

THE HAZARD OF WEALTH
The Rich Young Ruler
UNION WITH CHRIST

November 29, 2009
13th Sunday of Luke
Revision F

GOSPEL: Luke 18:18-27

Epistle: Ephesians 4:1-16

The subject of today’s Gospel lesson, The Rich Young Ruler, is also read in the Orthodox lectionary from Matthew 19 on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost. In commenting on this, the Church Fathers have followed two main themes. One is the hazard of wealth, which we will cover today. In leading up to Christmas¹, we take a close look at wealth; “When Jesus comes to us in complete poverty, possessing nothing, this is a good question for us to consider”. The other use of this Reading centers on the ruler’s reference to Jesus as “Good Teacher” and Jesus’ reply, telling him to keep the Commandments. This has been the proof text for many heretics, who said that it proves that Jesus is not God. This we address on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost. In the West today’s Gospel lesson is read from either Matthew or Mark on either the 6th Sunday after Trinity or the 23rd Sunday after Trinity.

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Gospel Lesson: Luke 18:18-30; Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31

The central figure in today’s Gospel lesson is a young man (Matthew 19:20) who was referred to as “a certain ruler” (Luke 18:18), and who was the ruler of the local synagogue. He would be the equivalent of a pastor of a Church today. He had been well educated and schooled in the Mosaic Law and had kept the Law from his youth (Luke 18:22). Yet he seemed to realize he was missing something and asked Jesus, “What good thing shall I do that I may have, or inherit, eternal life?” (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18; Matthew 19:16). In keeping with his dutiful observation of the Law, he figured there was something he could do for Jesus or for His disciples or for the poor that would guarantee him eternal life. This practice was common for political

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¹ Lev Gillet, The Year of Grace of the Lord, St Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1992, p. 93.

leaders then (today, also!!). For example, King Herod, whom the Jews despised, spent many years rebuilding the Temple into the ornate structure it was in Jesus' day. All this Herod did to curry the Jews' favor, even though they still despised him.

Jesus' first response struck at the heart of the matter. The young ruler addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher" as if Jesus was merely another man whose influence was important. Jesus pointed out that no one was good but God alone. [This was the whole point of the Old Testament sacrificial system: to atone for the sins of the priest first, then for all the people since no one was good]. If the rich young ruler could accept Jesus as good, then here is the Word from the Good One: Keep the commandments. From his youth the young ruler had learned the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) as a Creed as had all Jewish boys. He knew the Ten Commandments by heart as well as a great deal of commentary and interpretation on the Law.

A Camel Passing Through the Needle's Eye

Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:23-25) This is a difficult saying to interpret. One might argue that since it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, and this has never happened in the history of mankind, this implies that no rich man has ever entered the kingdom of God². Yet Abraham and Job were very wealthy, and they are referred to as saints and as models for the righteous to imitate.

The illustration that Jesus used of camels and needles needs explanation. The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and flameproofing. At night, the gates were closed and locked with a bar on the inside and they were not opened until morning. Travelers that arrived late in the day after the gates were closed were forced to spend the night outside the city unless there was some provision for them to get into the city. Outside the city, law and order did not exist at night and travelers were at the mercy of outlaws. This is still the case today in some third world countries.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a "needle's eye gate" which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus³. A man could fit easily through the "needle's eye gate", but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel's pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the "needle's eye gate."

The statement Jesus made, that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle's eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, made use of the above imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The Parable of the Sower refers to this pack as "the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things" (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can

² Jerome, Against the Pelagians, I, 10.

³ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, pp. 24-25.

lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas (one of the Seventy) sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Everyone else in the Early Church did the same, except the price of their property wasn't as much as that of Barnabas. Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

This does not mean that no Christian can be rich. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). The Patriarch Abraham was also very wealthy, and was referred to as “a Friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:23). Although Job and Abraham were rich, they entered the Kingdom of God because they spent their riches on good works. In doing so, they ceased to be rich for themselves, but were stewards of their wealth for God in helping others.

Jerome noted⁴ that wealthy men have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, just as camels can pass through the needle's eye when they have laid down their packs.

“As the preacher says, ‘wisdom is a defense and money is a defense’ (Ecclesiastes 7:12). We must not hastily conclude that this statement conflicts with that of the Lord, ‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ (Luke 18:24-25). Were it so, the salvation of Zacchaeus the publican, described as a man of great wealth, would contradict the Lord's declaration. But what is impossible with men is possible with God (Mark 10:27), and we are taught by Paul, ‘Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life’ (1 Timothy 6:17-19). We have learned how a camel can pass through a needle's eye, how an animal with a hump on its back, when it has laid down its packs, can take to itself the wings of a dove (Psalm 55:6) and rest in the branches of the tree which has grown from a grain of mustard seed” (Matthew 13:31-32).

In Jesus' illustration, nothing is said about the camel's pack being loaded back up once the camel is inside. The key here is discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one's heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. He said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10). Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth.

The early Church Fathers made a connection between the life of the Early Church after Pentecost and the Lord's words, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). The Early Church after Pentecost exhibited one method regarding how to sell everything they had and follow Christ; there are other methods also. In most cases in the Early Church, “wanting to

⁴ Jerome, Letter to Salvina, LXXIX, 3.

be perfect”, meant some form of monasticism. There are many aspects to this also, and they are overlapping and interconnected. In the following pages, we will try to separate them a little to examine what this subject meant from the perspective of the Early Church.

John Chrysostom stated⁵ that wealth is a major impediment to the Kingdom of Heaven, like a needle’s eye is an impediment to a camel. Poverty is not such an impediment, but is actually conducive to obtaining Life.

“The advantages which we gain from riches include drunkenness, gluttony and kinky pleasures. If we were so minded, we could win heaven itself for our inheritance by our riches. ‘So then riches are good’. It is not riches, but the will of the possessor that accomplishes this; it is the will that does this, it is in the power even of a poor man to win heaven. God does not regard the amount of the gifts, but the will of the givers; it is possible even for one in poverty, who has given little, to surpass everyone. Since God requires a measure proportioned to our ability, riches won’t secure heaven to us, nor will poverty secure hell; but a good will can obtain heaven. These then let us correct; this let us repossess; this let us regulate, and everything will be easy for us.”

“As the craftsman works the wood the same, whether his axe is made of iron or of gold, or rather he does it the better with an implement of iron, so the straight path of virtue is more easily kept in a state of poverty. Regarding riches we read, ‘It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 19:24). But God has made no such declarations about poverty; in fact, the opposite. ‘Sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21); as if the act of following were to spring from the selling of one’s goods.”

“Never then let us flee from poverty as an evil, for we can use it to obtain heaven. Again, let us never follow riches as a good; for they are the ruin of such as walk unwarily. In everything let us direct our eyes to God, let us, as occasion requires, use those gifts which He has granted us, both strength of body, and abundance of money, and every other gift.”

John Chrysostom also stated⁶ that affliction and poverty can be good things in that they keep us off the broad way that leads to destruction, and on the narrow way that leads to Life (Matthew 7:13-14). Paul took this path. On the other hand, great evils have arisen from wealth. Just as a true father might send his son’s mistress into exile rather than allow her to lead the son astray, so our heavenly Father might choose to send our wealth into exile.

“Affliction is a great good. ‘Narrow is the way’ (Matthew 7:14), so that affliction shoves us into the narrow way. He who is not pressed by affliction has difficulty entering. Notice how Paul enters into this narrow way. He ‘disciplines his body and brings it into subjection’ (1 Corinthians 9:27), so as to be able to enter. Therefore, in all his afflictions, he continued giving thanks to God. Have you lost your property? This has lightened you of the most of your wideness. Have you fallen from glory? This is another sort of wideness. Have you been falsely accused? Have the things said against you, of which you are not aware, been believed? ‘Rejoice and leap for joy’. For ‘blessed are you when they revile

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, X.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXIII, 9.

and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11, 12).

“Do you wish to be set free from temptations? Paul wished to be set free, and often requested of God, but did not obtain. ‘Three time for this I sought the Lord, and He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). By ‘weakness’, he means ‘afflictions’. When Paul heard this he received it thankfully, and said, ‘I take pleasure in infirmities’ (2 Corinthians 12:10); that is, I am pleased, I rest in my afflictions. Let us give thanks, both for comfort, and for affliction. ‘Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, naked shall I depart also’ (Job 1:21). You were brought to life naked, penniless, having no glory, and no honorable name. Consider how great evils have often arisen from wealth. ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven’ (Luke 18:25). Wealth is a hindrance for many good things, and do you still seek to be rich? So narrow is the way, which lead to the Kingdom; broad is the way of wealth. Therefore Christ said, ‘Sell what you have’ (Matthew 19:21), that the narrow way may receive you. Why do you yearn for wealth? For this cause He took it away from you, that He might free you from slavery. When a mistress corrupts a son, and his father can’t talk him out of parting with her, true fathers send the mistress into exile. Abundance of wealth is a mistress for some of us. Because the Lord cares for us, he delivers us from the harm, by taking wealth away from us. Let us not then think poverty is an evil: sin is the only evil. Wealth is not a good thing by itself; to be well pleasing to God is the only good. Let us seek poverty; by doing so, we shall we lay hold on heaven.”

The Problem with Wealth

The young man said to Jesus, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:20-22).

The young man seemed to have a desire for the things of God, and his keeping of the Commandments was an indication that he had prepared himself to receive the things Christ asked. Jesus didn’t ask the rich young ruler to do anything that the Twelve Apostles hadn’t already done. Each of the Twelve had not only left their jobs and their worldly wealth, but they had also given up worldly pleasures⁷ with their spouses (Matthew 19:29).

Clement of Alexandria noted⁸ that the rich young ruler was confident about the things of the Law, but he realized he lacked something. Jesus did not charge him with violating the Law, since the Law was meant to lead one to Christ (Galatians 3:24). As a free man, Jesus gave him a

⁷ The Twelve lived as celibates the rest of their lives; those who were already married often traveled with their families, but living as brother and sister with their wives.

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 8-10.

choice, in order that he might take ownership of his own salvation. The choice Jesus offered was similar to that illustrated in the example of Mary and Martha⁹.

“The rich young ruler was perfectly persuaded that nothing was lacking to him regarding righteousness, but yet he felt himself entirely destitute of life. Therefore he asked Him who alone is able to give it. With reference to the Law, he carries confidence; but the Son of God he addresses in supplication. He is transferred from faith to faith. As perilously tossing on the waves and occupying a dangerous anchorage in the Law, he goes to Jesus to find a haven.”

“Jesus does not charge him with violating all things out of the Law¹⁰, but loves him, and fondly welcomes his obedience in what he had learned. He says that he is not perfect regarding eternal life; that is, he had not fulfilled what is perfect, and that he was a doer indeed of the Law, but ignorant of true life. The things of the Law are good, for ‘the commandment is holy’ (Romans 7:12), as far as a sort of training with fear and preparatory discipline goes, leading as it did to the culmination of grace. But Christ is the end ‘of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believes’ (Romans 10:4); not as a slave making slaves, but as sons, brethren, and fellow-heirs, who perform the Father’s will.”

“Consequently, he was not yet perfect. The expression ‘if you want’ showed the self-determination of the soul speaking with Him in a divine manner. The choice depended on the man as being free; but the gift depended on God as the Lord. God gives to those who are willing, those who are eager, and those who ask, so that their salvation may become their own. For God does not compel us, for compulsion is repugnant to God, but He supplies to those who seek, grants to those who ask, and opens to those who knock. If you want, then, if you really want, and are not deceiving yourself, acquire what you lack. One thing the rich young ruler lacked, the one thing which lasts, the good, that which is above the Law, which the Law does not give, which the Law does not contain, which is the special right of those who live. He who had fulfilled all the demands of the Law from his youth, was not able to complete this one thing, which the Lord asked, so as to receive the eternal life he desired. He departed sad, bothered at the commandment of the life, which he sought. He did not truly want life, as he claimed, but aimed at the mere reputation of having made the good choice. He was capable of doing many things; but the one thing, the work of life, he was powerless and unable to accomplish. This is similar to what the Lord said to Martha, who was occupied with many things, and distracted and troubled with serving. She blamed her sister, who quit serving, and set herself at His feet, devoting her time to learning. ‘You are troubled about many things, but Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10:39-42). Similarly Jesus asked the rich young ruler to leave his busy life, cling to Him and adhere to the grace of Him who offered everlasting life.”

John Chrysostom stated¹¹ that Christ advised the rich young ruler to “strip himself of his money, not that he would lose what he had, but that he would add to his possessions. Christ

⁹ That is, Jesus offered the rich young ruler the choice of leaving the busy life pursuing worldly things for the life as an apostle.

¹⁰ Jesus did not charge the rich young ruler with violating the 1st Commandment, although that may very well have been the case with his fixation on his wealth.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIII, 2.

would give him more than He required him to give up; and not only more, but as much greater as Heaven is greater than earth. He called it a treasure, showing the plenteousness of the recompense, its permanency, its security, so far as was possible by human examples to convey to the hearer.”

“For they that have little are not equally held in subjection, as they that are overflowed with great affluence; for then the love of it becomes more tyrannical. The increase of acquisitions kindles the flame more and renders the consumers poorer, inasmuch as it puts them in greater desire, and makes them have more feeling of their want”.

John Cassian stated¹² that the Lord tests people’s faith, examining our faith in two methods, those in prosperity and those in adversity, and these come about in three ways. The three ways are (1) proving our faith, (2) improving our life to rid it of minor sins and (3) discipline because our sins deserve it. Cassian went into great detail regarding the 2nd and 3rd ways. We don’t normally think of prosperity as a method of examining our faith, but it can be just exactly that, if our love of our goods overpowers our love for God. We don’t usually think of great prosperity as a time when God is testing us, but that is exactly what He did with Israel (Deuteronomy 8:2, 11-18) when they became prosperous after the Conquest.

When His disciples heard Jesus’ statement about the difficulties of a rich man entering the Kingdom of God, they were astonished (Matthew 19:25, Mark 10:26) and said, “Who then can be saved?” (Luke 18:26) As part of their culture, their concept of a rich man was someone who was blessed by God more than most people. If he’s more blessed than most¹³ and still he can’t be saved, who can? Cyril of Alexandria comments¹⁴ on this as follows:

“But what does the Lord reply? ‘The things that are impossible with men, are possible with God.’ He has reserved, therefore, for those who possess wealth, the possibility of being counted worthy. Yet it is possible for them in another way to obtain honor. Christ Himself has shown us how this can happen, ‘Make to yourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon; that when it has failed, they may receive you in an everlasting house’ (Luke 16:9). There is nothing to prevent the rich, if they will, from making the poor partakers and sharers of the abundance, which they possess.”

At the end of today’s Gospel reading, Jesus addressed this in the lives of the Twelve. Peter asked, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” (Luke 18:28). Jesus answered:

- You, the Twelve, will sit on 12 thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28)
- Everyone who has given up riches or relationships for My Name’s sake will receive a hundredfold in this life (i.e. spiritual gifts) along with persecutions¹⁵, and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:30).
- Many who are first will be last and the last first (Mark 10:31). That is, those taking oaths of poverty may do quite well on their investment after all!

¹² John Cassian, Conferences, VI, xi.

¹³ For more details on their cultural understanding of a rich man’s blessings, see the Gospel lesson for the 9th Sunday of Luke.

¹⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18, Homily 123, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 491.

¹⁵ For more details of this, see the study under the Special Feast Days for the Unmercenary Healers.

Another aspect to the question, “Who then can be saved?” is found in Old Testament Law. Being rich under the Old Testament Law meant being blessed by the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:1-12). But there were strings attached to these blessings: those that were blessed were expected to be very generous with their wealth (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 15:7-11, 26:12-15). But the Law by itself cannot legislate conditions of the heart. The Law was meant to bring the believer to Christ (John 5:39-40, 45-47), for with God all things are possible (Luke 18:27).

While the direct subject matter in this Gospel lesson was riches, by extension it can be applied to other worldly endeavors. Isaac of Nineveh wrote¹⁶:

“The mind of a man engaged in spiritual endeavor who enters into a relationship with the world, is like a navigator who is calmly sailing the sea, but suddenly finds himself amidst submerged rocks and suffers shipwreck. You must first learn and understand the term ‘world’ in its purely inward significance; you will be able to learn about your soul, how far is it removed from the world and what is it mixed with that is of the world. ‘World’ is a collective name, embracing what are called passions, carnal life and minding of the flesh”.

What Does It Mean to Become Perfect?

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). Jesus’ advice is not a command; it is a call. We don’t have to do this; but we can if we want to. If we want to be perfect, we are invited to follow Christ and do as He and the Apostles and the Early Church did. The means to doing this is to sell what we have, such that we will have treasure in heaven.

Ambrose of Milan summarized¹⁷ this in his treatise “Concerning Widows”, where his subject was whether widows should remain celibate. The same advice applies here: we have the opportunity of going beyond the precepts and Commandments if we want to. The rewards for doing so are immeasurably greater.

“You will see the difference between precept and advice. The Law commanded us not to murder, commit adultery or bear false witness; that is a Commandment, which has a penalty for its transgression. But when the young man said that he had fulfilled all the Commandments of the Law, he is given advice that he should sell all that he had and follow the Lord, for these things are not imposed as commands, but are offered as advice. There are two ways of commanding things, one by way of precept, the other by way of advice. And so the Lord in one way says, ‘You shall not kill’, where He gives a Commandment; in the other He says, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell all that you have’ (Matthew 19:21). He is, then, not bound by a Commandment to whom the choice¹⁸ is left.”

“Those who have fulfilled the Commandments are able to say, ‘We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do’ (Luke 17:10). The virgin does not say this, nor does he who sold all his goods. Instead they await the stored-up rewards like the holy Apostle who says, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’ (Matthew 19:27) He doesn’t

¹⁶ Isaac of Syria, Directions of Spiritual Training, Texts 59, 22, 23

¹⁷ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Widows, XII, 73-74.

¹⁸ This implies that the rich young ruler was, in fact, capable of making this choice.

say, like the unprofitable servant, that he has done that which was his duty to do, but he has been profitable to his Master. He has multiplied the talents entrusted to him by the increase he has gained, having a good conscience; without anxiety as to his merits, he expects the reward of his faith and virtue. And so it is said to him and the others, 'In the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matthew 19:28). And to those who had faithfully preserved their talents, He promises rewards indeed, though smaller saying, 'Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Good faith, then, is due, but mercy is in the rewards. He who has kept good faith has deserved that good faith should be kept with him. He who has made good profit, because he has not sought his own benefit, has gained a claim to a heavenly reward.'

Cyprian of Carthage stated¹⁹ that a blind love of material things is like a chain that anchors us to this world, possesses us and leaves us as food for the serpent. By contrast, everyone in the Early Church sold what they had and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet.

"The truth, brethren, must not be disguised; nor must the cause of our wound be concealed. A blind love of one's own property has deceived many; they could not be prepared for their departure, when their wealth fettered them like a chain. By those bonds virtue was retarded, faith was burdened, the spirit was bound, and the soul was hindered. Those, who were involved in earthly things, become food for the serpent, which, according to God's sentence, feeds upon earth. Therefore the Lord the teacher of good things, warning about the future, says, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me' (Matthew 19:21). If rich men did this, they would not perish by their riches; if they laid up treasure in heaven, they would not have a domestic enemy. Heart and mind and feeling would be in heaven, if their treasure were in heaven. He could not be overcome by the world if he had nothing in the world whereby he could be overcome. He would follow the Lord loose and free, as did the Apostles, and many in the times of the Apostles. Many left both their means and their relatives²⁰, and clung to Christ with undivided ties."

"How can they follow Christ, who are held back by the chain of their wealth? Or how can they seek heaven, and climb to lofty heights, who are weighed down by earthly desires? They think that they possess, when they are rather possessed; they are slaves of their profit, and not lord of their own money. Paul indicts these men, when he says, 'But those that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and in perdition. For the root of all evil is the love of money, which, while some have coveted, they have wandered from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (1 Timothy 6:10). With what rewards does the Lord invite us to contempt of worldly wealth? 'There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age

¹⁹ Cyprian, Treatises, III, 11-12.

²⁰ It is more difficult for us to do this today since the support structure that was present in the Church after Pentecost is missing today. The only practical way to do this today is in a monastic community.

to come eternal life' (Luke 18:29-30). If we know these things, from the truth of the Lord who promises, not only is this loss not to be feared, but even to be desired. The Lord Himself announces to us, 'Blessed are you when men shall persecute you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall cast you out, and shall speak of your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven'" (Matthew 5:11-12 loosely).

Jerome wrote²¹ to a priest-monk who had abandoned the solitary life in the desert to return to clerical duties in Aquileia. Jerome called the celibate life "perfect", in that it was an imitation of the life of the Apostles.

"See how Peter left his net; see how the publican (i.e. Matthew 9:9) rose from the receipt of custom. In a moment he became an Apostle. 'The Son of man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matthew 8:20), and do you plan wide porticos and spacious halls? If you look to inherit the good things of the world you can no longer be a joint-heir with Christ. You are called a monk, and has the name 'monk' no meaning?"

"Listen to the words of the Lord, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come, follow Me' (Matthew 19:21). You have already promised to be perfect. For when you left the army and made yourself a celibate for the kingdom of heaven's sake, you did so that you might follow the perfect life. Now the perfect servant of Christ has nothing beside Christ. If he has anything beside Christ he is not perfect. If he is not perfect when he has promised God to be so, his profession is a lie. 'The mouth that lies slays the soul' (Wisdom 1:11 LXX). To conclude, then, if you are perfect you will not set your heart on your father's goods; and if you are not perfect you have deceived the Lord. The Gospel thunders forth its divine warning, 'You cannot serve two masters' (Luke 16:13), and does anyone dare to make Christ a liar by serving both God and Mammon? Repeatedly does He proclaim, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me' (Matthew 16:24). If I load myself with gold can I think that I am following Christ? Surely not! 'He that said he abides in Him ought to walk even as He walked.'"

Jerome also wrote²² to Demetrias, a highborn Roman lady, who had recently taken up the celibate life, to help guide her on her new mode of living. He advised her that we can choose to be perfect, just as Jesus advised the rich young ruler to choose. This is what the Apostles and the Early Church chose to do.

"I think it is unnecessary to warn you against covetousness, since it is the way of your family both to have riches and to despise them. Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5), and there was one who asked the Lord, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' He thus replied, 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me' (Matthew 19:21). Such is the climax of complete apostolic virtue — to sell all that one has and to distribute to the poor (Luke 18:22) and thus freed from all earthly burdens to fly

²¹ Jerome, Letter to Heliodorus, XIV, 6.

²² Jerome, Letter to Demetrias, CXXX, 14.

up to the heavenly realms with Christ. To us, or I should rather say to you, a careful stewardship is entrusted, although in such matters full freedom of choice is left to every individual, whether old or young. Christ's words are 'if you want to be perfect'. I do not compel you, He seems to say, I do not command you, but I set the palm before you, I show you the prize; it is for you to choose whether you will enter the arena and win the crown. Let us consider how wisely Wisdom has spoken. 'Sell what you have'! To whom is the command given? Why, to him to whom it was said, 'if you want to be perfect'. Don't sell just a part of your goods but 'all that you have'. And when you have sold them, what then? 'Give to the poor'. Not to the rich, not to your kinsfolk, not to minister to self-indulgence; but to relieve need. It does not matter whether a man is a priest, a relative or an acquaintance; you must think of nothing but his poverty. Let your praises come from the stomachs of the hungry and not from the rich banquets of the overfed. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how, while the blood of the Lord was still warm and believers were in the fervor of their first faith, they all sold their possessions and laid the price of them at the Apostles' feet (to show that money ought to be trampled underfoot) and 'distribution was made to every man according as he had need' (Acts 4:34-35). But Ananias and Sapphira proved timid stewards, and deceitful ones; therefore they brought on themselves condemnation. For having made a vow, they offered their money to God as if it was their own and not His to whom they had vowed it. Keeping back for their own use a part of that which belonged to another, through fear of famine, which true faith never fears, they drew down on themselves suddenly the avenging stroke, which was meant not in cruelty towards them but as a warning to others. In fact the Apostle Peter by no means called down death upon them, but he merely announced God's judgment by the spirit of prophecy, that the doom of two persons might be a lesson to many (Acts 5:1-10).

Jerome wrote²³ to Pammachius, a Roman Senator, whose wife and daughter had passed away, and who had become a monk, encouraging Pammachius to continue what he had started.

“‘If you want to be perfect’, the Lord says, ‘go and sell what you have and give to the poor and come and follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Great enterprises are always left to the free choice of those who hear them. Paul refrains from making virginity a positive duty, because the Lord in speaking of celibates, who had made themselves such for the kingdom of heaven's sake, finally said, ‘He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*’ (Matthew 19:12). ‘It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy’ (Romans 9:16). If you want to be perfect! There is no compulsion laid upon you; if you are to win the prize, it must be by the exercise of your own free will. If therefore you want to be perfect and desire to be as the Prophets, as the Apostles, as Christ Himself, don't sell a part of your wealth, but all that you have, lest the fear of want become an occasion of unfaithfulness, and you perish with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). And when you have sold everything, give the proceeds not to the wealthy or to the haughty but to the poor. Give each man enough for his immediate need, but do not give money to swell what a man has already. ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain’ (1 Corinthians 9:9), and ‘the laborer is worthy of his

²³ Jerome, Letter to Pammachius, LXVI, 8.

wages' (1 Timothy 5:18). Again 'those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of the altar*'" (1 Corinthians 9:13).

John Chrysostom noted²⁴ that just because something is permitted by the Law, doesn't mean that we ought to do it or stop short at what the Law commands. To the rich young ruler, Jesus didn't say, "Sell what you have", but "If you want to be perfect, sell". This leaves much to our own desire regarding how blessed we want to be.

"Let us not despise the poor or the weak, beloved, 'lest we hinder the Gospel of Christ' (1 Corinthians 9:12); that we may not betray our own salvation. Do not say when your brother is offended, 'this or that, whereby he is offended, has not been forbidden; it is permitted'. I have something greater to say to you, 'Even though Christ Himself has permitted it, yet if you see anyone injured, stop and do not use the permission' (1 Corinthians 8, 10:23-33 loosely). Paul did this; when he might have received, Christ having granted permission, he chose not to receive. Thus our Lord in His mercy has mixed much gentleness with His precepts that everything might not be merely of commandment, but that we might do much also of our own mind. It was in His power to extend the Commandments further to say, 'he who doesn't fast continually, let him be chastised; he who doesn't keep his virginity, let him be punished; he that doesn't strip himself of all that he has, let him suffer the severest penalty'. But he didn't do so, giving you occasion, if you will, to be forward in doing more. When He was speaking about virginity, He said, 'He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*' (Matthew 19:12). In the case of the rich man, some things He commanded, but some He left to the determination of his mind. He didn't say, 'Sell what you have', but, 'If you want to be perfect, sell' (Matthew 19:21). Not only do we refuse to do more, and to go beyond the precepts, but we fall very short even of the measure of things commanded. Whereas Paul suffered hunger that he might not hinder the Gospel; we don't have the heart even to spend what is in our own accounts, though we see innumerable souls destitute."

Following Christ

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). But just what does He mean by "following Him"? There are several aspects to this.

Our Free Will to Follow Christ

Irenaeus stated²⁵ that all things are possible for us, since we are in the image of God, have freedom and a free will, and it is in our power to do what we want. Christ advises us to do some things and abstain from others. If we choose right, all things are possible for us. Thus Jesus spoke at several occasions, "According to your faith, let it be done to you", where it is our own faith that does this.

"It is in man's power to disobey God, and to forfeit what is good; but such conduct brings no small amount of injury. On this account Paul says, 'All things

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXI, 8.

²⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxvii, 4-5.

are lawful to me, but not all things are helpful' (1 Corinthians 6:12). Referring to man's liberty, in which respect 'all things are lawful', God does not force anyone to do anything; by the expression 'not helpful', Paul pointed out that we 'should not use our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness' (1 Peter 2:16), for this is not helpful. Again he says, 'Every man speak the truth with his neighbor' (Ephesians 4:25). And, 'Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth' (Ephesians 4:29), not filthiness, foolish talking, or dirty jokes, which are not helpful, but rather let us speak the giving of thanks. 'For you were sometimes darkness, but now you light in the Lord'; 'walk honestly as children of the light' (Ephesians 5:8), not in carousing and drunkenness, not in bed-hopping with no moral restraint, not in strife and envy' (Romans 13:13). 'And such were some of you. You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus' (1 Corinthians 6:11). If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the Apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to advise us to do some things, and to abstain from others? Because man possessed free will from the beginning, and God possesses free will, in whose likeness man was created. Advice is always given to man to hold onto the good, which is done by obedience to God."

"In works, and in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you' (Matthew 9:29); thus showing that there is a faith especially belonging to man, since he has an opinion especially his own. Again, 'All things are possible to him that believes' (Mark 9:23); and, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done to you' (Matthew 8:13); and 'O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire' (Matthew 15:28). Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. And for this reason, 'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God shall remain upon him' (John 3:36). In the same manner the Lord, both showing His own goodness, and indicating that man is in his own free will and his own power, said to Jerusalem, 'How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! Therefore your house shall be left to you desolate'" (Matthew 23:37-38).

Following Christ out of Love

John Chrysostom noted²⁶ Paul's words, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). This implies that there were some in Corinth, who had given up all their goods to feed the poor (the ascetics), and that some were being martyred by being burned alive (the martyrs). Jesus spoke to this regarding what rewards the ascetics and the martyrs can expect. Paul spoke to this pointing out that loving one's neighbor is also crucial, and that this is implied in Jesus' words to the rich young ruler, when He said, "come follow Me".

"Paul didn't say 'if I die', but he names the most terrible of all deaths, the being burned alive (1 Corinthians 13:3), and said that even this without love is no great thing."

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXII, 8, 10. For similar arguments, see John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Paphnutius, I, iii, 7.

“To the rich man Jesus said, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come, follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Speaking of love for one’s neighbor, He said, ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man may lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13). Even before God this is greatest of all. Even if we should lay down our life for God’s sake, and not merely lay it down, but so as even to be burned, we shall have no great advantage if we don’t love our neighbor. That the gifts are of no great profit without love is no marvel, since our gifts are a secondary consideration to our way of life. Many have displayed gifts, and yet on becoming vicious have been punished, such as those who ‘prophesied in His name, and cast out many demons, and performed many mighty works’ (Matthew 7:22). An example is Judas the traitor; others, exhibiting a pure life as believers, have needed nothing else in order to obtain their salvation.”

