching the Control of the Passions

The Scriptures teach many good examples about how it is necessary to control our passions in order to be godly. As the Lord was instructing the Twelve on how to proceed after He left, He said, "By your patience possess your souls" (Luke 21:19). They had already given

up all the things of this life, and He was preparing them to take what they had learned to the rest of the inhabited world. The lives of the saints (e.g. Hebrews 11) demonstrate to us the reward of patience and long suffering often in the face of great injustice and contempt from the rest of the world. Possessing our souls is a concentration on what is really important.

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁸ that the memory of good men in the Scriptures, even looking at their lives just once, is enough to set us free from the deformity in our soul that is caused by the passions, especially by wrath. Wrath is like a monster that turns us into animals, driven by the passions for the things of this life. We can tame wild animals, but we need the help of the Scriptures to tame the passions.

“Sometimes we have no idea whatever of the deformity of our own soul, and we can’t discern its hideousness. On the other hand, when we are sitting at a hairdresser’s, we take a mirror and examine with care the arrangement of our hair; we ask those nearby, and the haircutter himself, if everything looks good. With regard for our own soul, however, we don’t have the slightest idea that it is not only deformed, even if it is transformed into a wild beast, and made a sort of Scylla⁹⁹ or Chimaera¹⁰⁰, according to the heathen fable. In this case, there is also a mirror, a spiritual one, far more excellent, and serviceable. It not only shows our deformity, but also transforms it into surpassing beauty. This mirror is the memory of good men, and the history of their blessed lives; the reading of the Scriptures; the Laws given by God. If we are willing only once to look at the portrait of those holy men, we will both see the foulness of our own mind, and having seen this, we will need nothing else to be set free from that deformity. The mirror is useful for this purpose also, and makes the change easy.

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

“What excuse will we have, if we can tame a lion, yet we become as wild as a lion ourselves; granting to the beast what is beyond nature by taming him, but for ourselves not even preserving what is natural? We display as much zeal with our wrath as others have displayed about lions, including grievous teeth and talons. Not even a lion has such power to tear things up as wrath, even with its talons continually doing so. The health of the soul is corrupted by wrath, devouring, tearing to pieces with all its strength, and making it useless for everything. If a man nourished worms in his guts, such that all his inner parts

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, IV, 16-17.

⁹⁹ In Greek mythology, mentioned by Homer, Scylla was a sea monster who lived underneath a dangerous rock at one side of the Strait of Messina, opposite the whirlpool [Charybdis](#). She threatened passing ships and in the *Odyssey* ate six of [Odysseus](#) companions.

¹⁰⁰ In Greek mythology, mentioned by Homer, Chimaera was a monster that was part lion (head), goat (middle) and serpent (hind), and which was capable of breathing fire.

wasted away, how shall we have so large a beast as wrath eating up all within us, and be able to produce anything noble?

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

For Teaching Piety

Piety or devoutness is something that the Scriptures teach throughout the Old and New Testaments. This begins with our deep respect for God and the things God has told us about Himself and the things that He would have us do. Ambrose of Milan summarized¹⁰¹ this by saying, “Our first duty is to have a measured respect in our speech. In this way we offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, and we show a godly fear when the Scriptures are read.”

Hippolytus added¹⁰² that anyone who wishes to practice piety will need to learn the Scriptures, just as one learns worldly wisdom from philosophers.

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

John Chrysostom stated¹⁰³ that piety is similar for us as it was from the beginning, such as for Abraham and David.

“As the prophet David exhorted, ‘Be not envious against the workers of iniquity’ (Psalm 37:1) so Paul exhorts, ‘Continue in the things which you have learned’, and not simply learned, but ‘have been assured of’ (2 Timothy 3:14),

¹⁰¹ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, x, 35.

¹⁰² Hippolytus of Rome, “Against the Heresy of Noetus”, *Extant Works and Fragments*, Part 2, Chapter 9.

¹⁰³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy*, VIII, v. 14.

that is, have believed. And what have I believed? That this is the Life! And if you see things happening contrary to your belief, don't be bothered. He had heard, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called' (Genesis 21:12); he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac yet he was not dismayed. Let no one be offended because of the wicked. This the Scripture taught from the beginning."

Chrysostom also noted¹⁰⁴ how Paul was so dedicated to informing people about what had happened with Christ that he worked six days per week to support himself and his companions, and then reasoned in the synagogues on the Sabbath. Paul's piety resulted in a separation between those who desired to know the Scriptures and those who didn't care.

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

"'Three Sabbath days', was the only time when they had leisure from work, where Paul 'reasoned with the Thessalonians, out of the Scriptures' (Acts 17:2). Christ used to do this also; on many occasions we find Him reasoning from the Scriptures, and not on all occasions urging men by miracles. Their adversaries were hostile to miracles and called them deceivers and magicians; but he that persuades men from the Scriptures, is not liable to this insinuation. On many occasions we find Paul convincing men simply by force of teaching. In Antioch 'the whole city was gathered together' (Acts 13:44); which itself is no

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXVII, vv. 1-3.

small miracle, and in fact, it is even a very great one. That they might not think that the Apostles did it all by their own strength, but rather that God permitted it, two things resulted. ‘Some of them were persuaded’, and ‘of devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few’” (Acts 17:4, 12).

Chrysostom further noted¹⁰⁵ that some people receive punishment in this life while others don’t. In both cases it is beneficial for us.

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

The Scriptures Confirm What God Has Said

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

Gregory of Nyssa described¹⁰⁶ the use of the Scriptural tradition as the rule and measure of every aspect of the Faith. Gentile philosophers, on the other hand, drift off into whatever the philosopher pleases. In describing the soul, Christians fix on the Scriptural terms of the soul created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 5:1). Gentile philosophers have difficulty separating desire and anger from the soul, and conclude that man is akin to an animal that can reason.

“Gentile philosophy is not adequate for a discussion on the soul with all its speculations. Philosophers speak on the subject of the soul, in whatever direction of supposed consequences that the thinker pleases; however, we Christians are not entitled to such license. We make the Scriptures the rule and the measure of every aspect; we necessarily fix our eyes upon that, and approve that alone, which may be made to harmonize with the intention of those writings. We therefore neglect the Platonic illustrations, where the philosopher allegorizes these facts about the soul. We neglect also all that is said by philosophers who succeeded him and who investigated this question, and who declared that the soul was mortal by reason of these principles. We neglect everything before and since their time, and we will adopt, as the guide of our reasoning, the Scripture, which lays it down as an axiom that there is no excellence in the soul, which is not a property as well of the Divine nature. He who declares the soul to be God’s likeness states that anything foreign to Him is outside the limits of the soul; similarity cannot be retained in those qualities which are diverse from the original. Since nothing of the kind we are considering is included in the conception of the Divine nature, one can reasonably surmise that such things are not consubstantial with the soul either.”

¹⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, v. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection.

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

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁰⁷ how Jesus used the Scriptures to confirm everything. The Scribes and Pharisees had heard the Father’s voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, but they didn’t pay attention to it. They claimed that they were following what Moses said, but they didn’t receive or keep Moses’ Commandments.

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

“While Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, are said to have seen Him, Jesus was guiding them by degrees to understand that God has neither voice nor shape, but that He is higher than forms or sounds. When He said, ‘You have not heard His voice’, He does not mean that God uttered a voice, but that He speaks with us in a way that cannot be heard with the ears. When He said, ‘Nor seen His shape’, He does not mean that God has a shape, even an invisible one. Neither of these things belongs to God. In order that they might not say, ‘God spoke only to Moses’ (John 9:29), He spoke as He did, to show that there is neither voice nor shape with God. In their case, they ‘neither heard His voice nor saw His shape’, nor did they even receive and keep His commandments.”

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

“Then that they may not argue, ‘If we have not heard His voice, how has He testified to you?’ He said, ‘Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you

¹⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XL, 3.

have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me' (John 5:39). By these the Father gave His testimony, both by the Jordan and also on the mountain (Matthew 17:5). Christ did not bring forward these voices; they did not hear the Father's voice on the mountain, and they didn't pay attention to the Father speaking at Christ's Baptism. For this reason He referred them to the Scriptures, showing that from them comes the Father's testimony."

John Chrysostom also referred¹⁰⁸ to the Scriptures as a door leading to God and opening to us the knowledge of God. The Scriptures help to define the sheep from the wolves, and bars entry to the heretics.