“That the gifts should require love is no marvel. But Christ appears to announce His great rewards to both the ascetics and the martyrs. To the rich man He said, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come, follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Speaking to the disciples about martyrdom He said, ‘Whoever shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it’ (Matthew 10:39); and, ‘Whoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 10:32). For great indeed is the labor of this achievement, and nearly surpassing nature itself; this is well known to such as have had these crowns granted to them. No language can set it before us; so noble a soul does the deed belong to and so exceedingly wonderful is it.”

“But how, after Christ had said that both the ascetics and the martyrs belong to perfection, does Paul state that these without love are imperfect? Paul is not contradicting Jesus, but harmonizing with Him. In the case of the rich man, Jesus said not merely, ‘sell your goods, and give to the poor’, but He added, ‘and come, follow Me’. Not even the following Him proves any man a disciple of Christ so completely as the loving one another.”

Chrysostom also stated²⁷ that almsgiving is at the center of the hearts of those who follow Christ. This was true of the Church following Pentecost, and Daniel even advised King Nebuchadnezzar to embrace it in Babylon.

“For what reason was Christ maintained by women (Luke 8:2-3), since women followed Him and served Him (Mark 15:40-41)? This was to teach us from the first that He is concerned for those who do good. Could not Paul, who supported others by his own hands, have maintained himself without assistance from others? But you see him receiving and requesting aid. Hear the reason for it: ‘Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account’ (Philippians 4:17). At the beginning too, when men sold all their possessions and laid them at the Apostles’ feet, the Apostles were more concerned for the givers than for those who received their alms. For if their concern had only been that the poor might be relieved by any means, they would not have judged so severely the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, when they kept back their money. Paul would not have charged men to give ‘not grudgingly or of necessity’ (2 Corinthians 9:7) either if he was discouraging giving to the poor. No, but he considers the good of

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Titus, VI, Moral.

those who give. When Daniel gave that excellent advice to Nebuchadnezzar, he did not merely consider the poor. He did not just say, ‘Give to the poor’; but ‘Break off your sins by almsgiving, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor’ (Daniel 4:27). Part with your wealth, not that others may be fed, but that you may escape punishment. Christ again says, ‘Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). The commandment was given to the rich young ruler that he might be induced to follow Christ. Riches are an impediment, therefore he commands them to be given to the poor, instructing the soul to be pitiful and merciful, to despise wealth, and to flee from covetousness. Doing this makes men like God. Yet celibacy, fasting, and sleeping on the ground²⁸, are more difficult than this, but nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. It is greater than all other virtues. It places its adherents by the side of the King Himself, and justly so. The effect of celibacy, fasting, and sleeping on the ground, is confined to those who practice them, and no one besides the celibate is saved thereby. But almsgiving extends to everyone, and embraces the members of Christ; actions that extend their effects to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.”

“Almsgiving is the mother of love, which is the characteristic of Christianity, which is greater than all miracles, and by which the disciples of Christ are recognized. It is the medicine of our sins, the cleansing of the filth of our souls, the ladder fixed to heaven; it binds together the body of Christ. In the time of the Apostles, men sold their possessions and brought them to the Apostles, and they were distributed. ‘Distribution was made to every man according to his need’ (Acts 4:35). Setting aside the future, let us see who in the present life are the ones who gain: those who received, or those who gave. The ones who received murmured and quarreled with each other. The ones who gave had one soul. ‘They were of one heart, and of one soul, and grace was upon them all’ (Acts 4:32). And they lived in great simplicity! Do you see that they were the ones who gained, even by thus giving? With whom would you wish to be numbered, with those who gave away their possessions, and had nothing, or with those who murmured and received the goods of others?”

Following Christ as a Bishop in the Church

There are some of the Lord’s Commandments that apply to Bishops in the Church that don’t apply to others. John Chrysostom mentioned²⁹ that if the government of the Church has been entrusted to Bishops or Apostles, they do not have an option; they must direct the people in godliness, and they will have to answer for it. The Bishop does not have a choice in this matter.

“The preaching committed to Paul included the Gospel, things present, things future, life, godliness, and faith. As a herald proclaims in the theater in the presence of all, so also Paul preached, adding nothing, but declaring the things that he had heard. The excellence of a herald consists in proclaiming to all what has really happened, not in adding or taking away anything. If therefore it is necessary to preach, it is necessary to do it with boldness of speech; otherwise, it is not preaching. On this account Christ did not say, tell it ‘on the housetops’, but

²⁸ This refers to the practice of monks, in their very simple lifestyle, sleeping on the ground on a bed of straw.

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Titus, I, vv. 1-4.

‘preach on the housetops’ (Matthew 10:27); showing both by the place and by the manner what was to be done.”

“The expressions, ‘committed to me’, and ‘according to the commandment’ (Titus 1:3), show the matter to be worthy of credit, so that no one should think it discreditable, hesitate about it, or be discontented. If then it is a commandment, it is not Paul’s option. He fulfilled what was commanded. Of things to be done, some are in our power; others are not. What Christ commands, that is not in our power; what He permits, is left to our choice. For instance, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire’ (Matthew 5:22). This is a commandment. And again, ‘If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Matthew 5:23, 24). This also is a command. But when He says, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you have’ (Matthew 19:21); and, ‘He that is able to accept it, let him accept it’ (Matthew 19:12); this is not a command, for He gives His hearer the option, and leaves him the choice, whether he will do it or not. But Commandments are not left to our choice; we must either perform them, or be punished for not doing so. This is implied when he says, ‘Necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel!’ (1 Corinthians 9:16) This I will state more plainly, that it may be clear. He that is entrusted with the government of the Church, and honored with the office of a Bishop will have to answer for it, if he does not declare to the people what they ought to do. But the layman is under no such obligation. On this account Paul said, ‘According to the commandment of God our Savior, I do this’ (1 Timothy 1:1, Titus 1:3).

Difficulties in Following Christ

John Cassian pointed out³⁰ that following Christ with His light and easy burden sometimes seems neither light nor easy due to our own perverseness. The devil uses our possessions and our corrupt desires to torment us with worldly cares like an executioner. Instead of walking in the right paths, we find ourselves in dark trackless places, littered with brambles and occupied by snakes.

“Sometimes Christ’s yoke seems neither light nor easy, when it is supposed to be easy (Matthew 11:30); this must be ascribed to our perverseness, as we are downcast by unbelief and lack of faith. We fight with foolish obstinacy against His advice, ‘If you want to be perfect, go sell (or get rid of) all that you have, and come follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21), for we keep the substance of our worldly goods. The devil holds our soul tight in these worldly labors. When he wants to sever us from spiritual delight, he bothers us by diminishing these and depriving us of them, using his crafty wiles. When the lightness of Christ’s burden become grievous to us through the evil of a corrupt desire, when we are caught in the chains of that property and substance, which we kept for our comfort, he torments us with the scourges of worldly cares, and we end up torturing ourselves. ‘Each one is caught in the cords of his own sins’ (Proverbs 5:22), and again, ‘You all kindle a fire, and feed a flame; walk in the light of your

³⁰ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Abraham, XXIV, 24.

fire, and in the flame which you have kindled' (Isaiah 50:11 LXX). Solomon witnesses, 'Each man shall be punished, according to how he has sinned' (Wisdom 11:16 LXX). The pleasures, which we enjoy, become a torment to us, and the delights and enjoyments of this flesh, turn like executioners upon their originator. One who is supported by his former wealth and property is sure not to admit perfect humility of heart. We endure all the trials of this present life, and whatever losses the enemy can contrive, not only with the utmost patience, but with real pleasure, because all these implements of goodness help us. When they are lacking, a pride springs up that we are actually wounded by the deadly strokes of impatience at the slightest reproach. It may be said to us by the prophet Jeremiah, 'why take the road to Egypt, to drink the troubled water? And why take the road to Assyria, to drink the water of the River? Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasy shall rebuke you. Know and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and that the fear of Me *is* not in you, says the Lord' (Jeremiah 2:18-19). We feel the wondrous sweetness of the Lord's yoke to be bitter, because the bitterness of our repugnance injures it. The exceeding lightness of the Divine burden becomes heavy, because in our obstinate presumption we despise Him. 'Had they gone in good paths, they would have found the paths of righteousness easy' (Proverbs 2:20 LXX). It is plain that we make rough the right and smooth paths of the Lord with the nasty and hard stones of our desires. With our wedding garment torn, we seek trackless and thorny places, blinded by the enticements of present delights, we tear our way with torn legs through dark paths. We are overrun with the briars of sins, so as not only to be pierced by the sharp thorns of the brambles but actually struck down by the bites of deadly serpents and scorpions lurking there. Solomon said, 'Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them' (Proverbs 22:5). Jeremiah added, 'My people have forgotten me; they have offered incense in vain, stumbling in their ways, *leaving* the ancient paths, to enter upon impassable paths' (Jeremiah 18:15 LXX). 'The ways of those, who do not work, are strewn with thorns, but those of the diligent are made smooth' (Proverbs 15:19 LXX). And thus wandering from the king's highway, they can never arrive at that metropolis, where our course should always be directed without swerving. Solomon also said this, 'The labor of fools wearies those who don't even know how to go to the city' (Ecclesiastes 10:15); that is, that 'heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all' (Galatians 4:26). But whoever truly gives up this world and takes up Christ's yoke, learns from Him, and is trained in the daily practice of suffering wrong, for He is 'gentle and lowly of heart' (Matthew 11:29). He will always remain undisturbed by all temptations, and 'all things will work together for good to him' (Romans 8:28). The words of God are 'good to him that walks uprightly' (Micah 2:7); and again, 'The ways of the Lord are straight, and the righteous shall walk in them; but the ungodly shall fall in them'" (Hosea 14:9).

John Chrysostom pointed out³¹ that the poor have the advantage over the rich regarding entry into the Kingdom of God. Poor men have far fewer impediments than rich men, and thus are much more likely to enter. This is apparent in the story of Lazarus and the rich man, and the

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, vv. 11-12.

Lord calls us to become poor in order to become perfect. Some common notions are that the rich and poor will enter the Kingdom equally, and that the poor man is subjected to many evils because of his poverty. Chrysostom refutes these notions and shows that the rich have a much more difficult time in this life.

“The poor have the advantage over the rich in the things of this life; and not in the things of this life only, but also in those that are higher. What leads us to the kingdom of God: riches or poverty? Let us hear the Lord Himself saying that ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 19:24). But of the poor the contrary, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me; and you shall have treasure in heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). But if you will, let us see what is said on either side. ‘Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it’ (Matthew 7:14). Who then enters by the narrow way, he that is in luxury, or he that is in poverty; he that is independent, or he that carries ten thousand burdens; the lax and debauched, or the thoughtful and anxious? Consider the example of the beggar Lazarus! Lazarus was very poor; and he that passed him by as he lay at his gate was rich. Which then entered into the kingdom, and was in delight in Abraham’s bosom? Which of them was scorched, with not even a drop of water at his command? But, said one, ‘many poor will be lost, and many rich will enjoy those unspeakable goods’. Rather, one may see the contrary; few rich will be saved, but of the poor there will be far more. Consider making accurate measurements of the hindrances of riches and the defects of poverty. ‘The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil’ (1 Timothy 6:10). Who stands close to this root of all kinds of evils, the rich man, or the poor man? Is it not very plainly the rich? For the more things anyone surrounds himself with, the more he desires more. Vainglory also damages many good deeds, and close to this again the rich man has his dwelling. ‘But’, said one, ‘you don’t mention the evils of the poor man, his affliction, his difficulty’. This is both common to the rich and the poor, and is more a problem for the rich man than the poor man. Those, that appear to be evils from poverty, are common to either; while those that appear to be evils from riches are problems for rich men only. ‘But’, said one, ‘for lack of necessities the poor man commits many horrible things’. No poor man commits as many horrible things from lack, as do the rich for the sake of surrounding themselves with more, and of not losing what belongings they have. The poor man does not so eagerly desire necessities as the rich does luxuries; nor has the poor man as much strength to put wickedness in practice as the rich man has. If then the rich man is both more willing and able, it is quite plain that he will rather commit such, and more of them. Nor is the poor man so much afraid with respect to hunger, as the rich man is anxious with respect to the loss of what he has. Since the rich man is close to vainglory, arrogance and the love of money, the root of all evils, what hope of salvation does he have except he display much wisdom? And how shall he walk the narrow way? Let us not carry about vague notions of the multitude, but examine the facts. Here is something absurd! Respecting money, we do not trust others, but refer to figures and calculations. But in calculating about facts, we are easily drawn away by the opinions of others; even though we possess an exact balance for all things; that is, the divine Laws. I exhort you all, disregard what the multitude thinks about these things, and inquire from the Scriptures; and

having learned what true riches are, let us pursue them that we may obtain also the eternal good things.”

Following Christ Means Giving Up Something

John Chrysostom asked³² what it was that made Peter and John stand out when they raised up the lame man (Acts 3:1-11). It was the giving up of their possessions that Christ commended, not the working of miracles. Christ doesn't ask us to perform miracles; He does ask us to retreat from a concentration on worldly possessions.

“Which sort of thing then made Peter glorious and blessed, the raising up of the lame man (Acts 3:1-11), or the casting away his money (Acts 3:6)? This we may learn from the Master Himself. What does He Himself say to the rich man seeking eternal life? He did not say, ‘raise up the lame’, but, ‘Sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come and follow me, and you shall have treasure in Heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). Peter again did not say, ‘Behold, in Your Name we cast out demons’; although he was casting them out, but, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what shall we have?’ (Matthew 19:27) Christ again, in answering Peter did not say, ‘If any man raises up the lame’, but, ‘whoever has left houses or lands, shall receive a hundredfold in this world, and shall inherit everlasting life’” (Matthew 19:29).

“Let us also then emulate Peter, that we may not be confounded, but may with confidence stand at the judgment seat of Christ; that we may win Him to be with us, even as He was with His disciples. He will be with us, like He was with them, if we are willing to follow them, and to be imitators of their life and conversation. God crowns and commends men, not requiring you to raise the dead, or to cure the lame. It is not these things that make one like Peter, but the giving up of one's goods, for this was the Apostles' achievement. But do you find it impossible to give them up? In the first place, I say, it is possible; but I do not compel you, if you are unwilling, or constrain you to it. But this I entreat, to spend at least a part on the needy, and to seek for yourself nothing more than is necessary. For thus shall we both live our life here in security and without trouble, and enjoy eternal life.”

Selling Everything to Obtain Treasure in Heaven

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). The means to becoming perfect and following Christ is selling what we have and giving to the poor.

This is just what the Church did after Pentecost, where “everyone who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the Apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Barnabas, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the Apostles' feet” (Acts 4:34-37). Thus the entire community desired to become perfect by selling what they had and giving to the poor.

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XC, 4.

John Chrysostom noted³³ that when Christ told His followers to “follow Him”, He meant for us to do as He did, and He never had any possessions. The rich young ruler claimed to have kept the Commandments, but hadn’t, since he didn’t care for his neighbor. If we wish, we can reverse this and trade our worldly possessions for treasure in heaven.

“When the young man said, ‘what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Matthew 19:16), Christ, after repeating to him the other Commandments, ended with the love of his neighbor. Similarly, many of us may say that we also have kept these, for we have not robbed, killed, or committed adultery; yet we may not be able to say that we have loved our neighbor, as we ought to. For if a man has envied or spoken evil of another, if he has not helped him when injured, or given to him of his substance, then neither has he loved him. Now Christ has commanded not only this, but something besides. ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21), terming the imitating of Him in our actions ‘following’ Him. What do we learn from this? First, that he who does not have all these things cannot attain the chief places in that rest. After the young man had said, ‘All these things I have done’, Christ, as though some great thing were lacking for him to be perfectly approved, replied, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me’”.

“Secondly, Christ rebuked the man for his vain boast; one that lived in such luxury, and had no concern for others living in poverty, how could he love his neighbor? So in this matter he spoke the truth about keeping the Commandments! Let us do both of these things; let us be eager to donate our wealth and to purchase heaven. For worldly honor, men have often spent all they have for an honor, which stays here below, and does not even stay with us long. What madness it is to do this, when it is in our power voluntarily to give to others, and so to take with us those things of which we shall even against our will be deprived? If a man were being led to death and it were proposed to him to give up all his goods and so go free, we should think he was granted a favor. Shall we, who are being led to the pit, when it is allowed us to give up half and be free, prefer to be punished, and uselessly to retain what is not even ours, forfeiting what is rightly ours? What excuse shall we have? What claim for pardon shall we have, when so easy a road has been cut for us into life? We rush down precipices, and travel along an unprofitable path, depriving ourselves of all things both here and hereafter, when we might enjoy both in security. Let us stop now, and come to our senses; let us rightly dispose of worldly things, that we may easily receive those which are to come.”

John Chrysostom spoke³⁴ of almsgiving as part of perfection, using examples such as Nebuchadnezzar, Zacchaeus, and Christ’s instruction to His disciples, “If you want to be perfect”.

“Who was more shameful and iniquitous than Nebuchadnezzar? The man was impious; after signs without number he refused to come to his senses, but cast the servants of God into a furnace; yet after doing these things, he worshipped God. What did Daniel say afterward? ‘O king, let my counsel please you, and

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXIX, 4.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV.

atone for your sins by alms, and *your* iniquities by compassion on the poor; it may be God will be long-suffering to your transgressions' (Daniel 4:27 LXX). In so speaking, Daniel didn't doubt, but wished to put him in greater fear, and to make a stronger case for doing these things. If Daniel had spoken as if forgiveness was free and easy, the king would have been more apathetic. By leaving it doubtful, Nebuchadnezzar's fear was made greater, and Daniel urged him on. This is the reason why Daniel did not make forgiveness certain to him. Shall there be pardon for so great impieties? Yes. There is no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, none, which alms cannot quench. All sin is beneath this; it is a medicine adapted for every wound. What is worse than a publican? His occupation is complete injustice; and yet Zacchaeus washed away all these sins. Note how Christ shows this³⁵ by the care taken for almsgiving (Luke 19:8-10). Paul also says, 'only that we remember the poor' (Galatians 2:10); everywhere the Scripture has much to say concerning this matter. 'The ransom of a man's soul is his own wealth' (Proverbs 13:8). With reason Christ said, 'if you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me' (Matthew 19:21). This may well be part of perfection. But alms may be done not only by money, but by deeds. For example, one may kindly stand by a person to aid and defend him; one may reach to him a helping hand; the service rendered by deeds has often done more good than money."

Cyprian of Carthage noted³⁶ that the Lord told us to abandon everything and take no thought for tomorrow, since our earthly wealth is a snare and a trap. God rebuked the rich fool, and advised us to become perfect by abandoning our wealth to the poor; we would then accompany our wealth to the Kingdom of God. If we are able to do this, the Lord promises that we shall not lack food.

"We who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, should only ask for ourselves food and support. The Lord instructs us, 'Whoever doesn't forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33). But he who has begun to be Christ's disciple, renouncing all things according to the word of his Master, ought to ask for his daily food, and not to extend the desires of his petition to a long period. The Lord again says, 'Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow itself shall take thought for itself. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble' (Matthew 6:34). With reason, then, does Christ's disciple ask food for himself for the day, since he is prohibited from thinking of tomorrow; because it becomes a contradiction and a repugnant thing for us to seek to live long in this world, since we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly. Paul admonishes us, giving substance to the steadfastness of our hope and faith, 'We brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the

³⁵ First Zacchaeus gave half his goods to the poor as alms; then he offered fourfold restitution for the cases where he had defrauded anyone, which was the penalty prescribed by the Law for theft (Exodus 22:1). Following this, Jesus said that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house.

³⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IV, 19-21

faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

“He teaches us that riches are not only to be despised, but that they are also dangerous; in them is the root of seducing evils, that deceive the blindness of the human mind by a hidden deception. God rebuked the rich fool, who thought of his earthly wealth, and boasted in the abundance of his overflowing harvests, saying, ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) The fool who was to die that night was rejoicing in his storehouse, and he to whom life already was failing, was thinking of the abundance of his food. But, on the other hand, the Lord tells us that he becomes perfect and complete who sells all his goods, and distributes them for the use of the poor, and so lays up for himself treasure in heaven. He says that that man is able to follow Him, and to imitate the glory of the Lord’s passion, who, free from hindrance, is involved in no entanglements of worldly estate, but free himself, accompanies his possessions, which before have been sent to God. In order that every one of us may be able to prepare himself, let us thus learn to pray, and know, from the character of the prayer, what he ought to be.”

“For daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish’ (Proverbs 10:3); and again ‘I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread’ (Psalm 37:25). And the Lord moreover promises, ‘Do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat, or what shall we drink or what shall we wear”. For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:31-33). To those who seek God’s kingdom and righteousness, He promises that all things shall be added. Since all things are God’s, nothing will be lacking to him who possesses God, if God Himself is not lacking to him. Thus a meal was divinely provided for Daniel. When he was shut up by the king’s command in the den of hungry lions, the man of God was fed³⁷. Thus Elijah in his flight was nourished by ravens serving him in his persecution. What detestable cruelty is the malice of man! The lions spare Daniel; the birds feed Elijah; while men lay snares, and rage against each other!”

Christ clearly taught that it is good to dispense with one’s possessions, and everyone in the Church after Pentecost practiced that. For us to do that today is very difficult, however. There was a great support structure in the Church after Pentecost that is hard to duplicate today. Then the Church was run by Apostles who healed people every day (Acts 5:15-16), and seven of the Seventy Apostles (who also healed people regularly) were commissioned as deacons just to oversee equitable distribution of food. People were of one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32), and everyone contributed to the common effort. If someone tried to be deceitful and not contribute an honest effort, the Apostles had the ability to look right through them and discern it (Acts 5:1-10).

³⁷ Lancelot Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon”, 1:30-42, in The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990.

Pockets of this kind of life still exist today, but only in scattered monasteries³⁸ throughout the world, where the monasteries are typically directed by an Abbot or Abbess, who has the spiritual gifts appropriate for the task.

John Chrysostom made a case³⁹ for voluntary poverty being not just a great good, but the way to enjoy true riches. Some accuse poverty as being the cause of many evils; this contradicts Christ, who spoke, demonstrated and taught the opposite.

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

“But you say, I have need of many things, and I am unwilling to receive handouts from anyone. Nevertheless, even in this respect the rich man is inferior to you; for you perhaps ask handouts for your support, but he shamelessly asks for ten thousand things for covetousness’ sake. It is the rich that are in need of many people, often those who are unworthy of them. For instance, they often stand in need of soldiers or slaves, but the poor man has no need even of the Emperor himself.”

“Let no man then accuse poverty as being the cause of many evils, nor let him contradict Christ, who declared it to be the perfection of virtue, saying, ‘If you want to be perfect’ (Matthew 19:21). For this Christ spoke in His words, showed by His acts, and taught by His disciples. Let us therefore follow after poverty; it is the greatest good to the sober-minded.”

“Perhaps some of those who hear me avoid poverty as a bad omen. I do not doubt it. This disease is great among most men, and is the tyranny of wealth, that they cannot endure the renunciation of it. Far be this from the Christian’s soul; for nothing is richer than he who chooses poverty of his own accord, and with a ready mind.”

John Cassian stated⁴⁰ that some people deceive themselves by quoting “It is more blessed to give than to receive” while they ignore “If you want to be perfect, go sell all that you have”, in an excuse to live in luxury while they donate a little from their abundance.

“Some try to make out a case for their avarice, by quoting the authority of Scripture, which they interpret with vile ingenuity, in their desire to pervert for their own purposes a saying of the Lord Himself. Instead of adapting their own life to the meaning of the Scripture, they make the meaning of Scripture bend to the desires of their own lust. Jesus had said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). By an entirely wrong interpretation of this they think that

³⁸ For the development of monasteries in the 1st century, where the monasteries initially took on a very similar character to the life in the Church after Pentecost, see the Study on the life of the Evangelist Mark, one of the Seventy Apostles.

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XVIII, 5.

⁴⁰ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 16.

they can weaken the force of the Lord in which he says, 'If you want to be perfect, go sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (Matthew 19:21). They think that under cover of this they need not deprive themselves of their riches. They declare that they are more blessed if, supported by their belongings, they give to others out of their superabundance. While they don't embrace with the Apostle that glorious state of denial for Christ's sake, they are not content either with manual labor or the sparse diet of fasting. These must know that they are deceiving themselves, and have not really renounced the world, while they are clinging to their riches."

Wealth is Not Evil by Itself

Since some of the early heretics taught that wealth, and all material things are evil, the Church Fathers sometimes went out of their way to correct this mistaken idea. Cyril of Jerusalem pointed out⁴¹ that money and riches are not evil by themselves, but it is the bad use of money that causes problems. Money can become a door to the Kingdom. The devil may claim to control wealth, but we don't have to believe him.

"Riches, gold and silver are not, as some⁴² think, the devil's, "For the faithful has the whole world full of wealth, but the faithless has not even a penny' (Proverbs 17:6 LXX). Now nothing is more faithless than the devil; and God says plainly, 'The gold is Mine, and the silver is Mine' (Haggai 2:8). If you use it well, there is no fault to be found with money; but whenever you have made a bad use of that which is good, then being unwilling to blame your own management, you impiously throw the blame on the Creator. A man may even be justified by money; 'I was hungry, and you gave Me food'; that certainly was from money. 'I was naked, and you clothed Me' (Matthew 25:35-36); that certainly was by money. Money may become a door to the kingdom of heaven. 'Sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven'" (Matthew 19:21).

"Now I have made these remarks because of those heretics who regard possessions, money, and men's bodies as cursed. For I neither wish you to be a slave of money, nor to treat as an enemies the things which God has given you for use. Never say that riches are the devil's; even though he may say, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me' (Matthew 4:9). One may reject what he says; for we don't have to believe the liar. Perhaps he spoke the truth, being compelled by the power of Christ's presence; for he didn't say, 'All these I will give you, for they are mine', but, 'for they are delivered to me'. He has not grasped the dominion of them, but confessed that he had been entrusted with them, and was for a time dispensing them. But at a proper time interpreters should inquire whether his statement is false or true."

John Chrysostom pointed out⁴³ that Paul did not ask the rich to get rid of their possessions, but to be humble about what they have. The covetous man is a slave; someone who is a master of his wealth is not. Those that are free from pride could also become free from the

⁴¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VIII, 6-7.

⁴² One of the teachings of the Manicheans was that all material things belong to the devil.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, II, 14-15

eagerness to be rich. Wealth is uncertain; the one who is truly rich is the one who gives much, not the one who possesses much.

“We should inquire into the reason that Paul does NOT say, ‘Command those who are rich in the present world, not to be rich; charge them to become poor; charge them to get rid of what they have’; but instead Paul says, ‘Command them not to be haughty’ (1 Timothy 6:17). He knew that the root and foundation of riches is pride; and that if any man understood how to be unassuming, he would not make a big deal about the matter. Tell me, why do you lead around so many servants, parasites, and flatterers? Not for necessity, but only for pride; that you may seem more dignified than other men! Paul knew that wealth is not forbidden if it is used for what is necessary. Wine is not a bad thing, but drunkenness is so. A covetous man is one thing, and a rich man is another thing. The covetous man is not rich; he is lacking many things, and while he needs many things, he can never be rich. The covetous man is a keeper, not a master, of wealth; a slave, not a lord. He would rather give anyone a portion of his flesh, than his buried gold, which he watches and keeps with all his effort. How does he hold possession of those things, of which he has neither the free use, nor the enjoyment? Besides this, Paul is not accustomed to command everything for every man, but accommodates himself to the weakness of his hearers, just as Christ did. When that rich man came to Him, and asked Him concerning Life, He did not say at once, ‘Go, sell what you have’, but He spoke to him of other Commandments. Afterwards, when he challenged Him and said, ‘What do I still lack?’, He didn’t simply say, ‘Sell what you have’; but, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have’ (Matthew 19:21). ‘I lay it down for your determination. I give you full power to choose. I do not lay upon you any necessity’. For this reason, Paul didn’t speak to the rich concerning poverty, but concerning humility. He did this as well because of the weakness of his hearers, because he perfectly knew, that if he could bring them to be free from pride, he could also free them from eagerness about being rich.”

“After giving this admonition, ‘not to be prideful’, he also taught how they would be able to avoid being so. They should consider the nature of wealth, how uncertain and faithless it is! Therefore he goes on to say, ‘Neither trust in uncertain riches’ (1 Timothy 6:17). The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much. Abraham was rich, but he was not covetous; he looked around wherever there happened to be a stranger, or a poor man, in order that he might aid poverty, and be hospitable to the traveler. He didn’t cover his roof with gold, but fixed his tent near the oak; he was content with the shadow of its leaves. Yet so illustrious was his lodging that angels stayed with him (Genesis 18:1-16). They didn’t look for a splendid house, but virtue of soul. Let us imitate this man then, beloved, and give what we have to the needy. That lodging was crudely prepared, but it was more illustrious than the halls of kings. No king has ever entertained angels; but Abraham, dwelling under that oak, was thought worthy of that honor.”

Cyprian of Carthage noted⁴⁴ that Christ prescribes nothing more frequently than almsgiving. This He calls perfection and the pearl of great price. He who gives alms according

⁴⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, VIII, 7-8.

to God's precept believes in God like Abraham. Unfruitful men are cut off and cast into the fire, but the merciful are called into the Kingdom.

“The Lord, the Teacher of our life and Master of eternal salvation, prescribes nothing more frequently than devotion to almsgiving, and laying up heavenly treasures. ‘Sell your goods, and give alms’ (Luke 12:33). And again, ‘Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Matthew 6:19-21). When He wished to set forth a man perfect and complete by the observation of the Law, He said, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Moreover, in another place He says that a merchant of the heavenly grace, and a gainer of eternal salvation, ought to purchase the precious pearl — that is, eternal life — at the price of the blood of Christ, from the amount of his inheritance, parting with all his wealth for it. He says, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking good pearls. And when he found a precious pearl, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it’” (Matthew 13:45-46).

“He calls those the children of Abraham whom He sees to be laboring in aiding and nourishing the poor. For when Zacchaeus said, ‘Behold, half of my goods I will give to the poor; and if I have done any wrong to any man, I will restore it fourfold’, Jesus answered, ‘Salvation has come to this house, for he also is a son of Abraham’ (Luke 19:8-9). If Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (James 2:23), certainly he who gives alms according to God's precept believes in God, and he who has the truth of faith maintains the fear of God. Moreover, he who maintains the fear of God considers God in showing mercy to the poor. He labors thus because he believes that unfruitful trees, that is, unproductive men, are cut off and cast into the fire, but that the merciful are called into the kingdom. In another place, He calls fruitful men faithful; but He denies faith to unfruitful and barren ones, saying, ‘If you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?’” (Luke 16:11-12)

Impossible with Men, But Possible with God

Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:24-26).