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

"Observe the marks of a robber: first, he does not enter openly; second, he does not enter according to the Scriptures, for this is 'not by the door'. Here He referred to those who had been before, and to those who should come after Him: Antichrist, the false Christs, Judas and Theudas (Acts 5:36-37), and whatever others there have been of the same kind. With good cause He called the Scriptures 'a door', for they bring us to God and open to us the knowledge of God; they make the sheep, they guard the sheep, and don't allow the wolves to come in after them. For Scripture, like some solid door, bars the entry to the heretics, places us in a state of safety to all that we desire, and doesn't allow us to wander. If we maintain it, we shall not be easily conquered by our enemies. By it we can know everyone, both those who are, and those who are not, shepherds. What does He mean by, 'into the fold?' It refers to the sheep, and the care of them. He that doesn't use the Scriptures, but 'climbs up some other way'; that is, who cuts out for himself another and an unusual way, 'is a thief'. Do you see from this that Christ agrees with the Father, in that He brings forward the Scriptures? Because of this He said to the Jewish leaders, 'Search the Scriptures' (John 5:39). He also brought forward Moses, and called him and all the Prophets witnesses, for 'all who hear the Prophets shall come to Me'; and, 'Had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me' (John 5:46). He put the same thing metaphorically by saying, 'climbs up some other way'; He alluded to the Scribes, because they taught for commandments the teachings of men, and transgressed the Law (Matthew 15:9). He criticized them for this saying, 'None of you keeps the Law' (John 7:19). Well did He say, 'climbs up', not 'enters in', since to climb is the act of a thief intending to leap over a wall, and who does so with danger."

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

¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LIX, 2.

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

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

In 1st century Hebrew culture, there was the Day of First Fruits, described in the Old Testament, which was being celebrated among the Hebrew community the same day Christ rose. This day celebrated the first of the barley harvest; understanding its details¹⁰⁹, one can infer Christ’s Resurrection on the third day from the Scriptures. John Chrysostom noted¹¹⁰ other examples where the Scriptures confirmed the Resurrection on the third day, but a little understanding was necessary to piece everything together.

“Where have the Scriptures said that Christ was buried, and on the third day should rise again? By the type of Jonah which Christ also said, ‘As Jonah was three days and three nights in the sea monster’s belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ (Matthew 12:40). By the bush in the desert! As the bush burned, yet was not consumed, (Exodus 3:2-4), so also that body died, but was not held by death continually. The dragon in Daniel also shadows out this. As the dragon took the food which the prophet gave, burst apart¹¹¹; even so Hades having swallowed down that Body, was torn apart, the Body of itself cutting asunder its womb and rising again. If you desire to hear also in words those things which you have seen in types, listen to Isaiah, saying, ‘His life is taken from the earth’, and, ‘it pleased the Lord to cleanse Him from His wound, to show Him light’ (Isaiah 53:8, 10, 11): and David before him, ‘You

¹⁰⁹ For more details, see the Section “Christ’s Resurrection on the Third Day”, in the Study for the 12th Sunday After Pentecost.

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XXXVIII, 4-5.

¹¹¹ Lancelot Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon”, 1:27, in *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990. The “dragon” was an idol in Babylon that used to “consume” large quantities of food overnight. The Prophet Daniel secretly sprinkled ashes on the floor one day. When all the food was gone the next morning, Daniel showed the king the footprints in the ashes proving that the priests of Bel had consumed the food. For this deceit, the king executed the priests of Bel. Daniel then put pitch, fat and hair, kneaded together into the mouth of the dragon. As the mixture rose the dragon broke apart.

will not leave My soul to Hades, nor will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10).

“Therefore Paul also sends you on to the Scriptures, that you may learn that not without cause nor at random were these things done. How could they, when so many prophets are describing and proclaiming them beforehand? Nowhere does the Scripture mean the death of sin, when it makes mention of our Lord’s death, but that of the body, and a burial and resurrection of the same kind.”

“Since Paul had mentioned the proof from the Scriptures, he also added that by the events themselves, witnesses of the resurrection included the prophets, the apostles and other faithful men.”

For Refuting Heretics

Some people take offense at the mere mention of heretics, preferring to treat everyone equally and kindly. John Chrysostom noted¹¹² that heretics had been around from the beginning of time, and they have always been singled out and separated from the flock as a shepherd separates a wolf from the sheep.

“If anyone takes offense at the existence of heretics, let him remember that it was so from the beginning; the devil always set up error alongside of truth. God from the beginning promised good, the devil came with a false promise. God planted Paradise; the devil deceived, saying, ‘You shall be like gods’ (Genesis 3:5). Since he could show nothing with actions, he made many promises in words. Such is the character of deceivers. After this were Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12), then the sons of Seth and the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1-5); afterwards Ham and Japheth (Genesis 9:20-24), Abraham and Pharaoh, Jacob and Esau. So it is even to the end, Moses and the magicians (Exodus 7:9-12), the Prophets and the false prophets, the Apostles and the false apostles, Christ and Antichrist. Thus it was then, both before and at that time. Then there was Theudas (Acts 5:36), then Simon (Acts 8:9-21), then the Apostles, then this party of Hermogenes and Philetus (2 Timothy 1:15, 2:17-18). There was no time when falsehood was not set up in opposition to truth. Don’t be distressed! That it would be so, was foretold from the beginning. Therefore Paul says, ‘Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection” (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

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

Athanasius of Alexandria addressed¹¹³ the heretical aspects of the teaching of Marcion, Manichaeus, Paul of Samosata and Arius. Each had a different twist, and they are all opposed to

¹¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, vv. 1-4.

¹¹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, To the Bishops of Egypt, 4.

the Scriptures. Their use of the Scriptures is primarily to deceive the simple into thinking that their words are right.

“Each of these heresies, with respect of the peculiar impiety of its invention, has nothing in common with the Scriptures. Their advocates are aware of this, that the Scriptures are altogether opposed to the teachings of every one of them. For the sake of deceiving the simple, such as, ‘The simple believes every word’ (Proverbs 14:15), they pretend like their ‘father the devil’ (John 8:44) to study and quote the language of Scripture. In this manner they appear by their words to have a right belief, and so persuade their followers to believe what is contrary to the Scriptures. Assuredly in every one of these heresies the devil has thus disguised himself, and has suggested to them words full of craftiness. The Lord spoke concerning them, that ‘false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ (Matthew 24:24). Accordingly the devil has come, speaking by each and saying, ‘I am Christ, and the truth is with me’; and he has made them, one and all, to be liars like himself. Strange it is, that while all heresies are at variance with one another concerning the inventions, which each has framed, they are united together only by the common purpose of lying. For they have one and the same father that has sown in them all the seeds of falsehood. The faithful Christian and true disciple of the Gospel, having grace to discern spiritual things, and having built the house of his faith on a rock, stands firm and secure from their deceits. But the simple person that is not thoroughly grounded in knowledge, considering only the words that are spoken and not perceiving their meaning, gets drawn away by their craftiness. Therefore it is good for us to pray that we may receive the gift of discerning spirits, so that everyone may know whom he ought to reject, and whom to receive as friends and of the same faith (1 John 4:1-3). One might write at great length concerning these things. The heretics are perverse and their deceit is extreme. But since the Scripture is sufficient for us, I recommend to those who desire to know more of these matters, that they read the Divine word.”

John Chrysostom noted¹¹⁴ that while the Scriptures are spiritual weapons, they do us no good if we don’t know how to use them.

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

Gregory of Nyssa stated¹¹⁵ that faith is conceived as the foundation whereby wisdom is begotten in the faithful. The life of the man, thus established, is truly blessed, for Wisdom is at

¹¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXX, 2.

all times in agreement with him, and rejoices with him. To obtain understanding, we need to fit our reflections and thoughts into the context of the Scriptures. An example of mistaken understanding is that the Son of God could be a created being rather than God begotten of God.

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

“This is the reference of the saying, ‘Listen to me, my son; blessed is the man who shall listen to me, and keep my ways’ (Proverbs 8:32 LXX). The meaning of ‘ways’ is the approach to virtue, the beginning of which is the possession of Wisdom. He, who looks to the Scripture, will agree that the enemies of the truth are impious and slanderous. They are impious because they degrade the unspeakable glory of the Only-begotten God, and unite it with the creation, striving to show that the Lord is one of the things that were made by Him. They are slanderous, because, though Scripture itself gives them no ground for such opinions, they arm themselves against piety as though they drew their evidence from piety. They cannot show any passage of the Scriptures which leads us to look upon the pre-temporal glory of the Only-begotten God as part of the creation. They make the creature equal to the creator; the Gospel from heaven teaches us that the Son is neither a bastard nor a counterfeit. We say that He, Who is Very God of Very God, is all that we behold in the Father. They are One, and in the one is conceived the other, not over shadowing Him, not inferior to Him, not altered or subject to change in any Divine or excellent property.”