The perspective of the Twelve was the Old Testament blessing of the Lord on the land and property of someone who is faithful to keep all the Commandments of the Mosaic Law⁴⁵. Someone who is rich had been obviously blessed by the Lord. If he couldn't be saved, who can?

⁴⁵ For more details, see the Study for the Epistle Lesson for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost.

Irenaeus of Lyons gave⁴⁶ examples that illustrate that the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God: the ages of the Patriarchs, the translation of Enoch and Elijah, Jonah and the sea monster, and the three young men in the furnace.

“If anyone imagines it impossible that men should survive for such a length of time as the Patriarchs, and that Elijah was not caught up in the flesh, but that his flesh was consumed in the fiery chariot, let him consider that Jonah, after being swallowed by the sea monster, was by the command of God again thrown out safe upon the land (Jonah 2:10). Again, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the furnace of fire heated sevenfold, they sustained no harm whatever, neither was the smell of fire perceived on them. The hand of God was present with them, working out marvelous things in their case, things impossible to be accomplished by man’s nature. Also in the case of those who were translated (Enoch and Elijah), the hand of God performed something wonderful. The Son of God appeared, as Nebuchadnezzar the king said, ‘Did not we throw three men bound into the furnace? I see four walking in the middle of the fire, and the fourth is like the Son of God’ (Daniel 3:19-25). Neither the nature of any created thing, nor the weakness of the flesh, can prevail against the will of God. For God is not subject to created things, but created things are subject to God; and all things yield in obedience to His will. Therefore the Lord declares, ‘The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God’ (Luke 18:27). It might seem to people today, who are ignorant of God’s appointment, that it is incredible and impossible that any man could live for over 900 years, yet those who were before us did live to such an age. Those who were translated live as a down payment of the future length of days. It might also appear impossible that a man came out unhurt from the sea monster’s belly and from the fiery furnace, yet they nevertheless did so, led out by the hand of God, for the purpose of declaring His power. Some, not knowing the power and promise of God, may oppose their own salvation, thinking it is impossible for God, who raises up the dead; yet the skepticism of such men shall not render the faithfulness of God powerless to confer eternal life on them.”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁴⁷ that the preservation of Jonah in the sea monster’s belly is incredible, just as is Jesus’ preservation in the tomb. All things are possible with God and Cyril chooses to believe both.

“Let us consider what is harder, for a man, after having been buried, to rise again from the earth, or for a man in the belly of a sea monster, having come into the great heat of a living creature, to escape corruption. Most people don’t know that the heat of the belly is so great, that even bones, which have been swallowed, decay and crumble away. How then did Jonah, who was three days and three nights in the sea monster’s belly, escape corruption? Seeing that the nature of all men is such that we cannot live without breathing in air, how did Jonah live without a breath of fresh air for three days? The Jews answer and say, ‘The power of God descended with Jonah when he was tossed about in hell’. Does then the Lord grant life to His own servant (Jonah), by sending His power with him, and can He not grant it to Himself as well? If Jonah is believable, Jesus

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, v, 2.

⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 18.

is believable also; if Jesus is unbelievable, Jonah also is unbelievable. To me both are alike worthy of credence. I believe that Jonah was preserved, 'for all things are possible with God' (Matthew 19:26); I believe that Christ also was raised from the dead. I have many testimonies of this, both from the Scriptures, and from the operative power today of Him who arose. He descended into hell alone, but ascended with a great company; for He went down to death, 'and many bodies of the saints, who had fallen asleep were raised' (Matthew 27:52) through Him."

Clement of Alexandria summarized⁴⁸ the dilemma facing the rich young ruler. It was not just the material wealth that he possessed, but the problem with his soul in loving his wealth more than God. Someone who is rich in virtue can make a faithful use of any fortune and not turn life into outward possession. Someone who is not rich toward God can obtain treasure in heaven by selling his possessions. The rich young ruler made the difficult for himself to be the impossible.

"Rich men that enter the kingdom with difficulty are to be apprehended in a scholarly way, not a worldly way. Salvation does not depend on external things, but on the virtue of the soul, on faith, hope, love, brotherliness, knowledge, meekness, humility and truth. It is not on account of good looks that anyone shall live or perish. He who uses the body given to him in a pure manner and according to God, shall live; and he that destroys the temple of God shall be destroyed. An ugly man can be prodigal, and a good-looking man can be sober. A man who is feeble may transgress from a stubborn temper. A poor and destitute man may be found intoxicated with lusts; and a man rich with worldly goods may be found temperate and pure. It is the soul which is to live; if virtue springing up around it saves, and vice kills, then it is clear that by being poor in those vices, it is saved."

"He is truly rich who is rich in virtue, and is capable of making a holy and faithful use of any fortune. He is falsely rich who is rich according to the flesh, and turns life into outward possession. In the same way there is a genuinely poor man. He that is poor in spirit -- that is the right thing -- versus he that is poor in a worldly sense, which is a different thing. To him, who is poor in worldly goods, but rich in vices, who is not rich toward God, it is said, 'Abandon the alien possessions that are in your soul, that you may see God'; which is another way of saying, 'Enter the kingdom of heaven'. How may you abandon them? By selling them! What then? By introducing in your soul other riches which deify and which bring everlasting life, you shall accrue endless reward, honor, salvation and everlasting immortality. It is for this purpose that you rightly sell the possessions, which shut the heavens against you, by exchanging them for those which are able to save. Let them be possessed by the worldly poor, who are destitute of the treasure in heaven. By receiving instead spiritual wealth, you shall now have treasure in the heavens."

"The wealthy and legally correct man in the Gospel, not understanding these things figuratively, nor how the same man can be both poor and rich, went away sad and downcast, abandoning the state of life, which he desired but couldn't attain, and made the difficult for himself to be impossible. For it was difficult for the soul to avoid being seduced and ruined by the luxuries of wealth.

⁴⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Salvation of the Rich Man*, 18-20.

It was not impossible, even surrounded with wealth, for one to lay hold of salvation, provided he withdraws himself from material wealth, in favor of that which is taught by God, and learned to use things rightly and properly, and so as to strive after eternal life.”

Another impossibility is seeing God. Irenaeus stated⁴⁹ that even though it is impossible to see God, some of those who love Him are permitted to see Him, when and how He wills, as the Prophets predicted.

“The prophets spoke in a prophetic manner; but they did not say that He who was seen by the prophets was a different God, the Father of all being invisible. Yet this is what the heretics declare, who are altogether ignorant of the nature of prophecy. Prophecy is a prediction of future things, a setting forth beforehand of those things which shall be afterwards. The prophets indicated beforehand that men should see God; as the Lord also says, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). But regarding His greatness, and His wonderful glory, ‘no man shall see God and live’ (Exodus 33:20), for the Father is incomprehensible. He grants His love, kindness, and infinite power to those who love Him; that is, that are permitted to see God, which the prophets predicted. ‘For those things that are impossible with men, are possible with God’ (Luke 18:27). Man does not see God by his own powers; but when He pleases, He is seen by men, by whom He wills, when He wills and as He wills. For God is powerful in all things, having been seen prophetically through the Spirit, and adoptively through the Son. He shall also be seen paternally in the kingdom of heaven, the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of God. The Son leads man to the Father, while the Father confers upon him incorruption for eternal life, which comes to everyone by virtue of his seeing God. Those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliancy; those who see God are in God, and receive of His splendor. His splendor animates them; those, therefore, who see God, receive life. For this reason, although He is beyond comprehension, boundless and invisible, He rendered Himself visible, comprehensible, and within the capacity of those who believe, that He might animate those who receive and behold Him through faith. His greatness is beyond finding out, His goodness is beyond expression; by which having been seen, He bestows life on those who see Him. It is not possible to live apart from life. The means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God, and to enjoy His goodness.”

Some people have distorted the things that are possible with God. Ambrose of Milan addressed⁵⁰ heretics who claimed that it was impossible for God to forgive sin, even after a time of penitence. Instead they re-baptized people who had sinned.

“Things which are impossible with men are possible with God; God is able whenever He wills to forgive us our sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. It is possible for God to give us that which it seems to us impossible. It seemed impossible that water should wash away sin, and Naaman the Syrian thought that his leprosy could not be cleansed by water. But that which was

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xx, 5.

⁵⁰ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Repentance, II, ii, 12.

impossible God made to be possible; He gave us so great grace. In like manner it seemed impossible that sins should be forgiven through repentance, but Christ gave this power to His Apostles, which has been transmitted to the priestly office. That, then, has become possible which was impossible. By a true reasoning, he convinces us that the re-Baptism by anyone using the Sacrament of Baptism is not permitted.”

UNION WITH CHRIST

November 29, 2009
25th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision F

Epistle: Ephesians 4:1-16

Today's Epistle lesson is used in the West for either the 13th or 17th Sunday after Trinity.

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Background to Ephesians

Shortly after Pentecost, the Twelve Apostles divided up the world into regions; then they drew lots to see where each one would go. The lot of the Apostle John was Asia Minor, which included Ephesus, but John also had been entrusted with the care of the Virgin Mary (John 19:26-27). John remained in Jerusalem until the mid-50's AD with the Virgin Mary except for a brief period in 44 AD when he left for Ephesus with the Virgin Mary to escape the wrath of

Herod (Acts 12). In the meantime, Paul filled in for John in Asia Minor until after the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.

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Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians from house-arrest in Rome in about 62 AD. He had first met with and reasoned with Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus in about 52 AD on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19). Although Paul did not stay long in 52 AD (Acts 18:20), he left Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla there and promised to return (Acts 18:18-21). About 53 AD, Paul returned on his Third Missionary Journey and spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10), during which time Paul probably evangelized the entire region of Asia Minor. At this time, the Church took a separate direction from the synagogue. Toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey in 57 AD, Paul had a very emotional farewell meeting (Acts 20:37-38) with the elders of the Church (Acts 20:17), knowing he may never return.

Ephesus had had a number of distinguished visitors over the years. The Apostle John and the Virgin Mary had gone there to escape the bloodbath of Herod (Agrippa) trying to please the Jews – which resulted in the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-4). That bloodbath began in 44 AD and ended with the death of Herod soon after (Acts 12:20-23). Apollos (of the Seventy) also was in Ephesus in c. 53 AD and vigorously refuted the Jews showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

After the death of the Virgin Mary in the mid 50's AD, the Apostle John returned to Ephesus and worked with a number of Churches in that area: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3). John may have been in the area when Paul wrote his Epistle.

Today's Epistle lesson from Ephesians has a pervading theme of the union of the believer and the Church with Christ. There are several analogies used in the Scriptures to help convey the concept of Union with Christ. Reviewing some of these will help us to a fuller understanding of the Epistle lesson.

The Vine and the Branches

The illustration of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-4) is one of many that Jesus used to illustrate His relationship with the Church. Other illustrations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Illustrations of Christ and the Church

Christ	Church	Reference
Vine	Branches	John 15:1-4
Head	Body	Colossians 1:18
Foundation	Building	1 Corinthians 3:11-14
Bridegroom	Bride	John 3:29, Revelation 21:2
Shepherd	Sheep	John 10:1-4
The Way	Those who walk therein	Acts 22:4
Indweller	Temple	1 Corinthians 6:16-20
Firstborn	The brethren	Romans 8:29
The Heir	Heirs together with Him	Hebrews 1:2, Galatians 4:7

The Life	The living	John 11:25
The Resurrection	Those who rise again	John 11:24
The Light	The enlightened	John 1:4-9

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁵¹ that the various names for Christ that relate to us describe how He benefited us.

“The Lord would not have been called a vine, except for the planting of those who are rooted in Him. He would not have been called a shepherd, had not the sheep of the house of Israel been lost, or a physician, except for the sake of those that were sick. He would not have received for Himself the rest of these names, had He not made the titles appropriate to those who were benefited by Him, by some action of His providence.”

John Chrysostom stated⁵² that, from the context (just prior to Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane), the main point of the illustration of the vine and the branches is that we can do nothing without His power.

“What does Jesus imply by the comparison of the vine and the branches? That the man who pays no attention to His words can have no life, and that the miracles about to take place, would be worked by the power of Christ! How is the Father the Vinedresser? Does the Son need a power working within? No! This example does not signify this. Observe with what exactness He goes through the comparison. He didn’t say that the ‘root’ enjoys the care of the Vinedresser, but ‘the branches’. The root is brought in here for no other purpose, but that they may learn that they can work nothing without His power, and that they ought to be united with Him by faith as the branch with the vine.”

The Closeness of the Vine to the Branches

The Apostle John records Jesus’ statements about Him being the vine and we the branches (John 15:1-4). Both vine and branches are an integral part of the plant and a grapevine would not function without both. The branches carry all the fruit, but the vine and root provide nourishment. Both are essential for they are all part of one plant. Thus we are united with Jesus in the body of Christ.

Chrysostom noted⁵³ that any separation that exists between Christ and us means trouble, and that we should be joined to Him especially by our works.

“If there were any interval between Christ and us, immediately we would perish. The branch, by its adherence to the vine, draws in the fatness; the building stands because it is cemented together with the foundation. If it stands apart, it perishes, having nothing to support itself on. Let us not then merely hold onto Christ, but let us be cemented to Him, for if we stand apart, we perish. ‘Those who keep themselves far away from You shall perish’ (Psalm 73:27 LXX). Let us be joined to Him, and let us be joined by our works. ‘He that keeps my Commandments, the same abides in Me’” (John 14:21 in substance).

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, III, 7.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVI, 1.

⁵³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VIII, 7.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁵⁴ that Christ, as a Foundation, had to be of like essence with the building that is built on it, just like the vine and the branches. Thus the Foundation and the building link Christ's humanity with our humanity and do not refer to His Divinity. A stone is only spoken of as a "foundation" after it is laid in place in the earth where the building is to be built.

"Paul wrote, 'No other foundation can a man lay except that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ; but let every man take heed how he builds on it' (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). The foundation must be of the same essence as the things built on it, that both may be well formed together. Being the Word, He has no one like Himself, who may be formed with Him; for He is Only Begotten. But having become man, there are many like Himself. According to His manhood, we, as precious stones, may be built on Him, and may become a temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. He is a foundation, and we stones built upon Him; He is a Vine and we are knit to Him as branches. We are not knit to Him according to the Essence of the Godhead; this is impossible; but according to His manhood, for the branches must be like the vine, since we are like Him according to the flesh."

"Thus He didn't say, 'He made me a foundation,' lest He might seem to be made and to have a beginning of being, and the heretics might find a shameless occasion for heresy; but He said, 'He founded me' (Ephesians 2:20). A foundation is made for the sake of the stones that are raised upon it; it is not a random process, but a stone is first transported from the mountain and set down deep into the earth. While a stone is on the mountain, it is not a foundation; when needed, and it is transported, and set deep in the earth. If the stone could speak, then it would say, 'He has now founded me, who brought me here from the mountain'. The Lord did not take a beginning of existence when He became a foundation; He was the Word before that; but when He put on our body, which He took from Mary, then He says 'He has founded me'. So He is founded for our sakes, taking on Him what is ours that we, as incorporated and compacted and bound together in Him through the likeness of the flesh, may attain to a perfect man, and remain immortal and incorruptible".

Pruning Grapevines

Let's look at grapevines in more detail. Those who have grown grapes for many years, usually do a lot of pruning. Most of the fruit of the grapevine is carried by the new growth. So every year in the fall, growers prune their vines back to the main stalk leaving just buds in strategic places for new growth. This way, the maximum new growth appears every year – and the maximum fruit. So long as the root system is healthy, the vine will replace everything that has been pruned away early in the new season. It's common in the spring for branches to grow a foot every week.

There is a similar relationship between Christ and us. Jesus is the true vine and God the Father is the vinedresser (John 15:1). Every branch that bears fruit, the Father prunes that it may bear more fruit (John 15:2). This is the action of the Cross in our lives. On the other hand, branches that don't bear fruit, He takes them away (John 15:2). Branches that don't bear fruit

⁵⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, xxii, 74.

sounds like faith without works. A third category is branches that don't abide in the vine (John 15:6); these are cast out, wither and are thrown into the fire. This may be a reference to heretics throughout the ages whose teachings do not last and whose end is Perdition.

Clement of Alexandria stated⁵⁵ that the Lord prunes His branches so that they produce fruit, not just wood. This compels the soul to produce fruit rather than engage in lust.

“The Lord shows Himself very clearly when, describing figuratively His manifold and in many ways serviceable culture, He says, ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser’ (John 15:1). He adds, ‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bring forth more fruit’ (John 15:2). The vine that is not pruned grows mostly wood, not grapes; so also man. The Word — the pruning knife — clears away the unrestrained shoots; this compels the impulses of the soul to produce fruit, not to indulge in lust. Reproof addressed to sinners has their salvation for its aim; the word is harmoniously adjusted to each one’s conduct; now with tightened cords, now with relaxed cords. Accordingly it was very plainly said by Moses, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin’” (Exodus 20:20).

Basil the Great noted⁵⁶ that our Vinedresser digs around our souls to separate us from the cares of the world and allow us to receive more nourishment from the roots. He also prunes us so that we don't generate too much wood, such as the applause of the world.

“He asks us to allow the soil we live in to be broken up; this is what the soul does when it disengages itself from the cares of the world, which are a weight on our hearts. He, who is freed from carnal affections and from the love of riches, and, far from being dazzled by them, disdains this miserable vain glory.”

“When the soil is broken up he breathes, free from the useless weight of earthly thoughts. We must not, in the spirit of the parable, generate too much wood, that is, live with ostentation, and gain the applause of the world. We must bring forth fruits, keeping the proof of our works for the vinedresser”.

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁷ that the pruning by the Father applies just to the branches, not to the root, which Christ didn't address at all. Even though the branches are excellent, they still need to be pruned; those that don't bear fruit, however, can't even remain on the Vine.

“Christ alludes to the Apostles’ manner of life, showing that without works it is not possible to be in Him. ‘Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it’ (John 15:1). That is, ‘He causes it to enjoy great care’. Yet the root requires care in addition to the branches, in having the ground broken up and cleared, yet about this He said nothing here, but focused just on the branches. This shows that He is sufficient to Himself, and that the disciples need much help from the Vinedresser, although they are excellent. Therefore He said, ‘those which bear fruit, He prunes’. The one branch, because it is fruitless, cannot even remain in the Vine, but for the other, because it bears fruit, He renders it more fruitful.”

⁵⁵ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, I, 8.

⁵⁶ Basil the Great, Hexaemeron, V, 6.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVI, 1.

“In order that the disciples might not be separated from Him by timidity, Jesus glues to Himself their souls slackened through fear, and holds out to them good hope for the future. The root remains fixed; it is only the branches that are taken away or left. Having urged them on in both ways, by things pleasant and things painful, He requires first what is to be done on our side.”

“Do you see that the Son contributes at least as much as the Father towards the care of the disciples? The Father prunes, but the Son keeps them in Himself. Staying connected to the root is what makes the branches to be fruit-bearing. That which is not pruned, if it remains on the root, bears fruit, though perhaps not so much as it ought; but that which doesn't remain, bears none at all. But still the 'pruning' also has been shown to belong to the Son, and the 'abiding in the root', to the Father, who also begot the Root. Do you see how all is common, both the 'pruning', and the enjoying the virtue which is from the root?”

The Fruit of the Vine

Let's look at the fruit of the vine in more detail to see what the implications are. Christ had said, “I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom” (Matthew 26:29). Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁵⁸ that this promise implies the inheritance of the earth as our home and the Resurrection in the flesh.

“Christ will Himself renew the inheritance of the earth, and will reorganize the mystery of the glory of His sons. As David says, ‘You renew the face of the earth’ (Psalm 104:30). He promised to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples, thus indicating both these points: namely the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk, and the resurrection of His disciples in the flesh. The new flesh, which rises again, is the same that received the new cup. He cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his disciples above in a super-celestial place like heaven. Nor are they who drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit.”

Hilary of Poitiers stated⁵⁹ that the point of the illustration of the Vine and the branches is to distinguish Christ's humanity from His and the Father's Divinity. We are “in Christ” as the branches are in the Vine.

“At the time of Christ's Passion, He unfolded the mystery of His assumption of flesh. Because He assumed flesh, we are in Him, as the branches in the Vine; unless He had become the Vine, we could have borne no good fruit. He exhorts us to abide in Himself, through faith in His assumed body, that, since the Word has been made flesh, we may be in the nature of His flesh, as the branches are in the Vine (John 15:1-2). He separates the form of the Father's majesty from the humility of His assumed flesh by calling Himself the Vine. The Vine is the source of unity for all the branches, and the Father is the careful Vinedresser, Who prunes away its useless and barren branches to be burnt in the fire. He said, ‘He that has seen Me, has seen the Father also’ (John 14:9), and ‘The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father

⁵⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V, xxxiii, 1.

⁵⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, IX, 55.

who dwells in Me does the works’, and ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?’ (John 14:10). By saying these things, He revealed the truth of His birth and the mystery of His Incarnation. He continues until He comes to the saying, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28); after this, to complete the meaning of these words, He adds the illustration of the vinedresser, the vine, and the branches, which directs our notice to His submission to bodily humiliation. He says that because the Father is greater than Himself, He is going to the Father, and that love should rejoice, that He is going to the Father; that is, to receive back His glory from the Father” (John 17:5).

The Vinedresser and the Vine

The Father is the Vinedresser and Christ is the Vine; but Christ is the Vine in His humanity, not in His Divinity. It has to be this way, since the branches (that is, us) are one essence with the Vine, which is not true if the Vine represents Christ in His Divinity.

Ambrose of Milan wrote⁶⁰ to address a misinterpretation of the Vine and the branches by the heretics of his day, who claimed that the Vine referred to Christ’s Divinity, not His humanity, and that the Father, as Vinedresser is greater than the Son. If this were the case, the Apostle Paul would be greater than the Son of God, since he refers to himself as vinedresser also. Since the Vine and branches are the same nature, this makes Christ a man only and not God. In fact, the Father is greater in that He tends and dresses Christ’s flesh just as the vinedresser dresses and tends his vines.

“Some heretics interpreted the Vinedresser as greater than the Vine, and therefore that Christ is not God. If this were the case, then Paul, who calls himself a vinedresser, is also greater than the Son of God.”

“If you interpret the vine with respect to the Substance of Christ’s Godhead, and if you suppose such a diversity of Godhead between the Father and the Son as there is of nature between a vinedresser and a vine, you insult both the Father and the Son. You insult the Son because if He is, as touching His Godhead, beneath a vinedresser, then He must also be reckoned lower than the Apostle Paul, since Paul called himself a vinedresser. ‘I have planted; Apollos has watered; but God has given the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul must then be better than the Son of God!”

“If the term ‘vinedresser’ comprehends in its designation all the preeminence of the Father’s Sovereignty, then, seeing that Paul too is a vinedresser, you set the Apostle Paul, to whom you deny that the Son is equal, on an even footing with the Father.”

“Paul wrote, ‘Neither he that plants is anything, nor he that waters; but God, Who gives the increase’ (1 Corinthians 3:7). If you rest the fullness of the Father’s Majesty in a name which stands for weakness (i.e. Planter) observe what your blasphemy intends. You expose the Father to contempt under the title of a vinedresser, and demand another God to provide the increase of the Father’s labor. Wickedly, therefore, do you think to exalt the Dignity of God the Father by the use of the term ‘vinedresser’, in which God the Father is brought down to the level of man, as being designated by a common title.”

⁶⁰ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, IV, xii, 160, 162-164, 166-167, 169.

“Moreover, if the Vine and its branches are of one nature, the Son of God appears, not to have taken upon Him our flesh, through the mystery of Incarnation, but to have altogether sprung into being from the flesh.”

“Jeremiah said, ‘O Lord, teach Me and I will know. Then saw I their purpose. For I did not know I was like an innocent lamb led to be sacrificed. They plotted an evil device against Me, saying, Come, let us put wood in his bread, and destroy Him root and branch from the land of the living’ (Jeremiah 11:17-18 OSB LXX). If the Son speaks here of the mystery of His coming Incarnation, then surely it is the Son Who speaks in an earlier passage, ‘I have planted a fruitful vine for you, one most healthy and sweet; yet you turned it into a vine unknown to Me, with a taste⁶¹ of bitterness” (Jeremiah 2:21 OSB LXX).

“Thus you see that the Son also is the vinedresser, of one Name with the Father, one work, one dignity and Substance. If, then, the Son is both Vine and Vinedresser, plainly we infer the meaning of the Vine with regard to the mystery of the Incarnation.”

“If the Son of God is called the Vine with respect to His Incarnation, you see what our Lord meant in saying, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28). After this, He proceeded immediately, ‘I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser’ (John 15:1), that you might know that the Father is greater in so far as He dresses and tends our Lord’s flesh, as the vinedresser dresses and tends his vines. Further, our Lord’s flesh is that which could increase in stature with age (Luke 2:52), and be wounded through suffering.”

Cyril of Jerusalem linked⁶² Christ’s burial in the ground with the planting of the vine to root out the curse on the ground that had been there since the days of Adam.

“A garden was the place of Christ’s burial, and a vine was planted there, like He has said, ‘I am the vine!’ (John 15:1). He was planted therefore in the earth in order that the curse, which came because of Adam, might be rooted out. The earth had been condemned to thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17-18); the true Vine sprang up out of the earth that the saying might be fulfilled, ‘Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85:11).

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Paul concluded a section in Ephesians that sounds like advice for married couples with the words: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). What is it about Christ and the Church that is such a big issue?

Christian marriage models Christ and the Church in many more ways that we might think. This began with Adam and Eve, where the description of their marriage foretold the details of the Incarnation. Just as in our relationship with Christ, our bodies are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19), so in Christian marriage our body belongs to our spouse. Because of this, it is important for the husband to concentrate on sanctifying his wife as Christ sanctifies the Church. An unpopular topic today is the wife submitting to her husband. But yet Christ submitted to the

⁶¹ Bitter grapes come from a neglect of the vineyard.

⁶² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 11.

Father; this does not make Christ a lesser god than the Father. We will take these aspects of Christian marriage one at a time and look at how they reveal important aspects about union with Christ.

John Chrysostom noted⁶³ that Paul gave his advice on personal matters on occasion⁶⁴. But Paul's words to the Ephesians were not just his advice; this was much deeper in importance, since a household is a little Church. Paul used Abraham and Sarah as an example of a little Church, where Abraham's servants were so loyal that they risked their lives at his command.

“Paul does not think it right to introduce his own advice, as he does in many cases, with examples from outside the Church. The example of Christ, so great and forcible, was alone enough; especially regarding the argument for submission. A man leaves his father and mother all the time outside the Church. Paul does not say, and ‘shall dwell with’, but ‘shall be joined to his wife’, thus showing the closeness of the union, and the fervent love. Paul explains the submission in such a way that the two appear to be no longer two. He does not say, ‘one spirit’; he does not say, ‘one soul’, but instead ‘one flesh’. She is a second authority, possessing indeed an authority and a considerable equality of dignity; but at the same time the husband is somewhat superior, which consists chiefly in the well-being of the house. Paul took the example of Christ to show that we ought not only to love, but also to govern; ‘that she may be holy and without blemish’ (Ephesians 5:27). The word ‘flesh’ has reference to love, and the word ‘shall be joined’ also has reference to love. If the husband shall make his wife ‘holy and without blemish’, everything else will follow. Seek the things which are of God and those which are of man will follow readily enough (). Govern your wife, and thus the whole house will be in harmony. Hear what Paul said, ‘If they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home’ (1 Corinthians 14:35). If men thus regulated their own houses, they shall also be fit for the management of the Church. Indeed a house is a little Church. Thus it is possible for us by becoming good husbands and wives, to surpass all others.”

“Consider Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and the 318 born in his house (Genesis 14:14). The whole house was harmoniously knit together; the whole was full of piety. Sarah ‘respected her husband’; listen to her words, ‘The thing has not as yet happened to me, even until now, and my Lord is old’ (Genesis 18:12 LXX). Abraham so loved Sarah, that in all things he obeyed her commands (Genesis 21:9-14). The young child Isaac was virtuous, and the servants born in the house were so excellent that they willingly risked their lives with their master. One of them was so admirable, that he was even entrusted with the marriage of the only-begotten child with a journey into a foreign country (Genesis 24:1-67). Just as with a general, when his soldiers are well organized, the enemy has no opportunity to attack. So it is also when husband, wife, children and servants are all interested in the same things, great is the harmony of the house. Where this is not the case, the whole is often overthrown and broken up by one bad servant.”

Chrysostom also stated⁶⁵ that marriage is a spiritual relationship modeled on Christ and the Church. What makes a good marriage is not passion and the flesh, but spiritual relationships.

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, v. 33.

⁶⁴ For example, on whether to marry or not (1 Corinthians 7:6).

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, v. 33.

“Marriage, when it takes place according to Christ, is a spiritual marriage and a spiritual birth, not of blood, not of work, nor of the will of the flesh. Such was the birth of Christ, not of blood, not of work. Such also was the birth of Isaac, ‘Sarah had passed the age of childbearing’ (Genesis 18:11). What makes a marriage is not passion, nor the flesh, but a spiritual relationship, the soul being united to God by an unspeakable union, and which He alone knows. Therefore Paul said, ‘He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him’ (1 Corinthians 6:17). Note how earnestly Paul endeavors to unite both flesh with flesh, and spirit with spirit. If marriage were a thing to be condemned, Paul would never have called Christ and the Church a bride and bridegroom; never would he have brought forward by way of exhortation the words, ‘A man shall leave his father and his mother’; never would he have added ‘but I speak concerning Christ and of the Church’ (Ephesians 5:31-32). Of the Church it is that the Psalmist said, ‘Listen, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your own people, and your father’s house. So the king will greatly desire your beauty’ (Psalm 45:10-11). Therefore Christ said, ‘I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world’ (John 16:28). But when I say, that He left the Father, do not imagine such a thing that happens among men, like a change of place; He didn’t literally come forth, but because of His Incarnation, so also is the expression, ‘He left the Father’”.

Christ and the Church

The mystery of Christ and the Church addresses the Incarnation, where Christ is both God and man in one person. Many Church Fathers have pointed out how Christian marriage illustrates the Incarnation, where the man represents the Deity of Christ and the woman represents His humanity. The illustration began with Adam and Eve, where Eve was “bone of Adam’s bone and flesh of his flesh” (Genesis 2:23). The Church is the flesh or the humanity of Christ; husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also does the Church” (Ephesians 5:28-29).