Living Godly in Christ

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

John Chrysostom stated¹¹⁵ that living godly will draw persecution in some way, either from men or from evil spirits. Sometimes the worst persecution comes during times of ease and peace. At times of peace, we are not on guard and the evil spirits are able to stir up passions such as pride, pleasure, envy, etc. During times of persecution, while hiding among the tombs, these passions do not make much headway, and our worth as Christians is much greater.

“Great are the medicinal virtues of repentance. That man truly deserves despair, who despairs of himself; that man has no hope or salvation. It is not the falling into a depth of evils, it is the lying there when fallen, that is dreadful; it is not the coming into such a condition, it is the making light of it that is impious. The thing that ought to make you serious, should not make us reckless? Having

¹¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, III, 2.

¹¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XXIV, vv. 44-46.

received so many wounds, do we fall back? There is no incurable wound of the soul, anything can be healed; for the body, there are many incurable wounds, but none for the soul. Yet for the body we don't cease in our efforts to obtain cures, while for the soul we are apathetic. Notice the thief on the cross, in how short a time he achieved his salvation! Notice the Martyrs, in how short a time they accomplished their whole work? But martyrdom is not to be had today! This is true! But there are contests available, if we have the mind. 'They that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). They that live godly are always undergoing persecution, if not from men, at any rate from evil spirits, which is a more grievous persecution."

"It is because of ease and comfort, first and foremost, that those who are not vigilant undergo this. Do you think it is a trifling persecution to be living at ease? This can be the worst persecution! Like a bloody discharge, ease makes the soul sluggish; persecution and ease are like summer and winter respectively. Ease is the worst persecution! It induces sleep in the soul, an excessive yawning and drowsiness; it stirs up the passions on every side; it arms pride, pleasure, anger, envy, vainglory and jealousy. But in a time of persecution none of these is able to make a disturbance; but fear, using the lash vigorously, as one does to a barking dog, will not let any of these passions attempt to talk back to us. Who shall be able in a time of persecution to indulge in vainglory? Who will live in pleasure? No one! There is much trembling and fear, making a great calm, filling the soul with awe. I have heard from our fathers, that in the persecution of old one might see men who were truly Christian. None of them cared for money, wife, children, home or country; the one great concern with everyone was to save their souls. They were hiding, some in tombs and sepulchers, some in deserts; even tender and dainty women, fighting all the while with constant hunger. There was no longing for sumptuous and dainty living in the minds of women, while hiding next to a coffin, waiting for her maidservant to bring her meal, and trembling lest she should be taken captive, lying in her terror as in a furnace. Was she even aware that there was such a thing as dainty living, that such things as dress and ornaments exist at all? Do you see that now, in times of ease, is the persecution, with our passions, like wild beasts, attacking us on every side? Now is the persecution, especially since it is not even thought to be persecution at all. This persecution has evil in it; being war, it is thought to be peace, so that we do not arm ourselves against it; no one fears, no one trembles."

"If you do not believe me, ask the heathen, the persecutors, at what time was the conduct of Christians stricter. They had then become few in number, but rich in virtue. What profit is it if there were plenty of straw, when there might be precious stones? (1 Corinthians 3:12) The amount does not consist in the sum of numbers, but in the proven worth. Elijah was just one man; yet the whole world was not worth so much as him. 'Better is one man who is just, than a thousand who are transgressors'. 'Don't desire a multitude of unprofitable children' (Ecclesiasticus 16:1-3). Such bring more blasphemy against God, than if they were no Christians. What need do I have of a multitude? It is only more food for the fire."

Athanasius of Alexandria noted¹¹⁷ that it is not everyone who is persecuted for the Faith, but just those who desire to live godly.

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

Gregory the Great, writing to the monk Narses, likened¹¹⁸ the persecution Narses was going through to Israel at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20:24); this was merely a means for increasing Narses’ godliness.

“Romanus told me of your afflictions, and made known your opposition by bad men. In all this recall what I believe that you never forgot, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). With regard to this I confidently say that you would live less godly if you suffered persecution less. Let us hear what Paul says to his disciples, ‘You yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. For we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi’ (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2). He declared that his entrance would have been of no effect, if he had not been shamefully treated. You wish to say good things, and refuse to endure evil things. Therefore you need to prepare yourself better in the midst of adverse circumstances, that adversity may increase your desire for the love of God and your earnestness in good works. The seeds of harvest germinate the more fruitfully after being covered over with frost; similarly fire is kept down by a high wind, that it may grow greater. I know that from the perverse speech of so many evil tongues you endure a violent storm, and bear in your soul billows of contradictions. But remember what the Lord says, ‘I heard you in the secret place of storm; I proved you at the waters¹¹⁹ of Meribah’ (Psalm 81:7, Numbers 20:24). If in the midst of those that contradict you, you do the things that are of God, then you are proven to be a true worker.”

John Chrysostom had some advice¹²⁰ for how to live godly in Christ. Our whole life is a wrestling match, where we don’t wrestle with flesh and blood, but with the demonic powers (Ephesians 6:12). We should bear everything nobly, but yet no throw ourselves into danger needlessly, which is rashness. If persecution comes, we are not called as cowards to avoid it. But if there is no threat to godliness and no challenge to the Faith, we are not called to compete.

“Let us not seek relaxation, for Christ promised tribulation to His disciples; Paul says, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). No noble-spirited wrestler, during competition, seeks baths, and a table full of food and wine. This is not for a wrestler, but for a sluggard. For the wrestler contends with dust, with oil, with the heat of the sun’s

¹¹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XIII, 6.

¹¹⁸ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Epistles, VII, 30.

¹¹⁹ Meribah means strife or contention.

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, V, 7.

ray, with much sweat, with pressure and constraint. This is the time for contest, for fighting, for being wounded, and for being bloody and in pain. Hear what Paul says, ‘So I fight, not as one that beats the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26). Let us consider that our whole life is in combat, and then we shall never seek rest. We shall never feel it strange when we are afflicted, any more than a boxer feels it strange, when he is in combat. There is another season for repose; by tribulation we must be made perfect.”

“Even if there is no persecution or tribulation, yet there are other afflictions which come upon us every day. If we don’t bear these, we won’t endure the others. ‘T No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man’ (1 Corinthians 10:13). Let us pray to God that we may not come into temptation; but if we come into it, let us bear it nobly. It is the part of prudent men not to throw ourselves into dangers, for that is rashness. If led into them, and called by circumstances, let us give in, for that is cowardice. But if the Gospel call us, let us not refuse. In a simple case, when there is no reason, need or necessity which calls us in ‘the fear of God’, let us not rush in, for this is mere display, and useless ambition. But should any of those things which are injurious to the Faith occur, then though it is necessary to endure ten thousand deaths, let us refuse nothing. When you find the things that concern godliness prosper as you desire, why draw down needless dangers that bring no gain?”

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

John Chrysostom also noted¹²¹ that soldiers train for battle even in times of peace so that they keep up their skills for when it is needed. Christians need to do this also, where our battle is continually against the demonic powers.

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

¹²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, III, Moral.

done this? No one! For this reason we become weak in war, and easily led captive by any.”

“What stupidity is this, not to think that the present time is a season of war, when Paul cries out, ‘All that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). Christ says, ‘In the world you shall have tribulation’ (John 16:33). And again Paul says, ‘Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood’, and again, ‘Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth’ (Ephesians 6:12, 14). He who in peace and considers the business of battle will be formidable in the season of battle; but he who is without experience in the things of war, will be more troubled even in peace. He will weep for the things which he possesses and, not being able to fight for them, will be in anguish. For the possessions of the cowardly and inexperienced in war, become the property of all who are brave and warlike. The whole time of our life is the season of war. The devil is always on hand; ‘As a roaring lion, he walks about, seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). Bodily affections attack us, such as riches, beauty, pleasure, power, authority, envy, glory, pride. Our own glory wars against us, forbidding us to descend to humility; the glory of others leads us to envy. What took Adam captive? Pleasure, eating, and the love of dominion! What took his son (Cain) captive? Grudging and envy! What took captive those in the time of Noah? Fleshly pleasures, and the evils that resulted from them! What about Noah’s son his son Ham? Insolence and irreverence! Like Solomon, we must ‘Acknowledge that we pass through the midst of snares’” (Ecclesiasticus 9:13).

Athanasius of Alexandria wrote¹²² that opposing evil men and making a stand for the Faith is equivalent to martyrdom; one receives the same reward for each.