John Cassian described⁶⁶ the illustration of the Incarnation when Jesus spoke of divorce to the Jewish leaders, who were plotting the Crucifixion, which would separate Jesus’ soul from His body⁶⁷. Jesus said, “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6). Just as the Son of God put His glory aside to become man, so it is with husband and wife. “For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31).

“The Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees, ‘What God has joined together, let not man put asunder’ (Matthew 19:6). This was originally spoken by God in answer to the matter of divorce. However, the deep wisdom of God spoke more of spiritual things than carnal things. When the Jews of that day believed that Jesus was only a man without Divinity, and the Lord was asked a question about the union in marriage, He referred to His Divinity and not so much to marriage.

⁶⁶ John Cassian, *On the Incarnation of the Lord*, V, 11-12.

⁶⁷ That is, when Christ’s body was in the grave, His soul descended into Hades. In His Deity, He is Omnipresent, on the Throne of God in heaven, in the grave with His body and in Hades with His soul.

His answer applied to greater and deeper matters, when he said, ‘What God has joined together, let not man put asunder’. That is, ‘Do not sever what God has joined together in My Person. Do not let human wickedness sever that which the Divine Glory has united in Me’, that is Divinity to humanity in one person.”

“Paul said the same thing, speaking about these same subjects, expounding the things that God had proclaimed in a mystery. When he was discussing carnal union, on which Christ had been asked a question, he repeated those same words from the Law that Christ had spoken of. Paul puts in the names of husband and wife, whom he exhorts to love one another. ‘Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church’. Again, ‘So men ought to love their wives even as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also does the Church, for we are members of His body’ (Ephesians 5:25-30). By adding to the mention of man and wife the mention of Christ and the Church, he leads us away from taking it carnally to understanding it in a spiritual sense.”

“When Paul had said this, he added those words which the Lord had applied in the Gospel, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh’. After this with special emphasis he added, ‘This is a great mystery’. He cuts off any carnal interpretation by saying that it is a Divine mystery. After this he added, ‘But I am speaking of Christ and the Church’ (Ephesians 5:31-32). Not everyone he was addressing could grasp the spiritual interpretation. At least we can grasp that it IS a spiritual interpretation, because both refer to Christ.”

“Paul, who elsewhere teaches the same thing using words of the same force, says, ‘Great is the mystery of godliness, which was revealed in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory’ (1 Timothy 3:16). What then is that great mystery, which was revealed in the flesh? Clearly it was God born of the flesh, God seen in bodily form, Who was openly received up in glory just as He was openly revealed in the flesh. This then is the great mystery, of which he says, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and they two shall be one flesh’ (Ephesians 5:31). The two in one flesh were God and the human soul, for in the one flesh of man, which is joined to God, are present God and the soul, as the Lord Himself says, ‘No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again’ (John 10:18). In this are three: God, the flesh, and the soul. He is God who speaks; the flesh in which He speaks; the soul of which He speaks. He ‘ascended up where He was before’ (John 6:62), of whom we read, ‘No one has ascended to heaven, but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of man who is in heaven’ (John 3:13). For this cause, He has left His father and mother, i.e., God from whom He was begotten and that ‘Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all’ (Galatians 4:26), and began to cling to human flesh, as to his wife. He was joined to his wife, for just as man and wife make but one body, so the glory of Divinity and the flesh of man are united; and the two, God and the soul, became one flesh. For just as that flesh had God as an indweller in it, so also the soul had within it dwelling with God. This is that great mystery, where our admiration for Paul summons us to search this out. The flesh of the Church is the flesh of Christ.”

Cyprian of Carthage wrote⁶⁸ that the Church bears children, sons of God, through baptism. Heretics and those who sever themselves from the Church cannot do this since they are dead; one must be alive to be born of God. In order to have God as our Father, we must have the Church first as our Mother.

“Those who are born in the Church are the sons of God! Paul proves that in baptism the old man dies and the new man is born, ‘He saved us by the washing of regeneration’ (Titus 3:5). If regeneration is in the washing, that is, in baptism, how can heresy, which is not the spouse of Christ, generate sons to God by Christ? It is the Church alone, which, united with Christ, spiritually bears sons; as Paul again says, ‘Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it with the washing of water’ (Ephesians 5:26). If she is the beloved spouse who alone is sanctified by Christ, and alone is cleansed by His washing, it is clear that heresy, which is not the spouse of Christ and cannot be cleansed or sanctified by His washing, cannot bear sons to God.”

“One is not born by the imposition of hands when he receives the Holy Spirit, but in baptism; being already born, he receives the Holy Spirit, even as it happened in the first man Adam. God first formed him, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The Spirit cannot be received, unless he who receives first has an existence. The birth of Christians is in baptism, while the generation and sanctification of baptism are with the spouse of Christ alone. She is able spiritually to conceive and to bear sons to God. How can someone have God as his Father, before he has had the Church for his Mother? No heresy and no schism can have the sanctification of saving baptism.”

Beginning with Adam, Christ Was Announced

After the Fall of Adam and Eve, the coming of Christ was described in the words of God to the serpent, “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). But more details of the coming of Christ were also given for those who had the vision to see it.

After the forming of Adam out of clay, God breathed into him the breath of life. Thus Adam was created in the image of God, where his soul, which is a spiritual substance, was the part of Adam that was in the image of God. Adam’s human body began to be subject to age, death and decay because of his fall into sin, but his soul doesn’t die. When God took a rib out of Adam’s body to form Eve, she became “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” (Genesis 2:23), but she had a unique and independent soul. Thus Adam and Eve were “one flesh” since she was formed from Adam’s rib. The same has been true ever since, where husband and wife are referred to as “one flesh”, and they are instructed to honor their spouse as they do their own flesh (Ephesians 5:28-30). But there is more to Adam and Eve than this.

Methodius of Olympus⁶⁹ noted how Paul set a much higher standard of the description of Adam and Eve than just a historical account of human succession. Instead Paul stated that the account of Adam and Eve prophesied concerning Christ and the Church.

⁶⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Pompey, LXXIII, 6-7.

⁶⁹ Methodius of Olympus, Banquet of the Ten Virgins, III, 1.

“Paul would not vainly refer the union of the first man and woman to Christ and the Church, if the Scripture meant nothing more than what is conveyed by words and history. If the Scriptures (Genesis 2-3) refer only to the union of man and woman, why should Paul guide us into the way of the Spirit, and allegorize the history of Adam and Eve as having a reference to Christ and the Church? Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall be one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24). Paul does not take it according to its mere natural sense, as referring to the union of man and woman. One could explain the passage in a natural sense, and say that the Spirit is speaking only of conception and births; that the bone taken from the bones was made another human being. But Paul, referring the passage to Christ, teaches ‘He that loves his wife loves himself. No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the Church. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church’” (Ephesians 5:32).

Methodius continued to say that Paul referred to Christ as “the last Adam”, indicating a direct comparison between Adam and Christ.

“It was fitting that the Evil One should be overcome by none other than him whom he had deceived, and him whom he boasted that he held in subjection. It was not possible that sin and condemnation should be destroyed, unless that same man on whose account it had been said, ‘Dust you are, and to dust you shall return’ (Genesis 3:19), should be created new, and undo the sentence, which for his sake had come on everyone. That ‘as in Adam’ at first ‘all die’, even so again ‘in Christ’, who assumed the nature and position of Adam, should ‘all be made alive’ (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Methodius continued⁷⁰ his comparison between Adam and Christ; in His person, His Divinity is joined to His humanity just as Adam was to Eve. Eve is like the Church who gives birth to the spiritual seed, which is virtue. The Church “increases and multiplies” just like Eve by the union and communion of the Word in the Eucharist. The Scriptures refer to the saints as the helper and bride of Christ.

“Man had become identical with the same light which poured into him. Therefore Paul directly referred to Christ the words that had been spoken of Adam. Thus the Church is formed out of His bones and flesh. The Word, leaving His Father in heaven, came down to be ‘joined to His wife’ (Ephesians 5:31), endured His passion, and willingly suffered death for her, that He might present the Church to Himself glorious and blameless. He cleansed her by the laver (Ephesians 5:26-27), for receiving the spiritual and blessed seed, which is sown by Him who implants it in the depths of the mind. The seed is conceived and formed by the Church, as by a woman, so as to give birth and nourishment to virtue. In this way, the command, ‘Increase and multiply’ (Genesis 1:22), is duly fulfilled. The Church increases daily in greatness, beauty and multitude by the

⁷⁰ Methodius of Olympus, Banquet of the Ten Virgins, III, 8.

union and communion of the Word, who still comes down to us by the memorial of His passion (i.e. the Eucharist). Otherwise the Church could not conceive believers, and give them new birth by the laver of regeneration. Christ had to empty Himself for their sake, that He might be contained by them. All who are born again by the laver receive His bones and His flesh, that is, of His holiness and of His glory. He who says that the bones and flesh of Wisdom represent understanding and virtue, is correct; and that the side⁷¹ is the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, of whom the illuminated⁷² receiving are fitly born again to incorruption.”

“It is impossible for anyone to be a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and to be chosen a member of Christ, unless the Word had come. Being filled with the Spirit, and rising again from sleep with Him who was laid to sleep for his sake, we are able to receive renewal and restoration. We are rightly called the side of the Word, the sevenfold Spirit of truth (Isaiah 11:2 LXX). After Christ’s incarnation and passion, God took and prepared a helper comparable to Him (Genesis 2:18 OSB LXX); that is, the souls which are betrothed and given in marriage to Him. The Scriptures frequently call the assembly and mass of believers by the name of the Church. Those who embrace the truth clearly, being delivered from the evils of the flesh, become, on account of their perfect purification and faith, a Church and helper of Christ, betrothed and given in marriage to Him as a virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2). Receiving the pure and genuine seed of His teaching, they cooperate with Him, helping in preaching for the salvation of others. Those who are still imperfect, beginning their lessons, are born to salvation, and shaped, as by mothers, by those who are more perfect, until they are brought forth and regenerated to the greatness and beauty of virtue. These, in their turn making progress, having become a Church, assist in laboring for the birth and nurture of other children, accomplishing in the receptacle of the soul, as in a womb, the blameless will of the Word.”

Leo the Great described⁷³ the Great Mystery of Christ and the Church as being introduced to Adam and Eve as two in one flesh. Other fathers of the Church also described⁷⁴ this.

“Whosoever doesn’t confess the human body in Christ, must know that he is unworthy of the mystery of the Incarnation, and has no share in that sacred union of which Paul speaks, ‘For we are His members, of His flesh and of His bones. For this cause a man shall leave father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and there shall be two in one flesh’ (Ephesians 5:30-31). Explaining what was meant by this, he added, ‘This mystery is great, but I speak in respect of Christ and the Church’ (Ephesians 5:32). Therefore, from the beginning of the human race, Christ is announced to all men as coming in the flesh. In which, ‘there shall be two in one flesh’; there are undoubtedly two, God and man, Christ and the Church, which issued from the Bridegroom’s flesh, when it received the mystery of redemption and regeneration, water and blood flowing from the side of the Crucified. The condition of a new creature, which at baptism puts off not the

⁷¹ Or rib, like Eve was created from Adam’s rib (Genesis 2:22)

⁷² The tern “illuminated” or the “newly illuminated” is commonly used among the Greek Fathers for the baptized.

⁷³ Leo the Great, Letter to the Clergy of Constantinople, LIX, 4.

⁷⁴ Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 11, 21; On Monogamy, IV, vi, 5; On Fasting, IV, viii, 3.

covering of true flesh but the taint of the old condemnation, is this: a man is made the body of Christ, because Christ also is the body of a man.”

Christ Has Sanctified the Church

Paul stated, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:35-38). What is this sanctifying and cleansing all about?

Just prior to the Crucifixion, Jesus said that He sanctified Himself (John 17:19). If He was already the Holy God, why did He need to sanctify Himself? In the Old Testament, anything offered as a sacrifice to the Lord was automatically holy, meaning it was sanctified. If it was set aside for God, it was holy; since Jesus was setting aside His human body as a sacrifice, He was “sanctifying” His human body. In the Old Testament, sheep and other animals were set aside for sacrifice; now it is our human bodies that are set aside. As Paul said, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). The Psalmist said, “We were counted as sheep for the slaughter” (Psalm 44:22). Jesus said, referring to His disciples, “That they may be sanctified by Your truth” (John 17:19), thus making them an offering also.

Since sanctification meant being holy, one could not be holy and still touch unclean things, like idols, prostitutes and dead bodies. In the New Testament, unclean things have been extended⁷⁵ to include greed, covetousness, heresy, etc.

John Chrysostom noted⁷⁶ that the Lord promised that we would be His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18). In order to maintain this relationship, cleansing of body and soul is needed.

“We are temples of God, sons and daughters, have Him indwelling and walking in us, His people, with Him for our God and Father. Therefore, ‘Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit’ (2 Corinthians 7:1). Let us not touch unclean things, for this is cleansing of the flesh; let us not touch things which defile the soul, for this is cleansing of the spirit. Yet he is not content with this only, but adds, ‘Perfecting holiness in the fear of God’. To avoid touching the unclean thing does not make one clean, but there needs to be something else besides in order for us to become holy: earnestness, heedfulness, piety. Paul well said, ‘In the fear of God’. It is possible to perfect chasteness, not in the fear of God but for vainglory.”

Leo the Great described⁷⁷ how Christ sanctified the Church at the Crucifixion. He had a secret design and restrained His power in order to destroy death and the author of death.

“Paul says the Father ‘did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all’ (Romans 8:32); again, he says, ‘For Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify it’ (Ephesians 5:25-26). The giving up

⁷⁵ See for example Ephesians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 2 Corinthians 6:15-17.

⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, 1.

⁷⁷ Leo the Great, Sermon for Holy Wednesday, LXVIII, 1.

of the Lord to His Passion was as much of the Father's as of His own will, so that not only did the Father 'forsake' Him, but He also abandoned Himself in a certain sense in voluntary withdrawal. The might of the Crucified restrained itself from those wicked men, and in order to make use of a secret design, He refused to make use of His open power. How would He, who had come to destroy death and the author of death by His Passion, have saved sinners, if he had resisted His persecutors? The Jews believed that Jesus had been forsaken by God, against Whom they had been able to commit such unholy cruelty. Not understanding the mystery of His wondrous endurance, they said in blasphemous mockery, 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him' (Matthew 27:42). O foolish scribes and wicked priests, the Savior's power was not to be displayed at your blind will; the Redemption of mankind was not to be delayed in obedience to blasphemers' evil tongues. If you had wished to recognize the Godhead of the Son of God, you could have observed His numberless works."

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁷⁸ that the partaking of Christ's Body and Blood is the means by which we are sanctified, both soul and body. By doing this we become partakers of the Divine Nature. There is the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation; the bread corresponds to our body; the Word to our soul. This is the Table prepared before me, and my head is anointed with the oil of the Holy Chrism.

"With full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ. In the figure of Bread is given to you His Body, and in the figure of Wine His Blood; by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, you are made of the same body and the same blood with Him. Thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that we became 'partakers of the divine nature'" (2 Peter 1:4).

"Christ said, 'Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you' (John 6:53). They did not hear His saying in a spiritual sense and were offended; they left, supposing that He was inviting them to eat human flesh."

"In the Old Testament there was showbread; but this has come to an end. In the New Testament there is Bread of heaven, and a Cup of salvation, sanctifying soul and body; as the Bread corresponds to our body, so is the Word appropriate to our soul."

"Do not consider the Bread and the Wine as bare elements; they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though sense suggests this to you, yet let faith establish you. Don't judge the matter from the taste; from faith be fully assured without misgiving that the Body and Blood of Christ have been granted to you."

"David will advise you about what this means, 'You have prepared a table before me in the presence of them that afflict me' (Psalm 23:5 LXX). What he says is to this effect: Before Your coming, the evil spirits prepared a table for men, polluted and defiled and full of demonic influence. But since Your coming. O Lord, 'You have prepared a table before me'. When the man says to God, 'You have prepared before me a table', what other does he indicate but that mystical

⁷⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXII, 3-9.

and spiritual Table, which God has prepared for us contrary to and in opposition to the evil spirits? The former had communion with demons, but this, with God. When David said, ‘You have anointed my head with oil’ (Psalm 23:5), it was with oil that He anointed your head upon your forehead, for the seal which you have of God. You have been made ‘the engraving of the signet, ‘Holiness of the Lord’ (Exodus 28:36 LXX). And ‘your cup cheers me like the best wine’ (Psalm 23:5 LXX). You see that cup here spoken of, which Jesus took in His hands, and gave thanks, and said, ‘This is My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’”.

“Solomon hinted at this grace, ‘Come here, eat your bread⁷⁹ with joy, and drink your wine⁸⁰ with a merry heart; and let not oil be lacking⁸¹ on your head; and let your garments be always white, for the Lord has favorably accepted your works’ (Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 LXX). Before you came to Baptism, your works were ‘vanity of vanities’ (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:8). But now, having put off your old garments, and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be continually robed in white. Of course we don’t mean that you always have to wear white clothing; but you must be clad in the garments that are truly white, shining and spiritual, that you may say with the blessed Isaiah, “Let my soul rejoice in the Lord, for He has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy. He has put a mitre on me as a bridegroom; He adorned me with ornaments as a bride” (Isaiah 61:10 LXX).

“Learn these things, and be fully assured that what seems to be bread is not bread, though it tastes like it, but it is the Body of Christ. What seems to be wine is not wine, though it tastes like it, but the Blood of Christ. Of this David sang of old, ‘And bread strengthens man’s heart, to make his face cheerful with oil’ (Psalm 104:15 LXX). It ‘strengthens your heart’ as you partaking of it as spiritual, and ‘makes the face of your soul to shine’. Having this unveiled with a pure conscience, may you ‘reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord, and proceed from glory to glory’” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Husbands Need to Sanctify Their Wives

A good marriage means servitude and dedication to holiness, husband to wife and vice versa, where each considers the other as better than himself/herself (Philippians 2:3). A bad marriage is one in which husband and wife cannot sanctify, but only mutually destroy each other.

Just as Christ sanctified His disciples, husbands are directed to pay attention to presenting their wives holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27) and giving himself up in order to accomplish this (Ephesians 5:25). Wives are instructed to be willing to receive this holiness; that is to submit to their husband’s efforts (Ephesians 5:22-24), just as the Church submits to Christ. Thus both husband and wife have roles to play in this life that are analogous to the relationship of Christ with the Church. These roles are confined to this present age, however.

To see this, consider the question posed to Jesus by the Sadducees and Jesus’ answer: they posed a situation where one woman was widowed six times and remarried six times.

⁷⁹ That is, the spiritual bread. Come here, he calls with the call to salvation and blessing.

⁸⁰ That is, the spiritual wine.

⁸¹ Cyril states that He alludes even to the mystic Chrism.

Therefore, they asked, whose wife would she be in the Resurrection (Luke 20:28-33)? Jesus replied that in the Resurrection, people do not marry but “are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the Resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36). In the Body of Christ, Paul wrote that, “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28).

Part of the mystery of the roles we play as husband and wife can be thought of as a instruction for the benefit of our children, our neighbors and the world. Husbands demonstrate how Christ treats the Church by how they treat their wives; and, by doing so, husbands also teach their wives how to love the Lord – thus sanctifying, cleansing and presenting her holy. Wives demonstrate how the Church responds to Christ by how they respond to their husbands; and, by doing so, wives also teach their husbands how to be obedient to the Will of God in everything. Even atheists, who are faithful to their spouses, demonstrate this to themselves in some way! Many people lose sight of this today and see only that their spouse isn’t perfect; therefore they feel a need to assume their spouse’s role, women becoming manlier and men becoming more effeminate. In contrast to this, the Orthodox wedding includes a crowning, where the crowns the bride and groom receive represent martyrs’ crowns to signify their life toward each other. This will not be necessary in the Resurrection; one will not need to teach anyone about knowing the Lord, “For they shall all know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34).

John Chrysostom encouraged⁸² his people to sanctify their wives by seeking beauty of soul in her, not just beauty in appearance. Everyone has spots, wrinkles and blemishes on their soul; these are the things that matter and the things that God sees. We should encourage affection, modesty and gentleness, which make up true beauty of soul.

“Don’t turn your back on your wife because of some deformity. Listen to the Scripture, ‘The bee is small among flying creatures, but her product is the best of sweet things’ (Ecclesiasticus 11:3). Your wife is of God’s fashioning; when you criticize her, you criticize Him that made her. What can a woman do for her beauty? Praise, hatred and love based on personal beauty belong to immoral souls. Seek beauty of soul and imitate the Bridegroom of the Church. Outward beauty is full of conceit and great license, and throws men into jealousy; it often makes you suspect monstrous things. There may be pleasure for the first or second month; perhaps for at most the first year, but then no longer; familiarity diminishes it. Meanwhile the evils which came from the beauty last: the pride, folly, contempt. The love that began on just grounds still continues ardent, since its object is beauty of soul and not of body.”

“Let us seek in a wife: affection, modesty, gentleness; these are the characteristics of beauty. Loveliness of person let us not seek, nor scold her on the points over which she has no power. Rather, let us not scold at all, since this is rudeness, nor let us be impatient. Do you notice how many, after living with beautiful wives, have ended their lives pitifully, and how many, who have lived with those of no great beauty, have run on to extreme old age with great enjoyment? Let us wipe off the ‘spot’ that is within, smooth the ‘wrinkles’ that are within, do away with the ‘blemishes’ that are on the soul. Such is the beauty God requires. Let us make her beautiful in God’s sight, not in our own. Let us

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, vv. 26-27.

not look for wealth or that high-birth which is outward, but for that true nobility which is in the soul. Let no one endure to get rich by a wife; for such riches are ugly. ‘They that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition’ (1 Timothy 6:9). Don’t seek in your wife abundance of wealth, and you shall find everything else go well. Who overlooks the most important things to acquire those which are of little value? If we have a son, we sometimes concern ourselves not how he may be made virtuous, but how we may get a rich wife; not how he may be well-mannered, but well-moneyed. We think like a businessman; we inquire not how we may be free of sin, but how we may acquire the most profit. Everything has become money; thus everything is corrupted and ruined, because that passion possesses us.”

Gregory the Theologian opposed⁸³ one standard for men and another one for women; if they are one flesh, they should have equal honor. However, the wife should reverence Christ through her husband and the husband should honor the Church through his wife.

“If you inquire into the matter: the woman sinned, and so did Adam. The serpent deceived them both; and one was not found to be the stronger and the other the weaker. Do you consider one better? Christ saves both by His Passion. Was He made flesh for the man only? He was also made flesh for the woman. Did He die for the man only? The woman also is saved by His death. He is called of the seed of David; do you think that the man is honored by this? He is also born of a Virgin, and this is on the woman’s side. ‘The two’, He says, ‘shall be one flesh’ (Ephesians 5:31); so let the one flesh have equal honor. Paul legislates for chastity by His example. ‘This Sacrament is great’, he says, ‘but I speak concerning Christ and the Church’ (Ephesians 5:32). It is well for the wife to reverence Christ through her husband; and it is well for the husband to honor the Church through his wife. ‘Let the wife’, he says, ‘see that she respect her husband’, for so she does Christ; but also he asks the husband to cherish his wife (Ephesians 5:33), for so Christ does the Church.”

John Chrysostom gave⁸⁴ some advice on how to maintain a loving household. If we despise money, look primarily to excellence of soul and keep the respect of God before us, we will be thoughtful and considerate of everyone around us.

“Let us be very thoughtful both for our wives, children, and servants; knowing that we shall be establishing an easy government for ourselves, and make our relationship with them gentle and lenient. Say, ‘Here am I, and the children whom the Lord has given me’ (Isaiah 8:18). If the husband commands respect, and the head is honorable, then the rest of the body will sustain no violence. Paul states accurately the wife’s and the husband’s fitting behavior; he charges her to respect him as the head, and him to love her as a wife; but how can these things be? That they ought to be, he has proved. They will be so (1) if we despise money, (2) if we look to one thing only, excellence of soul, and (3) if we keep the respect of God before our eyes. What Paul says to servants, ‘Whatever any man does, whether it be good or evil, the same shall he receive from the Lord’

⁸³ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Words of Matthew 19:1, XXXVII, 7.

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, v. 33.

(Ephesians 6:8); this is also the case here in husband-wife relations. Love her therefore not for her sake so much as for Christ's sake. This Paul intimates, in saying, 'as unto the Lord' (Ephesians 6:7). Do everything, as in obedience to the Lord, and as doing everything for His sake. Don't believe anyone who slanders the husband to his wife. Let the husband not believe anything at random against his wife, nor let the wife be overly inquisitive about her husband's going in and out. Let the husband not ever render himself worthy of any suspicion."

Chrysostom also compared⁸⁵ the state of the Church as the bride of Christ when He came to take her as His wife. Her surpassing ugliness and impurity were far greater than any man would accept for a wife; yet Christ came for her as if she were wonderfully beautiful.

"Whatever kind of wife men shall take, no one could take such a bride as the Church, when Christ took her. No bride could be so far removed from a man as the Church was from Christ; yet He did not loathe her for her surpassing deformity. Paul described her deformity, 'You were once darkness' (Ephesians 5:8). Note the blackness of her hue; what is blacker than darkness? Look also at her boldness, 'living in malice and envy' (Titus 3:3). Look again at her impurity, 'disobedient, foolish'. Though her blemishes were extensive, yet He gave Himself up for her in her deformity, as for one in the bloom of youth, dearly loved, and of wonderful beauty. In admiration of this Paul said, 'Scarcely for a righteous man will one die' (Romans 5:7); and again, 'in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). In spite of this, He took her, arrayed her in beauty, washed her, and didn't refuse to give Himself for her."

Members of His Body

Paul addressed⁸⁶ the Christians in Corinth to assure them that no one was unimportant and insignificant. Just like the human body, all parts of the body serve some purpose; the body is not the same without all its members. A single member of the human body or even a group of members can't make a normal human body; similarly the Church. This body of the Church is called by the Name of its head: i.e. Christ.

"Paul was struggling to prove that in the Church, no one was unneeded; this was calculated to refresh the weak by the example of the body. Nothing so consoles the person of small spirit and inferior gifts, or so persuades him to be content, as being convinced that he has his role. Therefore Paul made this point, 'the body is one and has many members'".

"For none of the members by themselves can make a body, but each is alike deficient. There is need of a coming together. The eye is as much a part of the body as is the foot in regard to its being a member and constituting a body; there is no difference in this respect."

"Paul added, 'the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12)', when he might have said, 'the many are one body, so also is the Church'. Although this was what naturally followed, he does not say it but instead of it places the name of Christ, elevating the reasoning and appealing more to the hearer's reverence. His meaning is this: 'As the body and

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, v. 26.

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXX, 1.

the head are one man, so he said that the Church and Christ are one'. Therefore he placed Christ instead of the Church, giving that Name to His body”.

John of Damascus defined⁸⁷ the Eucharist as the first-fruits of that future bread, which is life-giving spirit. We all become one body of Christ and members of one another through it.

“The bread of the Eucharist is the first-fruits of the future bread which is necessary for existence. It is thus fitting to speak so of the Lord’s body; for the Lord’s flesh is life-giving spirit because it was conceived of the life-giving Spirit. What is born of the Spirit is spirit. But I do not say this to take away the nature of the body, but I wish to make clear its life-giving and divine power. But if some persons called the bread and the wine antitypes of the body and blood of the Lord, as did the divinely inspired Basil, they said so not after the consecration but before the consecration, so calling the offering itself.

Participation is spoken of; for through it we partake of the Divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in His flesh and His Divinity. We have communion and are united with one another through it. Since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members of one another.”

John Chrysostom came out⁸⁸ really hard against anything that disturbs the members of Christ. Marriage to an idolater is better than a marriage with adultery present; it is impossible for an adulterer to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not just the husband and wife involved; the adulterer joins Christ to the harlot. Chrysostom asked adulterers not even to come to Church, since they would pollute the Church.

“Paul exhorts, ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’ (Hebrews 12:14). By ‘holiness’, he means chastity, so that each man ought to be content with his own wife, and not have to do with any other woman; for it is impossible that one not so contented should be saved. He will perish even though he has ten thousand right actions, since with adultery it is impossible to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Christ said concerning these, ‘Their worm shall not die, and the fire shall not be quenched’ (Mark 9:44-48). He can have no pardon, who after possessing the comfort of a wife, then acts shamelessly towards another woman. If many abstain even from their wives during a season of fast or prayer (1 Corinthians 7:4), how great a fire does he heap up for himself who is not even content with his wife, but pursues another. If it is not permitted one who has put away his own wife to be joined with another, (for this is adultery,) how great evil does he commit who, while his wife is in his house, brings in another. Let no one allow this illness to dwell in his soul; let him tear it up by the root. He does not so much wrong his wife as himself. So grievous and unpardonable is this offense, that if a woman separates herself from a husband who is an idolater without his consent, God punishes her; but if she separates herself from a fornicator, not so. ‘If any faithful woman has a husband that doesn’t believe, if he is pleased to dwell with her, let her not divorce him’ (1 Corinthians 7:13). Not so concerning a harlot! ‘If any man puts away his wife,

⁸⁷ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 13.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIII, 4.

except for the cause of fornication, he causes her to commit adultery' (Matthew 5:32). If the coming together makes one body, he who comes together with a harlot must become one body with her. How then shall the modest woman, being a member of Christ, receive such a one, or how shall she join to herself the member of an harlot? Observe how the one (fornication) is worse than the other (idolatry). The woman who dwells with an unbeliever is not impure; 'for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife' (1 Corinthians 7:14). Not so with the harlot! 'Shall I then make the members of Christ the members of an harlot?' (1 Corinthians 6:15) In the one case sanctification remains, and is not removed though the unbeliever dwells with his wife; but in the other case it departs. Fornication is a dreadful thing, and an agent for everlasting punishment; even in this world it brings with it hardship. The man so guilty is forced to lead a life of anxiety; he is no better off than those who are under punishment, creeping into another man's house with fear and much trembling. I exhort you to be freed from this illness; and if you don't obey, don't step on the sacred threshold. Sheep that are covered with scab and full of disease, may not be in the same herd with those that are healthy; we must drive them from the fold until they get rid of the illness. We have been made members of Christ; let us not become members of a harlot."

Irenaeus of Lyons summarized⁸⁹ the importance and the benefits of the Eucharist. It is a continuous cycle of bread and wine made from wheat and grapes that receives the Word of God and nourishes us as members of His body. We in turn are sown like wheat into the ground and complete the cycle. Like the wheat, we also will rise at our appointed time.