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

“I exhort you to keep in your hands the confession which was framed by the Fathers at Nicea, and defend it with great zeal and confidence in the Lord, as examples to the brethren everywhere. Show them that we now have a struggle in support of the Truth against heresy, and that the wiles of the enemy are substantial. For the proof of a martyr lies not only in refusing to burn incense to idols; but also in refusing to deny the Faith as a testimony of a good conscience. Not only were those, who turned aside to idols, condemned, but also those who

¹²² Athanasius of Alexandria, To the Bishops of Egypt, 20-21.

betrayed the Truth. Judas was degraded from the Apostolic office, not because he sacrificed to idols, but because he proved a traitor. Hymenaeus and Alexander fell away not by joining the service of idols, but because they ‘made shipwreck concerning the faith’ (1 Timothy 1:19). On the other hand, the Patriarch Abraham received the crown, not because he suffered death, but because he was faithful to God. The other Saints (Hebrews 11:20-40) were not made perfect by the shedding of their blood, but were justified by faith. To this day they are the objects of our admiration, as being ready to suffer death for piety towards the Lord.”

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹²³ to Bishop Rusticus, who was having difficulties with some fellow Bishops. They would rather resign their offices and go back to their monastery than put up with some rebellious presbyters. Leo counseled Rusticus that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecution, and the worst persecution is often from within the Church. The helmsman needs to continue to steer the ship during stormy seas; the shepherd needs to continue to watch the flock when wolves are around.

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

¹²³ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Letters, 167, 2.

Athanasius also noted¹²⁴ that faith and godliness are related like sisters. In order to avoid renouncing godliness during persecution, it is necessary to preserve the Faith. He who is practiced in one will be strengthened by the other, where the hope of both is the same: eternal life. Not so such 1st century heretics like Hymenaeus and Philetus, who didn't depart from wickedness. Similarly Israel in Egypt had to leave Egypt in order to offer a proper sacrifice to God.

“Faith and godliness are allied to each other like sisters; he who believes in Christ is godly, and he who is godly, believes the more (John 7:17). He, who is in a state of wickedness, wanders from the faith; and he who fails in godliness, falls from the true Faith. Paul advises Timothy saying, ‘Shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort’ (2 Timothy 2:16-17). Paul declared what their wickedness consisted of saying, ‘They have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past’ (2 Timothy 2:18). But again, desirous of showing that faith is yoked with godliness, Paul says, ‘All those who desire to live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). In order that no man should renounce godliness through persecution, he advised them to preserve the faith, adding, ‘You, therefore, continue in the things you have learned, and have been assured of’ (2 Timothy 3:14). As when brother is helped by brother, they become as a wall to each other; so faith and godliness, like brothers, hang together, and he who is practiced in the one, of necessity is strengthened by the other. Therefore, wishing everyone to be exercised in godliness to the end, and to contend for the Faith, he advised them, ‘Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold of eternal life’ (1 Timothy 6:12). For if a man first puts away the wickedness of idols, and rightly confesses Him, Who is truly God, he next fights by faith with those who war against Him.”

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

¹²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XI, 9-10.

Corinthians 6:17). A man will not otherwise depart from sin, than by meditation on his acts; when he has been practiced by exercise in godliness, he will lay hold on the confession of faith. Just like Paul, after he had fought the fight, possessed the crown of righteousness which was laid up; which the righteous Judge will give, not to him alone, but to all who are like him.”

Being Wise for Salvation

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

Clement of Alexandria stated¹²⁵ that those, who neglect God’s gracious calling, sin in a very grave manner. Godliness, on the other hand, makes us like God, and the Scriptures help in that direction to make us wise.

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

¹²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Heathen, 9.

John Chrysostom stated¹²⁶ that the term “wise unto salvation” applies to everyone, not just priests and bishops. Some had thought that just godliness or living a holy life was enough. Yet teaching and godliness need the help of each other.

“Hear what Paul says to Timothy, ‘Pay attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching’ (1 Timothy 4:13); Paul goes on to show the usefulness of this by adding, ‘In doing this you shall save both yourself and them that hear you’ (1 Timothy 4:16). Again he says, ‘The Lord’s servant must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient’ (2 Timothy 2:24); and he proceeds to say, ‘Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation’ (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Again, ‘All Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete’ (2 Timothy 3:16-17). He adds further in his directions to Titus about the appointment of bishops. ‘The bishop must hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able to convict those who contradict’ (Titus 1:7, 9). How shall anyone who is unskillful be able to convict those who deny the Faith and stop their mouths? What need is there to pay attention to reading and to the Holy Scriptures, if being unskillful is welcome among us? Such arguments are makeshifts and pretexts, the marks of idleness and sloth. But someone will say, ‘it is to the priests that these charges are given’; certainly, for they are the topic of the discussion.”

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

¹²⁶ John Chrysostom, Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood, IV, 8.