"When the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made, the substance of our flesh is nourished, increased and supported. How can anyone say that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, when the flesh is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him? Paul declares, 'We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' (Ephesians 5:30). He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man, for a spirit doesn't have bones or flesh. Paul of course refers to the Incarnation, by which the Lord became an actual man, consisting of flesh, nerves, and bones.

A cutting from the vine planted in the ground grows⁹⁰ and produces fruit in its season, and a grain of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with great increase by the Spirit of God. Through the wisdom of God, this serves for the use of men; having received the Word of God, the vine and the wheat becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ. So also our bodies, being nourished by it, are deposited in the earth, suffer decomposition there, and shall rise at their appointed time. The Word of God grants them resurrection to the glory of God the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). We should never become

⁸⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, V, ii, 3.

⁹⁰ Some plants reproduce from seeds, others from cuttings. Grapevines do both. To grow a grapevine from a short cutting off a fresh branch, there needs to be a couple of bud locations on the cutting. If one bud location is placed below ground, roots will grow from that location. If another bud location is above ground, branches will grow from that location.

puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves, or exalted against God, with our minds becoming ungrateful. We should learn by experience that we possess eternal duration from the excelling power of this Being, not from our own nature. We should neither undervalue that glory which surrounds God as He is, nor be ignorant of our own nature. We can know what God can do, and what benefits man receives, and thus never wander from the true comprehension of things as they are regarding God and man. God permitted our resolution into dust, that we might be instructed by every aspect and be accurate in all things, being ignorant neither of God nor of ourselves?"

Submission

Paul stated, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24). Paul's words have been twisted and misinterpreted in our generation more than most of his teaching on other subjects. In an age of the liberation of women, Paul's words are often interpreted as a put-down of women.

When we think of submission, we don't usually think in terms of Christ to the Father, but we more often think in terms of a slave to a master. Christ's relationship to the Father is not one of slave to master, but of equal to equal, where He submits to the Father out of His own free will, not out of necessity. Paul is saying the same thing regarding husbands and wives: they are equals, but he is asking the wife to submit to her husband out of her own free will, and not out of a sense of inferiority. In terms of relationships, this is a huge difference. We don't ridicule Christ as a lesser deity because He submits to the Father out of His own free will. Similarly for a wife to submit to her husband out of her own free will is not a put-down at all.

John Chrysostom stated⁹¹ that wives will become obedient to their husbands if their husbands treat them as Christ did the Church. Christ showed extraordinary love to the Church, even though she hated Him; He respected her and treated her as a free woman, not as a slave.

"Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Take the same providential care for her, as Christ takes for the Church! Even if you need to give your life for her, and to endure and undergo any suffering whatever, don't refuse it. Though you should undergo all this, yet you will not have done anything like Christ. You are doing it for someone to whom you are already knit; but He did it for someone who turned her back on Him and hated Him. Though you see her looking down on you with contempt and scorning you, yet by your great thoughtfulness for her, by affection, by kindness, you will be able to lay her at your feet. There is nothing more powerful to govern than the bonds of marriage. One may be able to hold down a servant by fear; but he will soon run away and be gone. But the partner of one's life, the mother of one's children, the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and threats, but with love and good disposition. What sort of union is it, where the wife trembles at her husband? What sort of pleasure will the husband himself enjoy, if he dwells with his wife as with a slave, and not as with a free-woman?"

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, v. 25.

Though you should suffer anything on her account, do not criticize her; for neither did Christ do this.”

The Introduction of Submission to Mankind

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 described⁹² 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).

Adam and Eve could eat freely from any of the trees in Eden, except one. God set this up as a test for their 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, which 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 had⁹³ 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. But 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 only 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 down to them so that they might admonish each other and plead for mercy. When He did come to them, He purposefully endowed 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,

⁹² Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, iii, 2.

⁹³ Ephraim the Syrian, Commentary on Genesis.

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 what would be fulfilled by Christ, the Lamb of God.

We might note first that when Eve was created from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-23), she was not "subject" to her husband. As Adam and Eve had the rule over the Garden and over all the other creatures, Eve was not "subject" to her husband either. It was only after the Fall that this was ordered. In His love for mankind, God seems to be ordering this relationship to protect women, since they can be more trusting and thus more easily ripped off by deceivers.

Christ Submits to the Father

Just before the Crucifixion, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "Father, if it is Your Will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My Will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus' human will, which is part of His humanity, submitted itself to the Will of God the Father. A little before this Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (John 14:10).

Ambrose of Milan noted⁹⁴ the depth of Christ's submission to the Will of the Father. While He is equal to the Father in His Divinity, He is in complete submission in His humanity. Even today, as we serve our fellow men, who are sick and in prison, we serve Christ, Who submits in His humanity to the conditions of our earthly existence as He lives in us. This is a very interesting observation by Ambrose that we don't hear much about today.

"Consider the subjection of the Son to the Father. He said, 'If it is Your Will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done' (Luke 22:42). His subjection was in His human nature; as we read, 'Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death' (Philippians 2:8). The subjection was that of obedience: that of death; the subjection therefore is the subjection of the assumed humanity. In the Godhead, however, there is no weakness."

"Paul said, 'That God may be all and in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28); this applies to the unity and equality of Christ with God the Father, for the Son is not separated from the Father. In like manner as the Father works all and in all, so also Christ works all in all. If Christ also works all in all, He is not subjugated in the glory of the Godhead. He is subjugated in us, in that He was made lower than the angels, in the sacrament of His body."

⁹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, xiv, 171, 176-178.

“How was Christ subjugated in us? He Himself shows us, ‘I was in prison, and you came to Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these you have done it to Me’ (Matthew 25:36). You hear of Him in subjection, and are moved, though He is sick and weak in him in whom He is in subjection, in whom He was made sin and a curse for us.”

“He was made sin and a curse not on His own account but on ours; so He was subjugated in us not for His own sake but for ours, being not in subjection in His eternal Nature, nor accursed in His eternal Nature. ‘For cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Galatians 3:13). Cursed He was, for He bore our curses; in subjection He was, for He took on Him our subjection, but in the assumption of the form of a servant, not in the glory of God. While he makes Himself a partaker of our weakness in the flesh, He makes us partakers of the divine Nature in His power. Neither in one nor the other have we any natural fellowship with the heavenly Generation of Christ, nor is there any subjection of the Godhead in Christ. On Him through that flesh which is the pledge of our salvation, we sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), though certainly not sitting by ourselves; so also He is said to be subjugated in us through the assumption of our nature.”

Paul also stated, speaking of Christ, “To Him every knee shall bow, of those in heaven, of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). Gregory of Nyssa summarized⁹⁵ what Paul meant by this:

“Paul speaks of the subjection of all men to God, when we all, being united to one another by the Faith, become one body of the Lord, Who is in all, as the subjection of the Son to the Father. Then the adoration paid to the Son by all things with one accord, by things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, overflows to the glory of the Father. When this takes place, Paul declares that the Son, Who is in all, is subject to the Father by virtue of the subjection of those in whom He is.”

All Mankind Will Submit to Christ

Paul said, ‘When all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28). Ambrose of Milan stated⁹⁶ that all things are not now subject to Christ, but they will be at some time. The Lord Himself has said, ‘Take My yoke upon you’ (Matthew 11:29). It is not the fierce that bears the yoke, but the humble and the gentle. All things were not made subject before, for they had not yet received the wisdom of God, not did they yet wear the easy yoke of the Word on the neck as it were of their mind. ‘But as many as received Him’, as it is written, ‘to them He gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1:12).

Someone might say that Christ is now made subject, because many have believed. Not so! Christ’s subjection lies not in a few but in all. I am not brought into subjection, if the flesh in me still lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). I am in part subdued; the whole Church is the one body of Christ; we divide Christ as long as the human race disagrees.

⁹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, 14.

⁹⁶ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, V, xiii, 166-169.

Therefore Christ is not yet made subject, for His members are not yet brought into subjection. But when we have become one spirit, not many members, then He also will become subject, in order that through His subjection ‘God may be all and in all’”.

Since Christ is not yet made subject, the work of God is not yet perfected; for the Son of God said, ‘My food is to do the will of My Father that sent Me, and to finish His work’ (John 4:34). Because I myself am not yet perfect, I make the work of God to be unfinished. That is not a matter of me doing something wrong; it is a matter of a lack of grace. In so far as we are made subject, it is to our profit that we are made subject to the Law, that we are made subject to grace. The wisdom of the flesh was at enmity with God, for it is not subject to the Law (Romans 8:7).

The Saints Discipline Their Bodies into Subjection

The Apostle Paul was known to exhibit the words of Christ speaking through him (2 Corinthians 13:3). Yet he admitted, “The good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil that I will not *to do*, that I do” (Romans 7:19). Paul also said, “Therefore I discipline my body and bring it into subjection lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). If Paul is fearful about not being able to keep his body in subjection, we should be also. And if our entire life is one of keeping our body in subjection, why should we be overly concerned about submission to one another? Jerome stated⁹⁷ that part of Paul’s problem was that he struggled greatly against sensual passion, and he needed to discipline himself.

“Paul disciplined his body and brought it into subjection, lest having preached to others he might himself become disqualified. Heated with the violence of sensual passion he made himself the spokesman of the human race. ‘O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ (Romans 7:24) Again, ‘I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do’ (Romans 7:19). And once more, ‘Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you’” (Romans 8:8-9).

Our Bodies Are Not Our Own

Paul spoke about the seriousness of fornication, where prostitution results in joining Christ to the prostitute. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two’, He says, ‘shall become one flesh’. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:15-17). The message is that our bodies are not our own; we have been bought with a price.

⁹⁷ Jerome, Letter to Demetrias, CXXX, 9.

There is a similar relationship between husband and wife: just as our bodies are not our own with respect to Christ, our bodies are not our own with respect to each other either. Following the same thought as our relationship with Christ, Paul said, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not defraud one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

John Chrysostom emphasized⁹⁸ how our bodies are not our own between husband and wife. This applies to our bodies as well as our property. To violate this is sin and fraud.

“When therefore you see a prostitute tempting you, say, ‘My body is not mine, but my wife’s’. The same also let the woman say to those who would undermine her chastity, ‘My body is not mine, but my husband’s’. Now if neither husband nor wife has power even over their own body, much less have they over their property. Listen all that have husbands and all that have wives: if you must not count your body your own, much less your money.”

“There is great equality of honor, and no special rights. Paul said, ‘Do not defraud one another except with consent’ (1 Corinthians 7:5). What does this mean? ‘Let not the wife’, he says, ‘exercise abstinence, if the husband is unwilling; nor the husband without the wife’s consent’. Great evils spring from this sort of abstinence, such as adultery, fornication and the ruin of families. If when men have their own wives, they commit fornication, much more if you defraud them of this consolation. Paul speaks well when he says, ‘Do not defraud’, and ‘debt’, that he might show the strictness of the right of dominion in question. It is fraud for one to practice abstinence against the will of the other; but not so, with the other’s consent. He only defrauds who takes something against another’s will and by force. Many women do this, working sin rather than righteousness, and thereby becoming accountable for the husband’s uncleanness, and tearing everything apart. They should value harmony above all things, since this is more important than everything.”

John Chrysostom had⁹⁹ some practical advice for husbands and wives regarding their relationship with each other and with God. Wives should submit to their husbands because this comes naturally and it makes them, not their husbands, look good. Husbands should love their wives without bitterness or fighting, since infighting with your own members is the worst kind. From being loved, the wife becomes loving; from being submissive, the wife causes the husband to become yielding. This is a good picture of our relationship with Christ.

“Paul said, ‘Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord’ (Colossians 3:18). Wives, submit for God’s sake, because this adorns you, not your husband. I don’t mean that kind of subjection which is due to a master, nor that which is natural, but that for God’s sake.”

“Paul said, ‘Husbands, love your wives, and don’t be bitter toward them’ (Colossians 3:19). Again Paul has exhorted reciprocity. He directed that there should be fear and love. It is possible for one who loves to be bitter. Don’t fight, he said; nothing is bitterer than fighting on the part of the husband toward the

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

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, X, vv. 18-19.

wife. Fighting is bitter when it happens between dearly loved persons; Paul shows that it comes from great bitterness, when anyone has differences with his own member. To love therefore is the husband's part, to yield pertains to the wife. If each one contributes his own part, everything goes well. From being loved, the wife becomes loving; from her being submissive, the husband becomes yielding. It has been naturally ordered that the one should love, the other obey. When the party governing loves the governed, then everything goes well. Love from the governed is not so requisite, as from the governing towards the governed; for from the governed obedience is due. The woman has beauty, and the man desire; for the sake of love it has been made this way. Because your wife submits to you, do not act like a tyrant; because your husband loves you, do not become puffed up. Don't let the husband's love elate the wife, nor the wife's submission puff up the husband. Christ asks her to submit to you, that she may be loved more. Christ has made you to be loved, O wife, that you may easily submit. Do not fear in submitting to him; for submission to one that loves you has no hardship. Do not fear in loving her, for you have her yielding. In no other way could a bond have been. The husband has his authority proceed naturally; maintain also the bond that proceeds from love."

Union with Christ

In terms of Union with Christ, just as husband and wife become one flesh (Ephesians 5:28-31), so those in the Church are members of Christ's body (Ephesians 5:30), where Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23). The different members of this body have different roles, but all the roles serve a purpose as directed by the Head (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Like the grapevine, the body of Christ is all one plant. As in Christian marriage, we are joined to Christ as body to head, creating one new body. With this as a background, let us look at the Ephesians 4.

Walking Worthy of Our Calling

Paul stated, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:1-4).

Paul had just finished saying in the previous chapter that he prays (Ephesians 3:14) to God the Father that He would grant:

- That they be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16).
- That Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17).
- That they be rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17).
- That they be able to comprehend (by revelation) the width, length, depth and height (Ephesians 3:18).
- That they might know the love of Christ which far surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:19).
- That they might be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19).

This is a lot! Having said this, Paul then said that God is able to do abundantly above all that we even ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). The only way all the above can be contained is in the Body of Christ.

What Is the One Hope of Christ's Calling?

If our entire life revolves around Christ's calling, since we are one body with Him, we might ask what Christ's calling is. Paul suggested that we understand what Christ's calling is, since we are part of it. He asked that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, as the eyes of your understanding are enlightened. We can know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (Ephesians 1:17-19).

Basil the Great stated¹⁰⁰ that our calling is to be made like God; but this is a difficult task and much instruction is required.

¹⁰⁰ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, I, 2.

“Those who are idle in the pursuit of the true Faith lack the ability to count the terms that are of primary importance in theology, and to trace out the hidden meaning in every phrase and in every syllable. But those who get knowledge of the ‘mark’ of our ‘calling’ are distinguished by these abilities. What is set before us is, so far as is possible with human nature, to be made like God. Now without knowledge there can be no making like; and knowledge is not obtained without lessons. Truth is always a quarry hard to hunt, and therefore we must look everywhere for its tracks. The acquisition of the true Faith is just like that of crafts; both grow bit by bit; apprentices must despise nothing.”

We are called to be made like God; therefore “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). This is a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:9). Those called are called to be saints (Romans 1:6), and we are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). We receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15) and we are named by Christ’s Name (James 2:7).

Since everything moves according to God’s agenda, God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Since we are part of Christ’s calling, it is not our works, but His grace that achieves results. He “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. This has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

John Chrysostom noted¹⁰¹ that there was great wisdom and power with God’s approach. Using primarily untrained men, He surpassed the best that the strength and wisdom of the world could offer. The most difficult task was to convince uneducated men regarding great things that are hard to understand.

“Paul shows that it was expedient to avoid focusing on the wisdom of this world. ‘Seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world didn’t know God, and God was well pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe’ (1 Corinthians 1:21). The Cross is a demonstration of incredible power and wisdom, showing that the foolishness of God is far mightier than the wisdom of man. This Paul proves not by means of the teachers, but by means of the disciples themselves. Look at their calling; not only untrained teachers, but untrained disciples also were objects of His choice. He chose ‘not many wise men according to the flesh’ (1 Corinthians 1:26). These untrained men surpassed both the strength and wisdom of the world. This convinced both the many and the unwise. In this regard it was extremely hard to convince an ignorant person, especially when the topic concerns great and necessary things. However, they were convinced and Paul calls the Corinthians themselves as witnesses. ‘Look at your calling, brethren’ Paul said, ‘consider and examine’. Teaching that was so wise that it can be received by ordinary men testifies about the greatest wisdom in the teacher. When Paul said,

¹⁰¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, V, 1-2

‘according to the flesh’, he meant according to what is in sight; according to the life that now is; according to the discipline of the Gentiles.”

Chrysostom also stated¹⁰² that God is glorified when His servants don’t yield in the face of suffering. Others may be called, but are rejected, where the calling is to the bridal chamber with the Bridegroom. There may be other callings, but this is the most important one.

“When those are brought into public view, who have suffered countless misfortune, designed to make them apostate from the faith, and yet have not yielded, but have believed, God is glorified. Then the glory of these people will be shown. ‘Judge no one blessed’, it says, ‘before his death’ (Ecclesiasticus 11:28). On this account he says, in that day those who believed will be revealed. ‘To which end we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power’ (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

“He who was clothed in filthy garments was called also, but did not remain in his calling, and for this reason was the more rejected. The calling is to the bride-chamber, since the five virgins also were called. ‘Arise’ it says, ‘the bridegroom comes’ (Matthew 25:6); they prepared themselves, but did not enter in. He speaks of the calling of the five wise virgins, showing what calling he is speaking of, ‘Fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power’ (2 Thessalonians 1:11). This is the calling that we seek! Notice how gently he takes them down. In order that they may not become vain and slothful by too much commendation, as if they had done great deeds, he shows that something still is lacking to them, so long as they are in this life. He also said this to the Hebrews, ‘You have not yet resisted to blood, striving against sin’ (Hebrews 12:4). Paul’s gratification, persuasion and full assurance was that the persuasion of God may be fulfilled, that nothing may be lacking to the Corinthians, and that they may do as He wills.”

Chrysostom further stated¹⁰³ that the hope of our calling is all about good works, where good works are something that we should walk in to our dying day, since we need a virtue that will last. It is like we are traveling on a road leading to a royal city. When we have passed over the greater part of it, if we were to droop and sit down near the end, the travel would be of no use to us.

Paul stated, ‘But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 3:13-14). Chrysostom continued¹⁰⁴ to say that what made Paul reach forward to the things which are ahead was his forgetting the things that are behind. He who thinks that everything is accomplished, and that nothing is lacking to him for the perfecting of virtue, may cease running, as having obtained everything. But he who thinks that he is still distant from the goal, will never cease running. This then we should always consider, even though we have done ten thousand good deeds.

¹⁰² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, III, v. 11.

¹⁰³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v. 10.

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XII, vv. 13-14.

Our Calling is Irrevocable

Speaking of the 1st Century Jews, who were the enemies of the Church, and who incited the Romans into persecution of the Church, Paul stated that the mercy of God still extended to them because of their righteous forefathers.

“I do not desire, brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, where blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer¹⁰⁵ will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this *is* My covenant with them, When I take away their sins’. Concerning the Gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. The gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable” (Romans 11:25-29).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁰⁶ that we are in the Father because of Christ and the Holy Spirit. If we repent after we fall, we stay there; if we don’t, the Holy Spirit deserts us. In this manner the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable; He will never abandon us, but we are able to desert Him if we so choose.

“Christ said of us, ‘As You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us’ (John 17:21); this does not mean that we were to have identity with Him. It is a request to the Father that the Spirit should be granted through Him to those who believe, where we are found to be in God through the Spirit, and in this respect to be joined to Him. Since the Word is in the Father, and the Spirit is given from the Word, He wills that we should receive the Spirit; when we receive It, we too may be found on account of the Spirit to become One in the Word, and through Him in the Father. And if He says, ‘as we are one,’ this again is only a request that such grace of the Spirit as is given to the disciples may be irrevocable. For what the Word has by nature in the Father, that He wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevocably. Knowing this, Paul said, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ ‘The gifts of God’ and ‘the grace of His calling are irrevocable’ (Romans 11:26).’ It is the Spirit then which is in God, and not us viewed in our own selves. As we are sons and gods because of the Word in us, so we shall be in the Son and in the Father, and we shall be accounted to have become one in Son and in Father, because the Spirit is in us, which is in the Word, which is in the Father. When a man falls from the Spirit for any wickedness, if he repents after his fall, the grace remains irrevocably to such as are willing. Otherwise he who has fallen is no longer in God, because that Holy Spirit and Paraclete which is in God has deserted him. But the sinner shall be in him to whom he has subjected himself, as took place in Saul’s instance; for the Spirit of God departed from him and an evil spirit was afflicting him (1 Samuel 16:14 LXX). God’s enemies hearing this ought to be embarrassed, and no longer pretend themselves equal to God. But they neither understand nor endure faithful words (Proverbs 29:7 LXX loosely), but find them heavy even to hear.”

¹⁰⁵ See Isaiah 59:20, 27:9.

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxv, 25.

John Cassian stated¹⁰⁷ that Paul hurried toward the goal of the high calling of God without swerving, having fought the good fight and having won the battle by the chastisement of the flesh. A similar reward is available to all who look forward to Christ's Coming.

“Paul did not run uncertainly, because, looking to the heavenly Jerusalem, he had a mark set, towards which his heart was swiftly directed without swerving. He did not run uncertainly, because, ‘forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 3:13-14). He directed his mental gaze, hurrying towards it with all speed of heart, and proclaimed with confidence, ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith’ (2 Timothy 4:7). Because he knew he had run unwearied ‘after the fragrance of Christ’s ointment, which is better than all spices’ (Song of Solomon 1:3 LXX). He had ready devotion of heart, and had won the battle of the spiritual combat by the chastisement of the flesh; he boldly concluded, ‘There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me in that day’. In order that he might open up to us a similar hope of reward, if we desire to imitate him in the struggle of his course, he added, ‘But not to me only, but to all who love His coming’ (2 Timothy 4:8). He declared that we shall be sharers of his crown in the Day of Judgment, if we love the coming of Christ and if we gain the victory in the fight by chastising the body.”

How Do We Walk Worthy of Our Calling?

The way we walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1) is “with all lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering, bearing with one another” (Ephesians 4:2). John Chrysostom stated¹⁰⁸ that this is the basis of all virtue:

“If we are lowly, and realize what we are; if we realize how we were saved; and if we will take this recollection as a motive to all virtue, the lowly-minded man is able to be at once generous and a grateful servant. Paul said, ‘For what do you have that you did not receive’” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Chrysostom continued to state¹⁰⁹ that those who have difficulty with this due to a demeanor that is very critical of others, they should remember:

“If you are not patient with your neighbor, how shall God be patient with you? If you don’t bear with your fellow-servant, how shall the Master bear with you? Wherever there is love, all things are to be endured”.

Some people have become lowly-minded by taking on an attitude of what might be called “worm theology.” This often expresses a great deal of piety, but also often represents merely an excuse for doing nothing. Walking worthy of our calling represents a depth of understanding accompanied by a gratitude for all the Grace given to us. If this gratitude is genuine, it will be translated into deeds.

¹⁰⁷ John Cassian, *Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia*, V, 17.

¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, IX, v. 3.

¹⁰⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, IX, v. 3.

In another place, Chrysostom said¹¹⁰ that we should consider what we have been given in the Body of Christ.

“If anyone were to place a crown of gold on our head, we would do everything that we might seem worthy of the lifeless jewels? But now it is not a crown that is placed on our head, but – what is far greater – Christ has become our head. If you are the Body of Christ, bear the Cross, for He bore it; bear spitting, bear beatings, bear nails.”

John Chrysostom stated¹¹¹ that faith is not sufficient for us to respond to our calling; filthy clothing, that is, lack of a pure life, will exclude us. God is not ashamed of beggars and those of low station in this life, but He brings them to His Table also. If we try to come to His Table with filthy clothing, we insult Him, the Marriage and the rest of the guests; He has no choice but to throw us out.

“There is no small fear, if we defile that beautiful robe by our sloth and transgressions, we might be cast out from the inner room and bridal chamber, like the five foolish virgins, or him who didn’t have on a wedding garment (Matthew 22:11). He too was one of the guests, for he had been invited. After the invitation and so great an honor, he behaved with insolence towards Him who had invited him; listen to what punishment he suffered, how pitiful, fit subject for many tears. When he comes to partake of that splendid Table, not only is he forbidden to have the least part, but he is bound hand and foot, and carried into outer darkness to undergo eternal wailing and gnashing of teeth. Therefore let us not expect that faith is sufficient to us for salvation. If we do not exhibit a pure life, but come clothed unworthy of this blessed calling, nothing hinders us from suffering the same as that wretched one. It is strange that He, who is God and King, is not ashamed of men who are vile, beggars, and of no reputation, but brings even those of the crossroads to that Table. We show ourselves lacking any sense, if we are not made better by so great an honor, if even after the call we remain in our old wickedness, we insolently abuse the unspeakable loving-kindness of Him who has called us. He didn’t call us to the spiritual and awesome communion of His mysteries that we should enter with our former wickedness. But putting off our filthiness, we need to change our clothing to such as become those who are guests in palaces. If we do not act worthily of that calling, it no longer rests with Him who has honored us, but with ourselves; it is not He that throws us out from that admirable company of guests, but we throw ourselves out.”

“He has done His part. He has made the marriage; He has provided the Table; He has sent men to call us; He has received us when we came, and honored us with all other honor. But if we insult Him, the company, and the wedding by our filthy garments, that is, our impure actions, we are then with good cause thrown out. It is to honor the marriage and the guests, that He drives away those bold and shameless people; were He to allow those clothed in this fashion, He would be insulting the rest. May it never be that one of us experiences this from Him who has called us! To this end have all these things been written before they come to pass, that we, being sobered by the threats of the Scriptures, may not

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV,

¹¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, X, 3. Chrysostom is saying here that the Protestant rallying cry of “Justification by Faith Alone” leaves out an important aspect of the Faith.

allow this disgrace and punishment to go on to the deed, but stop it at the word only. Let us each with bright apparel come to that call.”

John Cassian stated¹¹² that our enemy only lays snares along the path leading to our high calling and not elsewhere. One of the more subtle of these snares is vainglory and pride at being successful in avoiding the other snares.

“When men are anxious to walk in the path of holiness and perfection, their enemies do not lay their snares to deceive them anywhere except in the way along which they walk. In accordance with this David says, ‘In the way in which I walk, they have secretly set a snare for me’ (Psalm 142:3). The snares only occur in this way of virtue along which we are walking, when we are pressing on to ‘the prize of our high calling’ (Philippians 3:14). Some become elated by their successes, and sink down, and falling with the feet of their soul entangled and caught in the snares of vainglory. Those who could not be conquered in the conflict with the enemy are overcome by the greatness of their triumph. Another kind of deception occurs when we overreach the limits of our self-restraint and fail of perseverance in our course on account of bodily weakness.”

John Chrysostom stated¹¹³ that Christ’s calling to the Jewish leaders only injured them, whereas His calling to the thief saved him. The timing of the calling is important since the calling is not sufficient; our purpose is what works salvation. The calling is not compulsory; we’re not forced to accept; obedience is necessary.

“The exhibition of miracles and wisdom in Christ’s teaching only injured the Jews, as did the rightness of teaching. The Jews called Him possessed (John 8:48); when He said that He was equal to God (John 5:18), and because of the miracles, they even went about to kill Him (John 11:47, 53). But the thief, when nailed to the Cross, not only was not hurt, but even gained the greatest good from this. For those who love God all things work together for good. After mentioning this great blessing, one which far exceeds man’s nature, and seemed even past belief, he draws a proof of it from these words, ‘to those who are called according to His purpose’ (Romans 8:28). Consider from the calling, what this means. Why did He not from the first call everyone? Why did He not call Paul as soon as the rest? Does it not seem that deferring Paul’s call was harmful? But it was still by the event shown to be for the best. The purpose of the delay is that he might not ascribe everything to the calling; since in this way both Greeks and Jews would be sure to object. For if the calling alone were sufficient, how was it that all were not saved? Therefore he says that it is not the calling alone, but also the purpose of those called, that works the salvation. For the calling was not forced on them, nor was it compulsory. All were called, but all did not obey the call.”

Leo the Great stated¹¹⁴ that the calling of God is the greatest gift that man can receive. In earthly families, offspring are shamed if they don’t resemble their noble ancestors. Our calling as sons of God allows us to exhibit the Father’s likeness, and to have Him finish all our wars for us.

¹¹² John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia, XI, 6.

¹¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XV, v. 28.

¹¹⁴ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XXVI, 4.

“We must be worthy of our calling as sons and friends of God. The mystery of this favor is great, and this gift exceeds all other gifts: that God should call man son, and that man should name God as Father. By these terms we perceive and learn the love which reached so great a height. In natural offspring of earthly families, those who are born of noble parents are lowered by the faults of evil dealings, and unworthy offspring are put to shame by the brilliance of their ancestry. To what end will they come who, through love of the world, do not fear to be cast out from the family of Christ? If it gains the praise of men that the father’s glory should shine again in their descendants, how much more glorious is it for those who are born of God to regain the brightness of their Maker’s likeness and display in themselves Him Who begat them. The Lord said, ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven?’ (Matthew 5:16) We know that ‘the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one’ (John 5:19), and that by the stratagems of the Devil and his angels numberless attempts are made either to frighten man in his struggle upwards by adversity or to spoil him by prosperity. But ‘greater is He that is in us, than he that is against us’ (1 John 4:4, 2 Kings 6:16), and they who have peace with God and are always saying to the Father with their whole hearts ‘Thy will be done’ (Matthew 6:10) can be overcome in no battles, can be hurt by no assaults. Blaming ourselves in our confessions and refusing our spirit’s consent to our fleshly lusts, we stir up against us the enmity of him who is the author of sin. But we also secure a peace with God that nothing can destroy, by accepting His gracious service, in order that we may not only surrender ourselves in obedience to our King but also be united to Him by our free-will. If we are like-minded, if we wish what He wishes, and disapprove what He disapproves, He will finish all our wars for us. He Who gave the will, will also give the power; so that we may be fellow-workers in His works, and with the exultation of Faith may utter that prophetic song: ‘The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?’” (Psalm 27:1)

The Effects of Our Calling

If our calling is linked to Christ’s calling in our quest for holiness, what are the effects of this? What do we do with our life as a result of our calling?

Using as examples slavery, circumcision and marriage, John Chrysostom encouraged¹¹⁵ people to remain and blossom in the place where they were called. A life of slavery, circumcision and even marriage to an unbeliever are not hindrances to piety and thus don’t affect our calling.

“As God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised, and vice versa. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it.” (1 Corinthians 7:17-21). These things

¹¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XIX, 5.

contribute nothing to faith, he said. Don't be contentious or troubled; the Faith does not depend on these things.”

“Have you been called, having an unbelieving wife? Continue to be married to her. Do not cast out your wife for the Faith's sake. Have you been called, being a slave? Do not be concerned about it. Continue to be a slave. Have you been called while uncircumcised? Remain uncircumcised and vice versa. This is the meaning of, ‘As God has distributed to each man’ (1 Corinthians 7:17). These are no hindrances to piety. You are called, being a slave; another, with an unbelieving wife; another, being circumcised. Astonishing! Where does this put slavery? As circumcision doesn't profit, and uncircumcision does no harm; so neither does slavery and liberty. That he might point this out with surpassing clearness, he says, ‘But even if you can become free, rather use it’ (1 Corinthians 7:21); that is, continue as a slave. On what possible ground does he tell the person who might be set free to remain a slave? He means to point out that slavery is no harm but rather an advantage. Now we are not ignorant that some say the words, ‘rather use it’, are spoken with regard to liberty, interpreting it, ‘if you can become free, become free’. But the expression would be very contrary to Paul's manner if he intended this. When consoling the slave and signifying that he was in no respect injured, he would not have told him to get free. Someone might say, ‘What then, if I am not able to become free? I become an injured and degraded person’. This then is not what he says; he points out that a man gets nothing by being made free, ‘Though you have it in your power to be made free, remain rather in slavery’”.

John Cassian noted¹¹⁶ that as we consider our calling and what we do with it, all our efforts towards godliness in this life, including dumping worldly pursuits will not help us if we don't root out anger from our life.

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

John Chrysostom added¹¹⁷ that in order to gain the prize of our high calling, we need to discipline anger and desire in our soul. We need to put them like well-broken horses under the yoke of reason, and then set over them the mind as a charioteer.

¹¹⁶ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 22.

¹¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVII, Moral.

Chrysostom also stated¹¹⁸ that some aspects of our calling are hidden to the world, but these things are revealed to the faithful.

“Paul was about to mention some things which had already come to pass, and others which had not as yet happened. He makes those which have been brought to pass, a pledge of those which have not. For example, ‘That you may know what is the hope of His calling’. It is as yet, he means, hidden, but not so to the faithful. He continues, ‘what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints’” (Ephesians 1:18).

“This too is as yet hidden. What is clear is that through His power we have believed that He has raised Christ. To persuade souls is a thing far more miraculous than to raise a dead body.”

Bearing with Each Other

Another aspect of Union with Christ deals with our getting along with one another. If our calling is linked with Christ’s calling, and we are all in this together, we need to bear with one another or we will be rejected from our calling.

As part of the Body of Christ, we need to treat each other as our Lord treats us. This means that we should regard even the least of our fellow men as the Lord Himself as He stated in His description of what He will do at Judgment Day. “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me’” (Matthew 25:40).

Paul stated, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2). In bearing with one another Peter had asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother for sinning against him. Peter thought that 7 times per day was a reasonable upper limit, but Jesus upped the ante to 490 times per day (Matthew 18:22). Figuring 16 waking hours to the day, this represents our brother sinning against us every two minutes all day long. This represents a lot of long suffering on the part of the person who is the victim of the sin.

As he was being led to Rome to be eaten by lions, Ignatius of Antioch encouraged¹¹⁹ his people to treat each other like they wished the Lord would treat them.

“Give heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. Let my soul be exchanged for theirs that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbytery, and to the deacons; may I have my portion with them from God! Labor together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, and servants of God. Please Him under whom you fight, and from whom you shall receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete suit of armor. Let your works be the charge assigned to you, that you may obtain for

¹¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 21-22.

¹¹⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Polycarp, 6.

them a most worthy recompense. Be long-suffering, therefore, with one another, in meekness, and God shall be so with you. May I have joy with you forever!”

John Chrysostom had¹²⁰ some practical advice for bearing with each other: support each other in each individual’s weakness and don’t require everyone to be able to do everything. We don’t ask our feet to see and we don’t ask our hands to walk. Neither should we expect our brothers to do everything either.

“Paul said, ‘And so fulfill the law of Christ’ by the things in which you bear with one another. For example, this man is hot-tempered, you are slow to action; therefore bear with his vehemence that he in turn may bear with your sluggishness. Thus neither will he transgress, being supported by you, nor will you offend in the points where your defects lie, because of your brother’s patience with you. By reaching out a hand one to another when about to fall, you fulfill the Law in common, each completing what is lacking in his neighbor by his own endurance. But if you don’t do this, but each of you investigates the faults of his neighbor thoroughly, nothing will ever be performed by you as it ought. In the case of the body, if one were to exact the same function from every member of it, the body could never hold together; so there would have to be great dissension among brethren if we were to require all things from everyone.”

The Bond of Peace

Paul stated, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). The “bond of peace” needs a little explanation. Peacefulness is a characteristic of the Church, but it is unlike a worldly peace. It is dependant on the love of the brethren and it can’t last if love disappears. Some people may choose to be outside the peace of God, and therefore outside the Church. The bond of peace is something that should exist between Bishops and Patriarchs, and some serious discussions have occurred when it is lacking.

Leo the Great stated¹²¹ that peacemakers, besides being sons of God, are the key in achieving the bond of peace. This peace is unlike any worldly peace, and is even unlike the peace that comes from exact likeness of mind.

“The Lord said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God’ (Matthew 5:9). This blessedness does not belongs to any and every kind of agreement and harmony, but to that of which the Apostle speaks, ‘have peace towards God (Romans 5:1); and of which the Prophet David speaks, ‘Much peace have they that love Your Law, and it is not an offense to them’ (Psalm 119:65 OSB LXX). This peace even the closest ties of friendship and the most exact likeness of mind do not really gain, if they do not agree with God’s will. Similarly bad desires, crimes syndicates, and associations of vice cannot merit this peace. The love of the world does not associate with the love of God; nor does a person enter the alliance of the sons of God, who will not separate from the children of this generation. Whereas those who are always in mind with God,

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 6, Verse 2.

¹²¹ Leo the Great, Sermons, XCV, 9.

‘endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Ephesians 4:3), never dissent from the eternal law, uttering that prayer of faith, ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10). These are ‘the peacemakers’; these are thoroughly of one mind, fully harmonious, and are to be called sons ‘of God and joint-heirs with Christ’ (Romans 8:17). Their work shall be the record of the love of God and the love of our neighbor, in order that we shall suffer no calamities, and be in fear of no offense; they rest in God’s most perfect peace.

Cyprian of Carthage stated¹²² that deserters and apostates cannot have the power or the honor of a bishop since they have refused to maintain the unity of the Church and the bond of peace. Even if they are slain for His Name, they cannot be admitted to the peace of the Church.

Cyprian also noted¹²³ that the bond of peace is a result of the love of the brethren for each other. Without love, the bond of peace can’t endure.

“Love is the bond of brotherhood, the foundation of peace, it holds and secures unity, and is greater than both hope and faith. It excels both good works and martyrdom, and will continue with us always, eternal with God in the kingdom of heaven. Take away from it patience, and it does not endure. Take away from it the substance of bearing with one another and enduring, and it continues with no roots or strength. Paul, when he spoke of love, joined to it endurance and patience. ‘Love’, he says, ‘suffers long *and* is kind; love doesn’t envy, is not puffed up, is not provoked, thinks no evil; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). He shows that love can tenaciously persevere, because it knows how to endure all things. And in another place: ‘Bearing with one another’, he says, ‘in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Ephesians 4:2-3). He proved that neither unity nor peace could be kept unless brethren should cherish one another with mutual toleration, and should keep the bond of concord by the intervention of patience.”

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹²⁴ to Cyriacus, Patriarch of Constantinople, in 595 AD at his elevation to Patriarch about the offensive title of Ecumenical Bishop that Cyriacus had assumed for himself. Gregory compared this title to the sin of pride¹²⁵ that was disturbing the bond of peace in the Church. Gregory’s views are quite different from the modern Popes of Rome who refer to themselves as the Vicar of Christ.

“When you have wisely professed a right faith, doubtless you should more warily keep the peace of hearts, because of what the Truth says, ‘Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another’ (Mark 9:50). Paul admonishes, ‘Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Ephesians 4:3). Again he says, ‘Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’ (Hebrews 12:14). This peace you will truly have with us, if you turn away from the pride of a profane name, according to what Paul says, ‘O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge’ (1 Timothy

¹²² Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Antonianus, LI, 24, 29.

¹²³ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IX, 15.

¹²⁴ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Epistle to Cyriacus, Bishop of Constantinople, IV, 4.

¹²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_Cyriacus_of_Constantinople

6:20). It is too bad, if these who have been made preachers of humility should glory in the elation of a vain name, when the true preacher says, 'But God forbid that I should glory, except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Galatians 6:14). He then is truly glorious who glories not in temporal power, but, for the Name of Christ, glories in His passion. Therefore we embrace you from the bottom of our heart; we recognize you as priests, if, rejecting the vanity of words, you occupy the place of holiness with holy humility. We have been scandalized by this impious appellation, and retain in our mind and express in words major complaints. But your Fraternity knows how the Truth says, 'If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23-24). Consider this: while every fault is done away by the offering of sacrifice, the evil of offense created in another's heart is so great that from one, who has so sinned, the Lord does not accept the sacrifice itself, which tends to do away with sin. Pay attention then speedily to wipe away the cause of offense from your heart, that Almighty God may be able to regard as acceptable the sacrifice of your offering."

Gregory the Great also stated¹²⁶ that Christ established the Church in the world to be one flock under Himself, the one Shepherd, in the bond of peace. To have peace, there must be two sides; we can have peace with God, but we may not be able to achieve peace with some men. The Church is like the Ark of Noah; some people choose to be outside the peace of God.

"We are not far from you, since in Him who is everywhere we are one. Let us then give thanks to Him who, having abolished enmity, has caused that in His flesh there should be in the whole world one flock, and one sheepfold under Himself the one shepherd. Let us be ever mindful how the preacher of truth admonishes us, saying, 'Be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3), and, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see God' (Hebrews 12:14). He says also to other disciples, 'If it is possible, as much as lies in you, having peace with all men' (Romans 12:18). For he sees that the good cannot have peace with the bad; and therefore, as you know, he stated, 'If it is possible'"

"Because peace cannot be established except on two sides, when the bad fly from it, the good ought to keep it in their inner hearts. It is admirably said, 'As much as depends on you' (Romans 12:18); meaning that it should remain in us even when it is repelled from the hearts of evil men. Such peace we truly keep, when we treat the faults of the proud at once with love and with persistent justice, when we love them but hate their vices. For man is the work of God; but vice is the work of man. Let us distinguish between what God has made and what man has made, and neither hate the man on account of his error nor love the error on account of the man."

"Let us then with united mind attack the evil of pride in the man that from his enemy, that is to say his error, the man himself may be freed. Our Almighty Redeemer will supply strength to love and justice; He will supply to us, though placed far from each other, the unity of His Spirit. He, whose workmanship is the

¹²⁶ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Epistle to Eulogius, Bishop of Alexandris, and Anastasius, Bishop of Antioch, V, 43.

Church, having been constructed like the ark with the four sides of the world, and bound together with the structure of incorruptible planks and the pitch of love, is disturbed by no opposing winds or swells coming from outside.”

Gregory the Great further stated¹²⁷ that since the fruit of the Spirit is peace, those who don't seek peace don't have the fruit of the Spirit and miss the one hope of our calling. By being proud of some gifts of the Spirit, such as knowledge or abstinence, we can lose the greater gift of harmony. True wisdom is pure and peaceful.

“Those that are in disagreement are to be admonished to know most certainly that, in whatever virtues they have in abundance, they can by no means become spiritual if they neglect becoming united to their neighbors by agreement. It is written, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace’ (Galatians 5:22). He that doesn't care about keeping peace refuses to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says, ‘There is among you envying and strife; are you not carnal?’ (1 Corinthians 3:3) Again he says, ‘Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’ (Hebrews 12:14). Again he admonishes, ‘Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; there is one body and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling’ (Ephesians 4:3-4). The one hope of our calling, therefore, is never reached, if we don't run to it with a mind at one with our neighbors.”

“It is often the case that some, by being proud of some gifts that they especially partake of, lose the greater gift of harmony. This is like someone, who subdues the flesh more than others by bridling his appetite, but scorns being in harmony with those whom he surpasses in abstinence. Whoever separates abstinence from harmony let him consider the admonition of the Psalmist, ‘Praise him with timbrel and dance’ (Psalm 150:4). In the timbrel a dry, beaten skin resounds, but in the chorus harmonious voices are present. Whoever humbles his body, but forsakes harmony, praises God indeed with timbrel, but doesn't praise Him with dance. When superior knowledge lifts up some, it detaches them from the society of other men; the wiser they are, the less wise they are as to the virtue of harmony. Let these hear what the Truth in person says, ‘Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another’ (Mark 9:50). Salt without peace is not a gift of virtue, but an argument for condemnation. To such it is rightly said, ‘If you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom doesn't descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual and demonic. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceful’ (James 3:14-17). It is pure because its ideas are chaste; it is also peaceful, because it in no wise through elation detaches itself from the society of neighbors. Those who are in disagreement are to be admonished to take note that they offer to God no sacrifice of good work so long as they do not love their neighbors. ‘If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Matthew 5:23-24). By this precept we are led to consider how intolerable the guilt of men is shown to be when their sacrifice is rejected. Whereas all evils are washed away when followed by what is good, let us consider how great must be

¹²⁷ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 22, Admonition 23.

the evils of discord, seeing that, unless they are utterly extinguished, they allow no good to follow.”

One Body and One Spirit: Introduction

We will look at One Body and One Spirit from the point of view of:

1. One Lord
2. One Faith
3. One Baptism
4. One Church
5. One God and Father of All

In this context, Paul spoke of the Trinity as One Spirit, One Lord and One God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:4-6). Interspersed between these references to the Trinity are the references to one body, one faith and one baptism; the result is that God the Father is above all, through all and in all. The glue that holds all this together is love (Ephesians 4:2). Chrysostom comments¹²⁸,

“The love which Paul requires of us is no common love, but that which cements us together and makes us be joined inseparably to one another; it accomplishes as great and as perfect a union as though it were between limb and limb”.

One of the most intimate moments of this union occurs as the body of Christ (the Church) meets to worship her Lord and Head and partakes of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. This is a great mystery: how the body of Christ partakes of the Body of Christ!

Chrysostom refers¹²⁹ to the Body of Christ as including the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Testament:

“The body of Christ includes the faithful throughout the whole world, both which are, and which have been, and which shall be. Those that lived before the coming of Christ, who pleased God, are ‘one body’ also, because they knew Christ. ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad’ (John 8:56). Again, ‘If you had believed Moses, you would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me’ (John 5:46). And the prophets, too, would not have written of One whom they didn’t know. They both knew Him and worshipped Him. Thus they were also ‘one body’”.

In order to establish and promote this union, each one of us was given Grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift to us (Ephesians 4:7). These gifts, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, etc., are for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (literally deaconing) and for the building up of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12, 16). These gifts have their purposes listed in the following verses:

- That we all come to the unity of the Faith and knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:13).

¹²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XI, v. 4.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, X, v. 5.

- That we all come to a Perfect Man (Ephesians 4:13). This is the New Man referred to elsewhere (Ephesians 2:15, 4:24).
- That we all come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).
- That the truth of this might be preserved in spite of deceitful attempts to undo it (Ephesians 4:14).
- That the whole body might grow up in love with every part of the body doing its share, being joined and knit together with every joint supplying (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Many times we see today discussions and “manifestations” of spiritual gifts resulting in divisions rather than leading to the unity of the faith, the perfect man and the stature of the fullness of Christ. Perhaps this is caused by a lack of emphasis on love (1 Corinthians 13); but another cause may be lack of humility. Not all are given the same gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28-30); and some are given more or greater gifts than others, just as in the Parable of the Talents where some were given one, two and five talents (Matthew 25:15). Paul also wrote of a ranking (i.e. in honor) of the gifts with apostles first (1 Corinthians 12:28). We need to accept our gift, whatever it is, with humility and strive to use our gift to the best of our ability. Those using their gifts are often given more (Matthew 25:28-29). For more details, see the Gospel lesson for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost.

Thus, the aim of the illustrations of the vine and the branches and the husband and wife is to give us a glimpse into some of the mysteries of God being worked out in our midst (Ephesians 1:9-10, 3:1-10). The focus is always on Union with Christ and unity within the Body of Christ. While this much has been revealed to us, there are depths to it that we will not know until the Lord returns.

One Lord

The word translated “Lord” is the Hebrew *Jehovah* and the Greek *Kurios*. For several centuries before Christ, the Hebrews regarded the Name Jehovah as so holy that they could not dare to even pronounce it. So they substituted for the Name for God *Adonai*, meaning Lord or master. The Greek *Kurios* also conveys the connotation of Lord or master.

Cyril of Jerusalem spoke of “one Lord” as a continuum of the Old and New Testament. The three persons of the Trinity have different roles, but they all work together in perfect harmony.

“There is One God¹³⁰, the Father, Lord of the Old and of the New Testament; and One Lord, Jesus Christ, who was prophesied of in the Old Testament, and came in the New; and One Holy Spirit, who through the Prophets preached of Christ, and when Christ had come, descended and revealed Him.” Each person of the Trinity can be referred to as “one Lord”.

“The Father through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, is the giver¹³¹ of all grace; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son, and those of the

¹³⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVI, 3.

¹³¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVI, 24.

Holy Spirit; for there is one Salvation, one Power, one Faith; One God, the Father; One Lord, His only-begotten Son; One Holy Spirit, the Comforter.”

Gregory Thaumaturgus spoke¹³² of the properties of the Father and the Son, where Lordship can't be separated from Divinity. Both are Lord; both are Divine. The difficulties in getting our mind around this disappear if we think of the Father as the First Cause and the Son as Begotten.

“Divinity is the property of the Father; and whenever the divinity of the Trinity is spoken of as one, the property of the Father belongs also to the Son and the Spirit. If the divinity may be spoken of as one in three persons, the Trinity and the Unity is established; and the oneness, Which is naturally the Father's, is also acknowledged to be the Son's and the Spirit's. Paul addressed the Father as one with respect to divinity, and spoke of the Son as one with respect to lordship. ‘There is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live’ (1 Corinthians 8:6). There is one God and one Lord, but we don't speak as if we separated the lordship from the divinity, nor estranging the one from the other, but unifying them in the way warranted by actual fact. We call the Son God with the property of the Father, as being His image and offspring; and we call the Father Lord, addressing Him by the name of the One Lord, as being His Origin and Begetter.”

“Just as the designation Father is the expression of originality and generation, so the designation Son is the expression of the image and offspring of the Father. If one were to ask how there is but One God, if there is also a God of God, we would reply that this term applies to the idea of original causation, so far as the Father is the one First Cause. If one were to phrase the question, how there is but One Lord, if the Father also is Lord, we might answer that again by saying that He is so in so far as He is the Father of the Lord; and this difficulty disappears.”

Gregory of Nyssa stated¹³³ that the language used in the Scripture about the word “men” is less precise than the language about the word “God” because there is only one human nature. “God” only appears in the singular referring to Deity; therefore it states that the Lord is One Lord. If this were not the case, the Scripture would refer to “Gods” in referring to the Trinity.

“Golden coins are many sizes, but the gold is one; so those who we see in the nature of man, as Peter, James, and John, are many, yet the man in them is one. Although Scripture uses the word in the plural, where it says ‘men swear by the greater’ (Hebrews 6:16), and ‘sons of men’, etc., we must recognize that this is the custom of the prevailing form of speech.”

“It would be a lengthy task to set out in detail from the Scriptures those constructions which are inexactly expressed; however, where there is a risk of injury to any part of the truth, the Scriptural phrases are much more exact. Scripture admits the naming of ‘men’ in the plural, because no one imagines a multitude of humanities or supposes that many human natures are indicated by the use of the plural. But the word ‘God’ it employs studiously in the singular form

¹³² Gregory Thaumaturgus, “A Sectional Confession of Faith”, 8-9.

¹³³ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods”, On the Holy Spirit.

only, guarding against introducing the idea of different natures in the Divine essence by the plural ‘Gods’. This is why it says, ‘the Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deuteronomy 6:4 LXX), and also proclaims the Only-Begotten God by the name of Godhead, without dividing the Unity into a Duality, so as to call the Father and the Son two Gods, although each is proclaimed by the holy writers as God. The Father is God; the Son is God; and yet by the same proclamation God is One, because no difference either of nature or of operation is contemplated in the Godhead. If those who have been led astray are correct and the nature of the Holy Trinity is diverse, there would be a plurality of Gods, being divided according to the diversity of essence in the persons. But since the Divine Nature is single and unchanging, and rejects all diversity in essence; it is not referred to as multitude. It is called one nature. So it is called in the singular by all its other names, ‘God,’ ‘Good,’ ‘Holy,’ ‘Savior,’ ‘Just,’ ‘Judge,’ and every other Divine name. Whether one says that the names refer to nature or to operation, we shall not dispute the point. If anyone states that by admitting no difference of nature of the three Persons, it leads to a mixture and confusion of the Persons, we shall make such an answer: While we confess the invariable character of the nature, we admit the difference respecting the Cause, and that which is caused, by which alone we apprehend that one Person is distinguished from another. One is the Cause, and another is of the Cause.”

The Trisagion

The Trisagion is a very ancient prayer¹³⁴, possibly even from the Apostolic era, that became used widely in the 5th century and is used today by both East and West in different forms. It states, “Holy God, Holy Mighty (or Strong), Holy Immortal One; have mercy on us”. The Trisagion is directed to the Trinity as One Lord and God.

John of Damascus, in defending the original version of the Trisagion against what he considered blasphemous insertions, stated¹³⁵ that it refers to the Trinity as One Lord and not just to Christ. The foundation of the Trisagion is expressed in the words of Paul, “of Him, through Him and in Him are all things”.

“We hold the words ‘Holy God’ to refer to the Father, without limiting the title of divinity to Him alone, but acknowledging also as God the Son and the Holy Spirit. The words ‘Holy and Mighty’ we ascribe to the Son, without stripping the Father and the Holy Spirit of might. The words ‘Holy and Immortal’ we attribute to the Holy Spirit, without depriving the Father and the Son of immortality. We apply all the divine names simply and unconditionally to each of their subsistence. We follow Gregory the Theologian when he says¹³⁶, ‘To us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and one Holy Spirit, in Whom are all things’. The words ‘of Whom’, ‘through Whom’ and ‘in Whom’ do not divide the natures, for neither the prepositions nor the order of the names could ever be changed, but they characterize the properties of one unconfused nature. This becomes clear from the fact that they are once more gathered into one, if only one

¹³⁴ See Revelation 4:8, Isaiah 6:3.

¹³⁵ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 10.

¹³⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Holy Lights, XXXIX, 12.

reads with care these words of Paul, ‘Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things’” (Romans 11:36).

Gregory the Theologian stated¹³⁷ that the Personalities of the Trinity are unchangeable, but they are still one in nature. To separate them and say that they are not one nature is like saying that Adam and Seth are of different natures since Adam was created while Seth was born.

“To us there is but One God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and One Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things; and One Holy Spirit, in Whom are all things (2 Corinthians 8:6). Yet these words, of, by, in, whom, do not denote a difference of nature. If this were the case, the three prepositions, or the order of the three names would never be altered; they characterize the personalities of a nature that is one, ‘Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to Him be glory forever, Amen’ (Romans 11:36). The Father is Father, and is not originate, for He is of no one; the Son is Son, and is originate, for He is of the Father. But if you take the word origin in a temporal sense, He too is not originate, for He is the Maker of time, and is not subject to time. The Holy Spirit is truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by Generation but by Procession. The Father remained not begotten after His begetting the Son and the Spirit didn’t change into Father or Son because He proceeds, or because He is God. For Personality is unchangeable; how could Personality remain, if it were changeable, and could be removed from one and given to another? Those who make “not begotten” and “Begotten” natures of ambiguous gods would perhaps make Adam and Seth differ in nature, since Adam was not born of flesh (he was created), but Seth was born of Adam and Eve. There is then One God in Three, and These Three are One.”

The Nicene Creed

Cyril of Jerusalem noted that the Nicene Creed was drafted to deal specifically with Jesus as being One Lord. The Creed starts with the Father as the Fountainhead, and then proceeds to the Son. It says “One Lord Jesus Christ” in order to clarify His Nature as Only-Begotten Son of God, having a natural and eternal Lordship. He is called Son as being naturally Begotten. He has many other names that define His action among us.

“The name of the Father¹³⁸, with the very utterance of the title, suggests the thought of the Son, as in like manner one who names the Son thinks immediately of the Father. If He is a Father, He is certainly the Father of a Son; and if a Son, He is certainly the Son of a Father. The Creed thus speaks, ‘In One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible’; and we add this also, ‘And in One Lord Jesus Christ’, in order that no one should irreverently suppose that the Only-Begotten is second in rank to heaven and earth. Before naming them we named God the Father that in thinking of the Father we might at the same time think of the Son; for no being whatever comes between the Son and the Father.”

“Don’t be carried away¹³⁹ with the Jews when they craftily say, ‘There is one God alone’ (Deuteronomy 6:4); but with the knowledge that God is One, know that there is also an Only-begotten Son of God. The Psalmist in the person

¹³⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Holy Lights, XXXIX, 12.

¹³⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VII, 4.

¹³⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, X, 2-4.

of the Son said, ‘The Lord said to Me, You are My Son’ (Psalm 2:7). Don’t pay attention to what the Jews say, but hear what the Prophets say; the Jews stoned and killed the Prophets, and belittled their words?”

The Creed says, “We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God. We say ‘One Lord Jesus Christ’, that His Son-ship may be ‘Only-begotten’. We say ‘One’, that you may not suppose another; we say ‘One’, that you may not distribute the many names of His action among many sons. He is called a Door (John 10:7, 9); but don’t take the name literally for a thing of wood, but a spiritual, a living Door, discriminating those who enter in. He is called a Way (John 14:6), not one trampled by feet, but leading to the Father in heaven. He is called a Sheep¹⁴⁰; not an irrational one, but the one which through its precious blood cleanses the world from its sins, which is led before the shearers, and knows when to be silent. This Sheep again is called a Shepherd, who says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd’ (John 10:11); He is a Sheep because of His manhood, a Shepherd because of the loving-kindness of His Godhead. He said to the Apostles as rational sheep, ‘Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves’ (Matthew 10:16). He is called a Lion, not as a devourer of men, but indicating by the title His kingly, steadfast, and confident nature. He is also called a Lion in opposition to our adversary the lion, who roars and devours those who have been deceived (1 Peter 5:8). Christ came, not as having changed the gentleness of His own nature, but as the strong ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (Revelation 5:5), saving those that believe, but trampling on the adversary. He is called a Stone, not a lifeless stone, cut out by men’s hands, but a ‘chief cornerstone¹⁴¹, on whom whoever believes shall not be put to shame’”.

“Jesus is called Christ, not as having been anointed by men’s hands, but eternally anointed by the Father to His High-Priesthood, on behalf of men (Hebrews 2:17). He is called Dead, not as having lived among the dead, as everyone in Hades, but as being alone ‘free among the dead’ (Psalm 88:5 LXX). He is called Son of Man, not as having had His generation from earth, as each of us, but as coming on the clouds to judge both the living and the dead (John 5:27). He is called Lord, not improperly as those who are so called among men, but as having a natural and eternal Lordship. He is called Son, not as advanced by adoption, but as naturally begotten. Many are His titles; lest His multiple Names should make you think of many sons, and because of the errors of the heretics, who say that Christ is one, and Jesus another, and the Door another, and so on, the Faith secures you beforehand, saying well, in one Lord Jesus Christ’, for though the titles are many, yet their subject is one.”

Christ Has Two Natures, but is Still One Lord

Leo the Great pointed out¹⁴² that even though Jesus is truly a man and at the same time truly God, He is still One Lord. For some this is hard to fathom how it is possible.

“Some are so ashamed of the Gospel of the Cross of Christ, as to impudently belittle the punishment that He underwent for the world’s redemption. They deny the nature of true flesh of the Lord, not understanding how the unchangeable Deity of God’s Word could have condescended so far for man’s

¹⁴⁰ John 1:29, Isaiah 53:7, Acts 8:32.

¹⁴¹ Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, 1 Peter 2:4-6

¹⁴² Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XLVI, 1.

salvation, as by His power not to lose His own properties, and in His mercy to take on ours. In Christ, there is a twofold form but one person, and the Son of God, who is at the same time Son of Man, is one Lord. He accepted the condition of a slave out of loving-kindness, not by necessity. By His power He became humble; by His power He became capable of human feelings; by His power He became mortal. For the destruction of the tyranny of sin and death, His weak nature was capable of punishment, and His strong nature didn't lose any of its glory."

John of Damascus wrote¹⁴³ extensively on the teaching of the Church regarding the Incarnation. Christ is perfect God and perfect man, but also wholly God and wholly man. Yet He is one distinct person and one Lord. In His humanity, He is limited to a distinct place and time; in His divinity, He is uncircumscribed at any time. The divine nature penetrated His humanity without participation in the affections of His flesh, just as the sun gives us of its energy, but does not participate in ours.

"Christ was in all things and above all things and also dwelt in the womb of the holy Mother of God, but in it by the energy of the Incarnation. He therefore became flesh and He took on Himself the first-fruits of our compound nature, that is, the flesh animated with the intelligent and rational soul. The dwelling of God the Word was changed into the dwelling of the flesh, and the dwelling of the Word, which was formerly just Divine, became compound, of two perfect natures, divinity and humanity. Bearing the characteristic of the divine Son-ship of God the Word He is distinguished from the Father and the Spirit; bearing the characteristic of the flesh, He differs from the Mother and the rest of mankind in that He is God. In His divine nature He is united to the Father and the Spirit; In His human nature He is united to the Mother and to us. He differs from the Father, the Spirit, the Mother and us in being at the same time God and man. This we know is the most special property of Christ. Therefore we confess Him, even after the Incarnation, the one Son of God, and likewise Son of Man, one Christ, one Lord, the Only-Begotten Son and Word of God, one Lord Jesus. We reverence His two generations, one from the Father before time, cause, reason and nature, and one in the end for our sake. He is like us and above us; like us in that He was man born of woman at full term and above us because it was not by seed, but by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Virgin Mary, transcending the laws of childbirth. We proclaim Him not as God only, devoid of our humanity, nor yet as man only, stripping Him of His divinity, nor as two distinct persons, but as one and the same, wholly God and wholly man, the same being wholly God, even though He was also flesh and wholly man, even though He was also most High God. By 'perfect God' and 'perfect man' we mean to emphasize their fullness and unfailing natures; while by 'wholly God' and 'wholly man' we mean to lay stress on singularity and individuality."

"We confess also that there is one incarnate nature of God the Word, expressing by the word 'incarnate' the essence of the flesh. The Word was made flesh and yet did not abandon His own proper immateriality. He became wholly flesh and yet remained wholly uncircumscribed. So far as He is body He is diminished and contracted into narrow limits; but inasmuch as He is God, He is

¹⁴³ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 10.

uncircumscribed, His flesh not having the same limits as His uncircumscribed divinity.”

“He is then wholly perfect God, but yet is not simply God; for He is not only God but also man. He is also wholly perfect man but not simply man, for He is not only man but also God. ‘Simply’ here has reference to His nature. But observe that although we hold that the natures of the Lord permeate one another, yet we know that the permeation springs from the divine nature. The divine nature penetrates and permeates all things, as it wills, while nothing penetrates it; it, too, imparts to the flesh its own peculiar glories, while abiding itself without participation in the affections of the flesh. If the sun imparts to us its energies and yet does not participate in ours, how much the rather must this be true of the Creator and Lord of the Sun.”

Hilary of Poitiers used¹⁴⁴ details from the Mosaic Law to show that Christ and the Father are both one Lord and one God. The Scribes, in not understanding this, really didn’t understand the Law, of which they were supposed to be experts.

“As Jesus taught in the Temple, He asked how the Scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? David himself said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My Right Hand, till I make Your enemies the footstool of Your feet’ (Psalm 110:1). David himself calls Him Lord, and how is He his Son? The Scribe is not far from the Kingdom of God (Mark 12:34) when he confesses one God, Who is to be loved above all things. But his own statement of the Law reveals that the mystery of the Law has escaped him. He does not know Christ the Lord, the Son of God, that the nature of His birth is included in the confession of the one God. So Jesus asked the Scribe: how he can call Christ the Son of David, when David calls Him his Lord? It is against the order of nature that the son of so great a Patriarch should be also his Lord. He asked the Scribe, who regards Him only with respect to His flesh, and His birth from Mary, the daughter of David, to remember that, with respect to His Spirit, He is David’s Lord rather than his son. The words, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deuteronomy 6:4), do not sever Christ from the mystery of the One Lord, since so great a Patriarch and Prophet calls Him his Lord, as the Son begotten of the Lord before the morning star. David does not pass over the Law, or forget that none other is to be confessed Lord. Without violating the faith of the Law, David teaches that Christ is Lord, in that He had His being by the mystery of a natural birth from the substance of the incorporeal God. He is one, born of one, and the nature of the one Lord has made Him by nature Lord.”

“What room is left for doubt any longer? The Lord Himself, proclaiming that the chief commandment of the Law is to confess and love the one Lord, proves Himself to be Lord not by words of His own, but by the Prophet’s testimony, always signifying that He is Lord, because He is the Son of God. Thus by the Law Christ teaches that there is one Lord; by the witness of the prophets He proves Himself Lord also.”

¹⁴⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 26-27.

Scripture Speaks of Father, Son and Holy Spirit All As God

There are a number of accounts in the Scripture that address Father, Son and Holy Spirit as God. Tertullian commented¹⁴⁵ on a number of these accounts in the Scripture to show that the Father would have had to come down to earth Himself if only one person was described in these accounts. But that is not the case; multiple persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are described, yet still one God and one Lord.

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of righteousness. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You’ (Psalm 45:6-7); that is, made You His Christ. Since He speaks to God here, and states that God is anointed by God, He confirms that Two are God, by reason of the scepter’s royal power.”

“Isaiah says to the Person of Christ, ‘The Sabeans, men of stature, shall pass over to You; and they shall follow after You, bound in fetters. They shall bow before You, because **God is in You**, and there is no God beside You, O Lord. For **You are our God**, yet we didn’t know it; You are the God of Israel’ (Isaiah 45:14-15 LXX). Here too, by saying, ‘God is in You’, and ‘You are God’, he reveals Two who were God. In the first expression ‘in You’ means in Christ, and in the second ‘You are our God’ means the Holy Spirit.”

“There is a still grander statement in the Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). There was One God ‘who was’, and there was another God ‘with whom’ He was.”

“A much more ancient testimony we have in Genesis. ‘Then the Lord rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven’ (Genesis 19:24). Also in Genesis, the Father spoke to the Son, ‘Let there be light’ as the Holy Spirit moved over the waters (Genesis 1:2-3). In a more veiled reference at the same place, the Father spoke to the Son and the Holy Spirit, ‘Let us make man in our image’” (Genesis 1:26-28).

“Now, if there were found in the Scriptures only one Person of Him who is God and Lord, Christ would be justly enough inadmissible to the title of God and Lord. In the Scriptures only One God and One Lord was declared, and the Father Himself would have had to have come down to earth. If that were the case, His entire Economy would be involved in obscurity, which has been planned and arranged with so clear a foresight in His providential dispensation as matter for our faith.”

Irenaeus spelled out¹⁴⁶ the relation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to each other. The Father is above all, through all and in all, but it is the Holy Spirit that is in us all. The Son grants the Holy Spirit to all as the Father wills. The Father is the head of Christ and Christ is the head of the Church. Christ created all things as the Father spoke. Those who receive Christ are given power to become sons of God.

“The Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously, and the Word borne by the Father grants the Spirit¹⁴⁷ to all as the Father wills. To some He gives by creation what is made; to others He gives by adoption, namely

¹⁴⁵ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, II, vii, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xviii, 2-3.

¹⁴⁷ Some have argued that Irenaeus is saying here that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as the Western Churches have added to the Nicene Creed. But there is nothing here about procession, only about the mission of the Holy Spirit.

generation. Thus one God the Father is declared, who is above all, and through all, and in all. The Father is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ; but the Word is through all things, and is Himself the Head of the Church. The Spirit is in us all and He is the living water (John 7:39), which the Lord grants to those who rightly believe in Him, love Him, and who know that ‘there is one Father, who is above all, and through all, and in us all’ (Ephesians 4:6). John bears witness to these things, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made’ (John 1:1-3). Then John said of the Word Himself, ‘He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, to those who believe in His Name’ (John 1:10-12). Showing His human nature, John said, ‘The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us’. Continuing he said, ‘We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten by the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14). He thus plainly points out to those willing to hear, to those having ears, that there is one God, the Father over all, and one Word of God, who is through all, by whom all things have been made. This world belongs to Him, and was made by Him, according to the Father’s will, and not by angels; nor by apostasy, defect, and ignorance.”

“The Creator of the world is truly the Word of God; this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things. Therefore He came to His own in a visible manner, was made flesh, and hung on the tree, that He might sum up all things in Himself. ‘His own peculiar people did not receive Him’. Moses declared this among the people, ‘Your life shall hang before your eyes, and you will not believe in your Life’ (Deuteronomy 28:66 OSB LXX). Those who did not receive Him did not receive life. ‘But to as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God’. It is He who has power from the Father over all things, since He is the Word of God. He is really man, communicating with invisible beings after the manner of the intellect, and appointing a law observable to the outward senses. He reigns clearly over things visible and pertaining to men; He brings in just judgment and worthy upon all. David clearly points to this, ‘Our God shall openly come, and will not keep silence’ (Psalm 50:3 LXX). David shows the judgment which He brings, saying, ‘A fire shall burn in His sight, and a strong tempest shall rage round about Him. He shall summon the heaven above, and the earth, that he may judge his people’” (Psalm 50:3-4 LXX).

Ambrose of Milan stated¹⁴⁸ that the Holy Spirit fills and possesses all things just like the Father and the Son. No blessing can be full except through the Holy Spirit, and there is no difference in will between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“In the Gospel an Angel went down at a certain time into the pool of Siloam and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well (John 5:4). The Angel declared in this type about the descent of the Holy Spirit, which was to come to pass in our day, and should

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, I, vii, 88-89.

consecrate the waters when invoked by the prayers of the priest. That Angel, then, was a herald of the Holy Spirit; by means of the grace of the Spirit, medicine was to be applied to our infirmities of soul and mind. The Spirit, then, has the same ministry as God the Father and Christ. He fills all things, possesses all things, works all and in all in the same manner as God the Father and the Son work.”

“What, then, is more divine than the working of the Holy Spirit, since God Himself testifies that the Holy Spirit presides over His blessings, saying, ‘I will put My Spirit upon your seed and My blessings upon your children’ (Isaiah 44:3 LXX). No blessing can be full except through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul found nothing better to wish us than this, ‘We do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord’ (Colossians 1:9-10). He taught that this was the will of God; by walking in good works, words and affections, we should be filled with the will of God, Who puts His Holy Spirit in our hearts. Therefore if he who has the Holy Spirit is filled with the will of God, there is certainly no difference of will between the Father and the Son.”

Athanasius of Alexandria described¹⁴⁹ the Oneness of the relationship of the Father and the Son in terms of the sun and its radiance. The sun and its radiance are two identifiable things, but the sun is the source just as the Father is the fountainhead. Yet the sun and its radiance are one and come from one nature. Similarly using another example, one can see the Son in the Father and vice versa from looking at the Emperor and a statue or image of the Emperor; if one sees the image, one sees the Emperor, and vice versa, where in our case, the Son is the Image of the Father.

“Jesus had said, ‘I and the Father are One’ (John 10:30) and added, ‘I in the Father and the Father in Me’ (John 14:10), to show the identity of the Godhead and the unity of Its Essence. They are one, but not as one thing divided into two parts; they are not as one thing named twice, so that the Son becomes at one time Father, at another time His own Son; for this Sabellius was judged a heretic. They are two, because the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father; but the nature is one; for the offspring is not unlike its parent, for it is his image. All that is the Father’s, is the Son’s. The Son is not another God; for He was not procured from outside the Trinity, otherwise there would be many gods. If the Son is another Person, as an Offspring, still He is the same as God; He and the Father are one in peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead. The radiance of the sun is also light, not second to the sun, not a different light, not from participation in it, but a whole and proper offspring of it. Such an offspring is necessarily one light; and no one would say that they are two lights; but the sun and its radiance are two; yet one is the light from the sun enlightening all things in its radiance. So also the Godhead of the Son is the Father’s; therefore it is also indivisible; thus there is one God and none other than He. Since they are one, and the Godhead itself one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father. For instance, He is God: ‘And the Word was God’ (John 1:1); He is Almighty: ‘I am He who is and who was and

¹⁴⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, III, xxiii, 4-5.

who is to come, the Almighty' (Revelation 1:8); He is Lord: 'One Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 8:6); He is Light: 'I am the Light' (John 8:12); He wipes out sins: 'that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins' (Luke 5:24); and so with other attributes. The Son Himself says, 'All things that the Father has are Mine' (John 16:15); and again, 'And all Mine are Yours'" (John 17:10).

"On hearing the attributes of the Father spoken of a Son, we shall see the Father in the Son; and we shall contemplate the Son in the Father, when what is said of the Son is said of the Father also. The attributes of the Father are ascribed to the Son, because the Son is an Offspring from Him. The Son's attributes are proper to the Father, because the Son is the proper Offspring of His Essence. He who in this sense understands that the Son and the Father are one, knows that He is in the Father and the Father in the Son. Whoever enters into this is convinced that 'He that has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9), for in the Son is contemplated the Father's Godhead."

"We may perceive this from the illustration of the Emperor's image. In the image is the shape and form of the Emperor, and in the Emperor is that shape which is in the image. The likeness of the Emperor in the image is exact; so that a person who looks at the image, sees in it the Emperor; and he who sees the Emperor, recognizes that it is he who is in the image. The likeness does not differ; to one who saw the image and wished to see the Emperor, the image might say, 'I and the Emperor are one. I am in him, and he is in me; what you see in me, that you behold in him, and what you have seen in him, that you behold in me.' He who worships the image, in it worships the Emperor also; for the image is his appearance. Since the Son is the Father's Image, it must be understood that the Godhead and propriety of the Father is the Being of the Son."

One Faith

Many people pay lip service to the concept of "One Faith", but they don't have the depth of understanding to address the subject in more than a superficial way. There are many implications of "One Faith", and we will cover a few of them.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹⁵⁰ that there was a great oneness of the Faith during his life in the mid 2nd century. Everyone handed down the Faith as he received it, whether he was a great speaker or a brilliant intellectual.

"The Church, having received the Preaching and the Faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. Although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the impact of the tradition is one and the same. The Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, Gaul, Egypt, Libya, those in the East or those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But as the sun, that creature of God is one and the same

¹⁵⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, I, x, 2.

throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to knowledge of the truth. None of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these; nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. The Faith being ever one and the same, no one, who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, makes any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little diminish it.”

Leo the Great encouraged¹⁵¹ his people to stick to the one Faith as defined by the catholic and Apostolic creed. There are many people out there promoting wicked fables, trying to shoot down on a moonless night the upright of heart.

“You are ‘a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people’ (1 Peter 2:9), built on the impregnable rock, Christ, and joined to the Lord by His true assumption of our flesh. Remain firm in that Faith, which you have professed before many witnesses, and in which you were reborn through water and the Holy Spirit, and received the anointing of salvation, and the seal of eternal life. But ‘if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be anathema’ (Galatians 1:9). Refuse to put wicked fables before the clearest truth, and what you may happen to read or hear contrary to the rule of the catholic and Apostolic creed, judge it altogether deadly and diabolical. Don’t be carried away by their deceitful keepings of sham and pretended fasts which tend not to cleanse, but to destroy men’s souls. They put on a cloak of piety and chastity, but under this deceit they conceal the filthiness of their acts. From the recesses of their ungodly heart, they hurl shafts to wound the simple; as the prophet says, ‘that in a moonless night they may shoot down the upright in heart’ (Psalm 11:2 OSB LXX). A mighty defense is a sound faith, to which nothing has to be added or taken away. Unless the Faith is one, it is no faith, as Paul says, ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all’ (Ephesians 4:5-6). Cling to this unity, dearly beloved, with unshaken minds, and in it follow after all holiness (Hebrews 12:14). In it carry out the Lord’s commands, because ‘without faith it is impossible to please God’ (Hebrews 11:6); without it nothing is holy, nothing is pure, nothing is alive. ‘The righteous shall live by My faith’ (Habbakuk 2:4 OSB LXX); he who by the devil’s deception loses it, is dead though living; as righteousness is gained by faith, so too by a true faith is eternal life gained. This is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. May He make you advance and persevere to the end!”

One Faith by Nature, Not by Will

Hilary of Poitiers countered¹⁵² the opinion of heretics of his day, who said that the oneness in Christ, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, etc. is due to harmony of will and not due to nature. The heretics twisted the Scripture to support their position. Hilary emphasized that the oneness is through faith, and the heretics agreed that those, whose heart and soul were one,

¹⁵¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermon on the Feast of the Nativity, XXIV, 6.

¹⁵² Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VIII, 5, 7-9.

achieved this oneness through faith. If it is through faith, Hilary argued, the oneness has its basis in the Nature of God and not in harmony of will.

“The heretics deny things that are clearly stated and understood; they pervert them by the most foolish lies so as afterwards to deny them. The words of Christ, ‘I and My Father are one’ (John 10:30), they try to refer to a mere concord of unanimity, so that there may be in them a unity of will not of nature; that is, that they may be one not by essence of being, but by identity of will. They apply to the support of their case, ‘Now of the multitude of them that believed were one heart and soul’ (Acts 4:32), in order to prove that a diversity of souls and hearts may be united into one heart and soul through a mere conformity of will. They also cite the words, ‘Now he that plants and he that waters are one’ (1 Corinthians 3:8), to show that, since They are one in Their work for our salvation, and in the revelation of one mystery, Their unity is a unity of wills. Again, they quote the prayer of our Lord for the salvation of the Gentiles who should believe in Him, ‘I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us’ (John 17:20-21). The heretics try to show that, since men cannot be fused back into God or coalesce into one undistinguished mass, this oneness must arise from unity of will, while all perform actions pleasing to God. They claim that we unite one with another in the harmonious accord of our thoughts, and that thus it is not nature which makes us one, but will.”

“All agree that those whose soul and heart were one were one through faith in God. I ask, is the faith one or is there a second faith? It is one on the authority of Paul himself, who proclaims one faith even as one Lord, one baptism, one hope, and one God (Ephesians 4:4-5). If then it is through faith, that is, through the nature of one faith, that all are one, how is it that heretics do not understand a natural unity in the case of those who through the nature of one faith are one? All were born again to innocence, to immortality, to the knowledge of God, to the faith of hope. These things cannot differ within themselves because there is both one hope and one God, as also there is one Lord and one baptism of regeneration. These things are one not by agreement but by nature. They have been begotten again into the nature of one life and eternity, inasmuch as their soul and heart are one; the unity of will fails to account for their case who are one by regeneration into the same nature.”

“These are not our own conjectures which we offer, nor do we falsely put together any of these things in order to deceive the ears of our hearers by perverting the meaning of words. We hold fast the form of sound teaching; we know and preach the things which are true. Paul shows that this unity of the faithful arises from the nature of the sacraments, ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:27-28). That these are one amid so great diversities of race, condition, sex, is it from an agreement of will or from the unity of the sacrament, since these have one baptism and have all put on one Christ? How will a concord of minds help here when they are one in that they have put on one Christ through the nature of one baptism?”

“Again, since he who plants and he who waters are one, are they not one because they are born again in one baptism and they form a ministry of one

regenerating baptism? Do they not do the same thing? Are they not one in One? So they who are one through the same thing are one also by nature, not only by will, inasmuch as they themselves have been made the same thing and are ministers of the same thing and the same power.”

One Faith by Obedience to the Bishop

Ignatius of Antioch linked¹⁵³ the one Faith with obedience to the Bishop and with the Eucharist, which is the medicine of immortality.

“Stand fast, brethren, in the faith of Jesus Christ, in His love, in His passion, and in His resurrection. Come together all of you in common, and individually, through grace, in one faith of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son, and ‘the first-born over all creation’ (Colossians 1:15), but of the seed of David according to the flesh. Be under the guidance of the Comforter, in obedience to the bishop and the presbytery with an undivided mind. Break one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which prevents us from dying, but a cleansing remedy driving away evil, which causes that we should live in God through Jesus Christ.”

Many Orthodox Jurisdictions today are returning to the words of Ignatius in deciding whether to baptize converts coming from various Protestant denominations. It used to be that the baptism of Protestants in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was recognized as valid by most Orthodox Jurisdictions, and the converts came into the Church by just Chrismation. But in recent years many Protestant denominations are fracturing into disregard for the Trinity as if it’s unimportant. Each individual may be coming from a very different background since there can be a wide spectrum of belief within the same Protestant denomination. A common remedy for this problem is for individuals to enter the Orthodox Church in obedience to the Bishop, and the Bishop will decide in each case what is right and proper for their special case.

One Baptism

One baptism is a very elusive subject, and different people have different concepts as to what Baptism is. Adding to the confusion are different kinds of Baptism, such as the Baptism of John the Baptist versus the Baptism of the Church. Then there are those who think that water-baptism is of lesser importance than the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. All this adds up to a great challenge to the attainment of one Baptism.

A Different Understanding of Baptism East Versus West

There is a different understanding of baptism between East and West today¹⁵⁴. In the Orthodox Church, baptism is generally viewed as something that is done in the Church and by the Church. It is a public event, not a private event. Both East and West would probably agree that there are two deaths in baptism: our death with Christ on the Cross, and our daily dying to sin as we walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). In the Orthodox Church, baptism is followed immediately with Chrismation, that is, the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, which is true food, and without which we have no life (John 6:53-

¹⁵³ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians, 20.

¹⁵⁴ See Mark Douglas Saunders, Holy Baptism, An Orthodox Christian Understanding, at the web site: <http://www.westernorthodox.com/baptism.html>.

57). Baptism and Chrismation lead us into that life, and the Eucharist is the continuation and fulfillment of that life.

In the West, baptism is viewed¹⁵⁵ as a private event. One result is the tragic consequence of baptism's absence from liturgy, piety, Christian worldview, and philosophy of life. The West, having largely abandoned full immersion, has lost sight of the fact that baptism is a burial and resurrection with Christ. Having lost this, the West has had to develop¹⁵⁶ alternative theology for the meaning of baptism. The fundamental rule of liturgical theology is that the true meaning of each liturgical act is revealed through context; each rite receives its meaning and also its power from that which precedes it and that which follows¹⁵⁷. Therefore, changing one part of the sacrament can have profound effects on the rest of the sacrament. The Orthodox Church, by preserving the form of the sacrament of baptism, has also preserved the theology of the sacrament.

We can see the development of this difference between East and West in the controversy between Cyprian of Carthage and Pope Stephen I in the mid 3rd century. The matter in dispute was the effect of baptism, when it was administered by heretics. Stephen declared¹⁵⁸ baptism by heretics valid if administered according to the institution either in the name of Christ or of the Holy Trinity. Cyprian, on the other hand, believing that outside the Church there was no true baptism, regarded that of heretics as null and void, and baptized as for the first time those who joined the Church from heretics. When heretics had been baptized in the Church, but had temporarily fallen away and wished to return in penitence, then Cyprian did not re-baptize them.

Following are some excerpts from Cyprian and his fellow Bishops¹⁵⁹ in their understanding that the baptism of heretics is done outside the Church and therefore is not baptism at all. Each paragraph in the following is the viewpoint of a different Bishop.

“According to Apostolic testimony, heretics, who are called adversaries of Christ and Antichrists, when they come to the Church, must be baptized with the one baptism of the Church, that they may be made friends and Christians.”

“There is no baptism except the one and true baptism in the Church. Not only is God one, but the faith is one, and the Church is one, wherein stands the one baptism, and holiness. Whatever is done outside has no effect on salvation.”

“Let those who favor heretics, consider how many baptisms there are. We claim for the Church one baptism, which we only know in the Church. How can they baptize anyone in the name of Christ, whom Christ Himself declares to be His adversaries?”

“Since all confess that there is one baptism, I am surprised that all do not perceive the unity of the same baptism. For the Church and heresy are two

¹⁵⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, pp. 8-101.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁸ The modern Catholic Church holds [dogmatically](#) that baptism by heretics and even by atheists or other non-Christians is valid if done according to the manner that the Church prescribes, in other words by using the Trinitarian formula "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", while having the intention to baptize, even if the person doing the baptizing is not themselves baptized. [See Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1256, Code of Canon Law, can. 861 no.2.] The doctrinal basis for this was articulated by St. Augustine in his conflict with the Donatists. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian>.

¹⁵⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, *The 7th Council of Carthage on the Baptism of Heretics*

different things. If heretics have baptism, we don't have it; but if we have it, heretics cannot have it. But there is no doubt that the Church alone possesses the baptism of Christ, since she alone possesses both the grace and the truth of Christ."

"We maintain one baptism, because we demand for the Church Catholic alone her own property. But those who say that heretics truly and legitimately baptize, are themselves the people who make not one, but many baptisms. Since heresies are many, according to their number, there will be that many different baptisms."

"I know one Church and her one baptism. If there are any who says that the grace of baptism is with heretics, he must first show and prove that the Church is among them."

"God is one; Christ is one; the Church is one; and baptism is one. How, therefore, can anyone be baptized there, where God, Christ, and the one Church is not?"

Cyprian compared¹⁶⁰ Pope Stephen I to Korah in his rebellion against Moses. Both have separated themselves from the Catholic Church. Thus the Church and heretics do not have one Lord, one faith, one baptism or even one Spirit.

"The greatness of Stephen's error, and the depth of his blindness, is that he says that remission of sins can be granted in the synagogues of heretics, and does not remain on the foundation of the one Church which was once based by Christ upon the rock. This may be perceived from Christ's words to Peter, 'Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 16:19). And again, in the Gospel, when Christ breathed on the Apostles alone, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:22-23). Therefore the power of remitting sins was given to the Apostles, to the Churches which they established, and to the bishops who succeeded them by ordination. Our adversaries and the enemies of the one Catholic Church, where we have succeeded the Apostles, assert for themselves unlawful priesthoods, and set up profane altars. What else are they than Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16), profane with a like wickedness, and about to suffer the same punishments, as well as those who agree with them, just as their partners and abettors perished in the wilderness?"

"Those who contend that people baptized among the heretics ought to be received as if they had obtained the grace of lawful baptism, say that baptism is one and the same to them and to us, and differs in no respect. But the Apostle Paul says, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God (Ephesians 4:5-6). If the baptism of heretics is one and the same with ours, without doubt their faith also is one. But if our faith is one, we also have one Lord; if there is one Lord, it follows that we say that He is one. But if this unity which cannot be separated and divided at all is itself also among heretics, why do we contend any more? Why do we call them heretics and not Christians? Since we and heretics do not have one God, one Lord, one Church, one faith, not even one Spirit, or one body, it is clear that neither can baptism be common to us and heretics, since between us

¹⁶⁰ Cyprian, *Epistles*, LXXIV, 16, 26.

there is nothing at all in common. Yet Stephen is not ashamed to offer patronage to such heretics in opposition to the Church, and for the sake of maintaining heretics to divide the brotherhood. In addition, he calls Cyprian ‘a false Christ and a false apostle, and a deceitful worker’. However he is conscious that he is what he accuses others of.”

Cyprian also noted that the Scriptures are opposed to Pope Stephen I. One must be in the “garden” of Solomon and the Ark of Noah in order to be baptized in the Church. Those who create broken cisterns that don’t hold water do not have the baptism contained in the Church; they can’t even sanctify themselves, never mind others.

“For it has been delivered¹⁶¹ to us, that there is one God, one Christ, one hope, one faith, one Church, and one baptism ordained only in the one Church, from which unity whoever departs must be found with heretics. While Stephen upholds the heretics against the Church, he impugns the sacrament of the divine tradition. The unity of the sacrament we see expressed in the Song of Solomon, in the person of Christ, ‘A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a fountain sealed, a well of living water, a garden with the fruit of pomegranates’ (Song of Solomon 4:12-13 LXX). But if His Church is a garden enclosed, and a fountain sealed, how can he who is not in the Church enter into the same garden, or drink from its fountain? Moreover, Peter, showing and vindicating the unity, has commanded and warned us that we cannot be saved, except by the one only baptism of one Church. ‘In the ark’, he says, ‘of Noah, a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water, as also baptism in like manner saves you’ (1 Peter 3:20-21). In how short and spiritual a summary has he set forth the sacrament of unity! In that baptism of the world, in which its ancient iniquity was purged away, he who was not in the Ark of Noah could not be saved by water. So neither can he appear to be saved by baptism who has not been baptized in the Church, which is established in the unity of the Lord according to the sacrament of the one ark.”

“When we were together¹⁶² in council, dearest brethren, we read your letter which you wrote to us concerning those who seem to be baptized by a heretic and a schismatic, asking whether, when they come to the Catholic Church, they ought to be baptized. On which matter, although you yourselves hold the truth and the Catholic rule, yet since you have thought that we ought to be consulted, we put forward our opinion, not as a new one, but we join with you in equal agreement, in an opinion long since decreed by our predecessors. We judge and hold it for certain that no one can be baptized outside the Church, since there is one baptism appointed in the holy Church. In the words of the Lord, ‘They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water’ (Jeremiah 2:13). And again, ‘Abstain from strange water, and don’t drink from a fountain of strange water’ (Proverbs 9:18 LXX). It is required that the water should first be cleansed and sanctified by the priest, that it may wash away by its baptism the sins of the man who is baptized. The Lord says, ‘Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness; and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I

¹⁶¹ Cyprian, Epistle to Pompey, LXXIII, 11.

¹⁶² Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Januarius et al., LXIX, 1.

will give you a new heart and will put a new spirit within you' (Ezekiel 36:25-26). But how can he cleanse and sanctify the water when he is himself unclean, and in whom the Holy Spirit does not dwell? The Lord says, 'Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean' (Numbers 19:22). How can he who baptizes give to another remission of sins when he himself, being outside the Church, cannot put away his own sins?"

Not All Baptisms Are the Same

Ambrose of Milan compared¹⁶³ different baptisms, noting that they are not all one. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch was valid as the Sacrament of baptism because it was done in the Name of Christ (Acts 8:36-39); the baptism of John was not really the Sacrament of baptism and it needed to be repeated since it was done just for repentance (Acts 19:4). Any baptism is complete if done in the Name of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, since they are all one.

"The Ethiopian eunuch of Queen Candace, when baptized in Christ, obtained the fullness of the sacrament. Those who said that they didn't know of any Holy Spirit, although they said that they had been baptized with John's baptism, were baptized afterwards, because John baptized for the remission of sins in the Name of the coming Jesus, not in his own name. They didn't know the Spirit, because in the form in which John baptized they had not received baptism in the Name of Christ. John, though he did not baptize in the Spirit, nevertheless preached Christ and the Spirit. When he was questioned whether he were perchance himself the Christ, he answered, 'I indeed baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matthew 3:11). Because they had been baptized neither in the Name of Christ nor with faith in the Holy Spirit, they could not have received the sacrament of baptism."

"So they were baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, and baptism was not 'repeated' in their case, but was administered differently, for there is but one baptism. Where there is not the complete sacrament of baptism, there is not considered to be a commencement nor any kind of baptism. But baptism is complete if one confesses the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If you deny One you overthrow the whole. If you mention in words One only, the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, and in your belief do not deny either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the faith is complete. So too, if you name the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and lessen the power of either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the whole mystery is made empty. Those who had said, 'We have not heard if there is any Holy Spirit' (Acts 19:5), were baptized afterwards in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was an additional abundance of grace, for now through Paul's preaching they knew the Holy Spirit."

"Although subsequently mention is not made of the Spirit, He is yet believed in, and what had not been mentioned in words may be expressed in belief. For when it is said, 'In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ', the mystery is complete through the oneness of the Name, and the Spirit is not separated from the baptism of Christ, since John baptized into repentance and Christ baptized into the Spirit."

¹⁶³ Ambrose of Milan, *Of the Holy Spirit*, I, iii, 41-43.

John of Damascus outlined¹⁶⁴ what baptism means for the Orthodox Church. We are only baptized once, but we must be baptized into the Trinity or it is not real Baptism. Baptism is an image of the death of Christ, and the details of the baptismal rite reflect that. But there are two parts to baptism: water and the Spirit, where water expresses death and the Spirit expresses life.

“We confess one baptism for the remission of sins and for life eternal, since baptism declares the Lord’s death. We are indeed ‘buried with the Lord through baptism’ (Colossians 2:12), as Paul said. So then, as our Lord died once for all, we also must be baptized once for all, and baptized according to the Word of the Lord, in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), being taught the confession in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. After having been baptized into Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and having been taught that there is one Divine Nature in three Persons, if some are re-baptized¹⁶⁵, these, as Paul says, crucify Christ afresh. For it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6). But those who were not baptized into the Holy Trinity, these must be baptized again. Although Paul said, ‘Into Christ and into His death were we baptized’ (Romans 6:3), he does not mean that the invocation of baptism must be in these words, but that baptism is an image of the death of Christ. By the three immersions, baptism signifies the three days of our Lord’s entombment. The baptism into Christ means that believers are baptized into Him. We could not believe in Christ if we were not taught confession in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, where Christ is the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16), Whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). In the words of David, ‘Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above your companions’ (Psalm 14:7 LXX). Isaiah, also speaking in the person of the Lord, says, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me’ (Isaiah 61:1 LXX). Christ, however, taught His own disciples the invocation and said, ‘Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). Since Christ made us for incorruption, and we transgressed His command, He condemned us to the corruption of death in order that that which is evil should not be immortal. In His compassion He stooped to His servants and became like us to redeem us from corruption through His own passion. He caused the fountain of remission to spring for us out of His holy and immaculate side (John 19:34). Water came out of His side for our regeneration, and the washing away of sin and corruption; blood came out of His side to drink as the pledge of life eternal. He laid on us the command to be born again of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5), through prayer and invocation, the Holy Spirit drawing near to the water. Since man’s nature is twofold, consisting of soul and body, He gave us a twofold purification, of water and of the Spirit. The Spirit renews that part in us which is after His image and likeness, and the water by the grace of the Spirit cleanses the body from sin and delivers it from corruption. The water expresses the image of death, but the Spirit expresses the guarantee of life.”

¹⁶⁴ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Many of the heretics re-baptized those Christians that entered their communities.

Tertullian wrote¹⁶⁶ regarding heretics: their excommunication testifies that they are outside the Faith and that they don't have the same God. Therefore they can't have the same baptism, and what they do have doesn't count.

“There is to us one, and only one, baptism; as well according to the Gospel as according to Paul's letters, inasmuch as he says, ‘One God, and one baptism, and one church in the heavens’ (Ephesians 4:4-6 loosely). But it must be admitted that the question, ‘What rules are to be observed with regard to heretics?’ is worthy of being treated. Heretics have no fellowship with us; the mere fact of their excommunication testifies that they are outsiders. I am not bound to recognize in them a thing which is commanded to me, because they and we don't have the same God, nor the same Christ. Therefore their baptism is not one with ours either, because it is not the same; they don't have a proper baptism; in fact, they don't have it at all. It is not capable of being counted if they don't have it (Ecclesiastes 1:15). They cannot receive it either. We enter the font once; sins are washed away once, because they ought never to be repeated. The Jewish Israel bathes daily, because he is daily being defiled. Out of fear that defilement might be practiced among us also, therefore the definition regarding the one bathing was made (John 13:10). Happy is the water, which once washes away; which does not mock sinners with vain hopes; which does not defile again those whom it has washed, by being infected with the repetition of impurities!”

One Church

We are living in an age where the concept of “one Church” is a hard thing to fathom. Many divisions exist among the people of God and the number of new denominations keeps increasing. The perspective of the early Church Fathers was quite different; there was a real unity in the Church that was disrupted by heretics who generally denied the Deity of Christ. It was easier for the early Church to achieve unity; they just had to focus back on what the Apostles taught, which was clearer then than now. Our problem today is that there are so many different dissenting voices, all claiming to be speaking for the early Church, that it is hard to know who is right. In addition, modern heretics, who deny the Deity of Christ, are increasing rapidly; like the early heretics, modern heretics also claim to be part of the Church. In this study, we focus on the perspective of what the early Church Fathers had to say on this issue.

Ignatius of Antioch stated¹⁶⁷ that there should be one mind in the Church centered on the Bishop. Nothing is more excellent than this.

“As Christ does nothing without the Father, for says He, ‘I can of my own self do nothing’ (John 5:30), so do you; let no presbyter, deacon, or layman do anything without the bishop. Don't let anything appear commendable to you which is destitute of his approval. For every such thing is sinful, and opposed to the will of God. All come together into the same place for prayer. Let there be one common supplication, one mind, one hope, with blameless faith in Christ Jesus; nothing is more excellent than this. As one man, run together into the temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the Unbegotten God.”

¹⁶⁶ Tertullian, On Baptism, III, ii, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 7.

Cyprian of Carthage emphasized¹⁶⁸ that one can only be saved for sure in the Church; anywhere else, the risk is on us. Peter taught this using the example of Noah's Ark; only those inside were saved for sure; those outside took their chances. Eating the sacrificial lamb at Passover also taught this, and Rahab was an example of the Church protecting her family during the siege of Jericho. Anyone outside her house was at risk.

“Peter showed that the Church is one, and that only they who are in the Church can be baptized. ‘In the ark of Noah, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water; where the figure of baptism now saves us’ (1 Peter 3:20-21), proving that the one ark of Noah was a type of the one Church. In that baptism of the world, he who was in the ark of Noah could be saved by water; he who is in the Church to which alone baptism is granted, can also now be made alive by baptism. Paul, more openly and clearly still revealing this same thing, writes to the Ephesians, ‘Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water’ (Ephesians 5:25-26). But if the Church is one, which is loved by Christ, and is alone cleansed by His washing, how can he who is not in the Church be either loved by Christ, or washed and cleansed by His washing?”

“The Faith of the Scripture establishes that the Church cannot be separated or divided against itself, but maintains the unity of an inseparable and undivided house. In the sacrament of the Passover, the instructions regarding the sacrificial lamb, where the Lamb designated Christ, state ‘In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house’ (Exodus 12:46). We also see this expressed concerning Rahab, who herself was a type of the Church, and received the command, ‘You shall bring your father, and your mother, and your brethren, and all your father's household to you into your house; whoever shall go out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head’ (Joshua 2:18-19). In this mystery is declared, that they who will live, and escape from the destruction of the world, must be gathered together into only one house, that is, into the Church. If anyone of those thus collected together shall go out of the Church, although he may have obtained grace in the Church, his blood shall be on his own head. That is, he must regard it as his own fault if he perishes. Paul explains this, teaching that a heretic must be avoided, as perverse and a sinner, and as condemned of himself. That man will be guilty of his own ruin, who, not being cast out by the bishop, but of his own accord deserts the Church.”

Cyprian of Carthage also stated¹⁶⁹ that a heretic or a schismatic is a profane person and an enemy of the Lord's peace. Just as Jeroboam ripped off the Ten Tribes of Israel, so heretics rip Churches away from the Lord's flock. The ten tribes were rewarded for their heresy at the time of the Assyrian Captivity. Even 1000 years later, Jesus refused to allow the Apostles to preach immediately in Samaria, which is where the remnants of the Ten Tribes lived. Thus the saving water of baptism and heavenly grace can't be in common with those who promote schism.

“The Lord suggests to us a unity that comes from divine authority, saying, ‘I and my Father are one’ (John 10:30). He reduces His Church to this unity, saying, ‘There shall be one flock, and one shepherd’ (John 10:16). But if the

¹⁶⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXXV, 2, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXXV, 5-6.

flock is one, how can he be numbered among the flock, who is not in the number of the flock? While the true shepherd remains and presides over the Church of God by successive ordination, how can he be regarded a pastor of a real Church if he succeeds no one, and beginning a new thing from himself. He becomes a stranger and a profane person, an enemy of the Lord's peace and of the divine unity. He does not dwell in the house of God, that is, in the Church of God, in which none dwell except those that are of one heart and one mind.

“Even the Lord's sacrifices themselves declare that Christian unanimity is linked together with itself by a firm inseparable love. When the Lord calls bread, which is combined by the union of many grains, His body, He indicates our people as being united. When He calls the wine, which is pressed from many grapes and clusters and collected together, His blood, He also signifies our flock linked together by the mingling of a united multitude. How inseparable is the sacrament of unity, and how hopeless are they, and what excessive ruin they earn for themselves who make a schism. If someone forsakes his bishop and appoints another as a false bishop, Holy Scripture declares this in the books of Kings. Ten tribes were ripped away from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, and, forsaking their king, appointed for themselves another one outside. It says, ‘The Lord was angry with the whole seed of Israel; He agitated them, and delivered them into the hand of those that plundered them, until He cast them out of His Presence. Israel revolted from the house of David, and made Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, king’ (2 Kings 17:20-21 LXX). It says that the Lord was very angry, and gave them up to perdition, because they were scattered from unity, and had made another king for themselves. So great was the indignation of the Lord against those who had made the schism, that even when the man of God was sent to Jeroboam, to charge him with his sins, and predict the future vengeance, he was forbidden to eat bread or to drink water with them. When he did not observe this, and took food against the command of God, he was immediately struck by the majesty of the divine judgment, so that on his return he was slain on the way by the jaws of a lion (1 Kings 13). Does anyone dare to say that the saving water of baptism and heavenly grace can be in common with those who promote schism, with whom neither earthly food nor worldly drink ought to be in common? Moreover, the Lord satisfies us in His Gospel, and shows a still greater light of intelligence. The same persons who had divided themselves from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, and had seceded to Samaria¹⁷⁰, should be reckoned among profane persons and Gentiles. When He first sent His disciples on the ministry of salvation, He told them, ‘Do not go to the way of the Gentiles, and don't enter into any city of the Samaritans’ (Matthew 10:5). Sending them first to the Jews, He commanded that the Gentiles should as yet be passed over, adding that even the cities of the Samaritans were to be omitted. Where there were those who promote schism, He shows that they were to be put on the same level as Gentiles.”

John Cassian stated¹⁷¹ that it is difficult to find one person to imitate. One person has wisdom; another has humility and another has patience. However, because of the unity of the

¹⁷⁰ That is, Samaria was the home of the Ten Northern Tribes who had revolted from the House of David.

¹⁷¹ John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia, V, 4.

Faith, for the present Christ is distributed member by member among all the saints. This will be our life experience until the Second Coming.

“If we want to gain all virtues from some one person, we shall with great difficulty or perhaps never at all find suitable examples for us to imitate. We do not as yet see that Christ is made ‘all things in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28), as Paul says; still in this way we can find Him bit by bit in all. It is said of Him, ‘He became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, sanctification and redemption’ (1 Corinthians 1:30). In one person there is found wisdom; in another, righteousness; in another, sanctification; in another, kindness; in another, chastity; in another, humility; in another, patience. Christ is at the present time distributed, member by member, among all of the saints. But when all come together into the unity of the faith and virtue, He is formed into the ‘perfect man’ (Ephesians 4:13), completing the fullness of His body, in the joints and properties of all His members. Until that time arrives, when God will be ‘all in all’, for the present, God can be ‘in all’, through particular virtues, although He is not yet ‘all in all’ through the fullness of them. Although our Faith has but one end and aim, yet there are different ways by which we approach God. So we must seek a model of discretion and continence more particularly from those from whom we see that those virtues flow more abundantly through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Not everyone can acquire all those things which are divided among many; but in order that we may progress in those good qualities of which we are capable, we may advance by the imitation of those who especially have acquired them.”

John Chrysostom stated¹⁷² that in the One Church, God has called us all on the same terms and all have received tremendous gifts, such that we sit with Him in the heavenly places. But there are specific spiritual gifts given to each person for the work of the Church, not for the honor of one person over another. The one who earned five talents received the same reward as the one who earned two talents; we disgrace the gift if we get stuck up over how much we receive. Each gift that a person receives is accompanied by an expectation to use it.

“There is ‘one body’; it is one both by sympathy, by not opposing the good of others, and by sharing their joy. He then beautifully adds, ‘and one Spirit’, showing that from the one body there will be one Spirit. There could be one body, and yet not one Spirit; for instance, if any member of it should be a friend of heretics. Then he adds, ‘Even as you were called in one hope of your calling’ (Ephesians 4:4); that is, God has called you all on the same terms. He has given to one more than to another. To all He has freely given immortality, to all eternal life, to all immortal glory, to all brotherhood, to all inheritance. He is the common Head of all; ‘He has raised all’ up, ‘and made them sit with Him’ (Ephesians 2:6-10). You then who in the spiritual world have so great equality of privileges, why is it that you are stuck up? Is it that one is wealthy and another strong? How ridiculous this is? If the emperor were to take ten persons, array them all in purple, seat them on the royal throne, and grant them all the same honor, would any one of these people venture to reproach another, as being wealthier or more illustrious than he? Never! And the difference is not so great in heaven as here below. There is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’. Behold ‘the hope of your calling. There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and

¹⁷² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XI, vv. 4-7.

through all, and in us all' (Ephesians 4:4-6). Can it be that you are called by the name of a greater God, and another is called by the name of a lesser God? That you are saved by faith, and another is saved by works? That you have received forgiveness in baptism, while another has not? 'There is one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all'. He is 'over all', in that He is the Lord and above all; He is 'through all' in that He provides for and orders all; He is 'in us all' in that He dwells in us all."

"'To each one of us was the grace given' (Ephesians 4:7). Paul asked, where did those diverse spiritual gifts come from? This subject was continually carrying away the Ephesians, the Corinthians, and many others, some into vain arrogance, and others into despondency or envy. Paul took along with him everywhere this illustration of the body of Christ. He entered into the subject more fully in the Epistle to the Corinthians, because this malady most especially reigned among them; to the Ephesians he has only alluded to it. Note what he said! He does not say, 'according to the faith of each', lest he should throw those who have no large attainments into despondency. Instead Paul said, 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ' (Ephesians 4:7). The chief points are common to all, that is, Baptism, being saved by faith, having God for our Father, all partaking of the same Spirit. If one man possesses any superiority in any spiritual gift, his labor also is greater. He that had received the five talents, had five more required of him; he that had received the two talents brought back only two more, and yet received no less a reward than the other. Therefore Paul encourages the hearer on the same ground, showing that gifts are given not for the honor of one above another, but for the work of the Church."

"Paul said that the gifts are 'For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministering for the edifying of the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:12). Paul himself said, 'Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel!' (1 Corinthians 9:16) Paul received the grace of Apostleship; for this reason, 'woe to him' if he doesn't follow through; we don't have that gift so we are free from the associated danger."

"'Why does one receive more and another less 'according to the measure of Christ's gift?' (Ephesians 4:7) This means that we have received, 'not according to our merit', since we have all received the free gift. Our actions are not the cause of this, Paul would say, since everyone contributes towards 'the building'. He shows that it is not of his own intrinsic merit that one has received more and another less, but that it is for the sake of others, as God Himself has measured it" (1 Corinthians 12:18).

One God and Father of All

Paul stated, "There is one body and one Spirit, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Sometimes today in listening to people in their relationship with God, one might think that God the Father was off on vacation somewhere. Everything is Jesus this and Jesus that. The Trinity is just not emphasized. The Son is the only person of the Trinity who took human form, but the Deity of the Godhead is beyond human understanding. While Jesus reveals God the Father through His humanity, everyone needs the Holy Spirit just to understand this. Belief in God the Father is not enough for salvation; one must also believe that the Son was incarnate. But yet the Son's human flesh was not able to fully

contain His Godhead. The Son was dwelling with His Father external to the universe as well as dwelling in the human body He assumed from the Virgin Mary. Let us hear what some of the Church Fathers had to say about this.

Cyril of Jerusalem gave¹⁷³ a brief description of the Unity of God in His majesty. He is sometimes described in characteristics humans can understand, but He is way beyond human understanding. Even the angels can only see Him as far as they are capable.

“For devotion it is enough for us simply to know that we have a God; a God who is One, an ever-living God; always like Himself; who has no Father, no one mightier than Himself, no successor to thrust Him out from His kingdom. He has many Names, is infinite in power, uniform in substance. He is called Good, Just, Almighty and Sabaoth¹⁷⁴, but He is not diverse and various because of that. He is one and the same; He sends forth countless operations of His Godhead, not exceeding here and deficient there, but being in all things like Himself. He is not great in loving-kindness only, and little in wisdom, but with wisdom and loving-kindness in equal portions. He does not see in part, and is blind in part; but is all eye, and all ear, and all mind. He is not like us perceiving in part and in part not knowing; for such a statement is blasphemous, and unworthy of Divinity. He foreknows the things that are; He is Holy and Almighty, and excels all in goodness, majesty and wisdom; of Him we can declare neither beginning, form or shape. ‘You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor have you seen His form’ (John 5:37). Therefore Moses said to Israel, ‘Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire’ (Deuteronomy 4:15). If it is wholly impossible to imagine His likeness, how shall thought come near His substance?”

“One He is; He is everywhere present, beholding all things, perceiving all things, creating all things through Christ. ‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made’ (John 1:3). A fountain of every good, abundant and unending, a river of blessings, an eternal light of never-failing splendor, an insuperable power condescending to our infirmities. ‘Will you find out the tracks of the Lord?’, said Job, ‘Or have you come to the end of that which the Almighty has made?’ (Job 11:7 LXX) If the least of His works are incomprehensible, shall He be comprehended who made them all? ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). If the things which God has prepared are incomprehensible to our thoughts, how can we comprehend with our mind Himself who has prepared them? ‘O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!’ (Romans 11:33). If His judgments and His ways are incomprehensible, can He Himself be comprehended?”

“Someone will say that it is written, ‘Take heed that you 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). But the angels don’t see God as He is, but as far as they themselves are capable. For it is Jesus Himself who said, ‘No man has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen

¹⁷³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VI, 7, 9, 6.

¹⁷⁴ The word *Sabaoth* is a Hebrew word transliterated into Greek and means “of armies”. In connection with God, it means “of hosts”, as in Lord of hosts.

the Father' (John 6:46). The angels therefore behold as much as they can bear, and archangels as much as they are able; thrones and dominions behold more than these, but yet less than His worthiness; the Son and the Holy Spirit alone can rightly behold Him. 'The Spirit searches all things and knows even the deep things of God. No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God' (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). The Only-Begotten Son, with the Holy Spirit, knows the Father fully. No man knows the Father, only the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him' (Matthew 11:27). He fully beholds; as each can bear, He reveals God through the Spirit, since the Only-Begotten Son together with the Holy Spirit is a partaker of the Father's Godhead. Since Angels then are ignorant, let no man be ashamed to confess his own ignorance. How can I declare Him who has given us speech? I who have a soul, and cannot tell even the soul's distinctive properties, how shall I be able to describe its Giver?"

Hilary of Poitiers stated¹⁷⁵ that the words "one God and one Lord" might seem to limit the property of "God" only to the Father. To understand this, spiritual gifts and the help of the Holy Spirit are needed, since belief in one God the Father is not enough for salvation.

"Paul said, 'For us there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we in Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and we through Him' (1 Corinthians 8:6). Again, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who *is* above all, and through all, and in us all' (Ephesians 5:5-6). By these words 'one God and one Lord', it would seem that to God only is attributed the property of being God; since the property of oneness does not admit partnership with another."

"How rare and hard to attain are such spiritual gifts! How truly is the Spirit revealed in the giving of such useful gifts! With reason has this order in the distribution of graces been appointed (1 Corinthians 12:8-10), that (1) the first should be the word of wisdom. 'No one can call Jesus Lord but in the Holy Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:3), because only through this word of wisdom could Christ be understood to be Lord. (2) Next is the word of understanding that we might speak with understanding about what we know, and might know the word of wisdom. (3) The third-ranked gift consists of faith, seeing that those higher graces would be unprofitable gifts if we did not believe that He is God. In the true sense of Paul's greatest utterance, no heretics possess either the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge or the true faith. Willful wickedness, being incapable of understanding, is void of the knowledge of the word and of genuineness of faith. No one utters what he does not know; nor can he believe that which he cannot utter; thus when Paul preached one God, a proselyte as He was from the Law, and called everyone to the Gospel of Christ, he has attained to the confession of a perfect faith."

"The simplicity of an unguarded statement might give heretics an opportunity for denying, through the preaching of one God, the birth of the Son. Therefore, Paul has spelled out one God, while indicating His peculiar attributes in these words: 'One God the Father, of Whom are all thing, and we in Him', in order that He, Who is God, might also be acknowledged as Father. 'Since this bare belief in one God the Father is not enough for salvation, Paul added, 'And

¹⁷⁵ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VIII, 34.

one Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and we through Him', showing that the purity of saving faith consists in the preaching of one God and one Lord. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone that sees the Son and believes on Him should have eternal life (John 6:40). In fixing the order of the Church's faith, and basing our faith upon the Father and the Son, he has uttered the mystery of that indivisible and indissoluble unity and faith in the words one God and one Lord."

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁷⁶ that Christ as a man did not have His Deity contained within His humanity; His Deity was included only within His Father. Men cannot influence things outside their bodies by acts of thought, since their being is included within their bodies. Christ was not bound by His human body, but was Himself controlling it. He was dwelling with His Father external to the universe, and is present in everything.

"Christ was not, as some might imagine, circumscribed in the body; while present in the body, He was also present elsewhere. While He moved the body, the universe was not left void of His working and Providence. The thing most marvelous is that although He was the Word, so far from being contained by anything, He rather contained all things Himself. While present in the whole of Creation, He is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by His own power. He gives order to all things, over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included in it. His being is included in His own Father alone wholly and in every respect."

"Thus, even while present in a human body and Himself energizing it, He was, without inconsistency, enlivening the universe as well. He was in every process of nature, and was outside the whole; while known from the body by His works, He was none the less revealed from the working of the universe as well."

"It is the function of soul to view even what is outside its own body, by acts of thought, without working outside its own body, or moving things remote from the body. Never does a man, by thinking of things at a distance, either move or displace them. If a man were to sit in his own house and reason about the heavenly bodies, he cannot by that fact either move the sun or make the heavens revolve. But he sees that they move and have their being, without being actually able to influence them."

"Now, the Word of God in His man's nature was not like that; for He was not bound to His body, but rather was Himself controlling it. He was not only in it, but was actually in everything, and while external to the universe, abode within His Father only."

"This was the wonderful thing that He was at the same time walking as man, and as the Word was giving life to all things, and as the Son was dwelling with His Father. So that not even when the Virgin bore Him did He suffer any change, nor by being in the body was His glory dulled; but, on the contrary, He sanctified the body also."

"Not even by being in the universe does He share in its nature, but all things, on the contrary, are energized and sustained by Him."

¹⁷⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, XVII, 1-7.

“If the sun, which was made by Him, and which we see, as it revolves in the heaven, is not defiled by touching the bodies on earth, nor is it extinguished by darkness; on the contrary, itself illuminates and cleanses them. Much less was the all-holy Word of God, Maker and Lord also of the sun, defiled by being made known in the body. On the contrary, being incorruptible, He energized and cleansed the body also, which was in itself mortal. So it says, ‘no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth’” (1 Peter 2:22).

Hilary of Poitiers pointed out¹⁷⁷ that the Scriptures do not give us vague paths open to imagination regarding the definition of the Faith; it is easy to define one Lord, one Faith, one baptism and one God. Heretics who don't fit this definition are not of the one Faith and preach another Christ.

“Paul reviewed the full and perfect mystery of the Gospel, saying, ‘You were called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and through all, and in us all’ (Ephesians 4:4-6). He does not leave us on vague and misleading paths of an indefinite teaching, or abandon us to the shifting fancies of imagination, but limits the license of intellect by the appointment of restraining barriers. He gives us no opportunity to be wise beyond what he preached, but defines in exact and precise language the faith fixed for all time, that there may be no excuse for instability of belief. He declares one faith, as he preaches one Lord, and pronounces one baptism, as he declares one faith of one Lord. As there is one faith of one Lord, so there may be one baptism of one faith in one Lord. Since the whole mystery of the baptism and the faith is not only in one Lord, but also in one God, we must confess the one God. The one baptism and the one faith are of one God, as they are of one Lord. Lord and God are each one, not by union of person but by distinction of properties. On the one hand, it is the property of Each to be one, whether of the Father in His Fatherhood, or of the Son in His Son-ship. On the other hand, that property of individuality, which Each possesses, constitutes for Each the mystery of His union with the Other. Thus the one Lord Christ cannot take away from God the Father His Lordship and the one God the Father cannot deny to the one Lord Christ His Godhead. If Christ is not also by nature divine, then the one God cannot be Lord, because there is one Lord Christ; their ‘oneness’ would be signified not by the mystery, but an exclusive unity. So there is one baptism and one faith of one Lord, as of one God.”

“How can it be any longer one Faith, if it does not steadfastly confess one Lord and one God the Father? Referring to the various heretical opinions, how can the Faith be one, when its preachers are so at variance? One teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ, in weakness, groaned with anguish when the nails pierced His hands, that He lost the virtue of His own power and nature, and shrank shuddering from the death which threatened Him. Another denies the principal teaching of the Incarnation and pronounces Him a creature. Another might call Him God, but not think Him so, on the ground that the Faith allows us to speak of more Gods than one. How can Christ the Lord be one, when some say that as God He feels no pain; others make Him weak and fearful; to some He is God in name only; to others He is God in nature only; to some He is the Son only by His birth to Mary;

¹⁷⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, XI, 1-2.

to others He is just called the Son? If this is so, how can God the Father be one in the Faith, when to some He is Father by His authority, to others Father by generation?"

"Whatever is not the One Faith, is not faith at all. In the One Faith there is one Lord Christ, and God the Father is one. The one Lord Jesus Christ is not one in the truth of the confession, as well as in name, unless He is Son, God and unchangeable, and unless His Son-ship and His Godhead have been eternally present in Him. He who preaches Christ other than He is, that is, other than Son and God, preaches another Christ, and is not part of the One Faith of the one baptism."

Ambrose of Milan defended¹⁷⁸ the Deity of the Holy Spirit to the Emperor. He is God with the Father and the Son through the Oneness of the Trinity. God can raise the dead; therefore the Holy Spirit raises the dead on some occasions also. By recognizing what is done, we also recognize the Oneness of God; by recognizing the nature of the Holy Spirit, we see that He is over all and in all.

"God has a Name which is above every name, and has given a name to the Son, that at the Name of Jesus knees should bow (Philippians 2:10). Let us consider whether the Spirit has this Name also. It is written, 'Go, baptize the nations in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19); He has, then, a Name above every name. What, therefore, the Father and the Son have, the Holy Spirit also has through the oneness of the Name of His nature.

It is a prerogative of God to raise the dead. 'As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom He wills' (John 5:21). But the Spirit also raises them, for it is written, 'He will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who dwells in you' (Romans 8:11). That you may not think that this is a trivial grace, learn that the Spirit also raises the dead, 'Come, O Spirit, and breathe on these dead, and they shall live. So I prophesied, as He commanded me, and the Spirit of life entered into them and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great assembly' (Ezekiel 37:9-10 OSB LXX). And farther on God says, 'Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your tombs to lead you, My people, up from their graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live'" (Ezekiel 37:13-14).

When He spoke of His Spirit, did He mention any other besides the Holy Spirit? He would neither have spoken of His Spirit as produced by blowing¹⁷⁹, nor could this Spirit come from the four quarters of the world; for the blowing of these winds, which we experience, is partial, not universal. This spirit by which we live is also individual, not universal. It is the nature of the Holy Spirit to be both over all and in all. Therefore from the words of the prophet we may see how the bones may come together again to the form of a revived body, when the Spirit gives them life. The ashes come together on their limbs, animated by a disposition to come together before being re-formed in the appearance of living.

Do we not in the likeness of what is done recognize the oneness of the Divine power? The Spirit raises after the same manner as the Lord was raised at

¹⁷⁸ Ambrose of Milan, *Of the Holy Spirit*, III, xix, 148-152.

¹⁷⁹ In Hebrew and in Greek, the word for spirit also is used to mean wind or blowing depending on the context.

the time of His Passion. Suddenly in the twinkling of an eye the graves of the dead were opened, and the bodies living again arose from the tombs, and the smell of death was removed (Matthew 27:51-53). The scent of life was restored, and the ashes of those who were dead took again the likeness of the living.

So, then, the Spirit has that which Christ has, and therefore what God has, for all things which the Father has the Son also has. Therefore He said, 'All things which the Father has are Mine' (John 16:15).

Paul stated, "God the Father has put all things under Christ's feet. But when He says 'all things are put under Him', it is evident that He who put all things under Him is exempted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

Paul stated, "Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Ambrose of Milan stated¹⁸⁰ that the "subjection of Christ" that Paul spoke of refers first to Christ's humanity, and second to a time in the future when the work of God will be perfected, but it is not a degrading subjection. So long as any of us humans are still imperfect, the work of God continues; at Christ's return, things will change. To be "subject" implies obedience, as in Christ's "obedience unto death". At the Second Coming of Christ, all will obey, whether they want to or not; however those that don't want to will be separated to their own place. Then God will be all and in all, and our humanity, which is the Body of Christ, will be perfected and subject to God. Those who receive this had already begun becoming subject as they served the Lord as represented by the "least of their brethren", which is part of Christ's humanity.

"Some say that Christ is now made subject, because many have believed. This is certainly not the case! Christ's subjection that Paul spoke of lies not in the conversion of a few but in everyone. Just as I am not brought into subjection if my flesh still lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17), so because the whole Church is the one body of Christ, we divide Christ as long as the human race disagrees. Therefore Christ is not yet made subject, for His members are not yet brought into subjection. But when we have become one spirit, then He also will become subject, in order that through His subjection 'God may be all and in all'".

"Since Christ is not yet made subject, so the work of God is not yet perfected; for the Son of God said, 'My food is to do the will of My Father, and to finish His work' (John 4:34). There is no doubt that the subjection of the Son in me is still in the future, in whom the work of the Father is unfinished, because I myself am not yet perfect. In so far as we are made subject, it is to our profit, not to that of the Godhead that we are made subject to the Law, that we are made subject to grace. The wisdom of the flesh was formerly at enmity with God, for 'it was not made subject to the Law' (Colossians 2:23); but now it is made subject through the Passion of Christ."

"Let us then consider His subjection. 'Father', He said, 'if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done' (Luke 22:42). Therefore that subjection will be according to the assumption of human nature; as we read, 'Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself,

¹⁸⁰ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, 13-15, 168-169, 171, 176-177, 182.

and became obedient to death' (Philippians 2:8). The subjection therefore is that of obedience; the obedience is that of death; the death is that of the assumed humanity; that subjection therefore will be the subjection of the assumed humanity. Thus in no wise is there a weakness in the Godhead, but we do have a duty to obey Him."

"That you might know that when Paul said, 'That God may be all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28), he does not separate Christ from God the Father. Paul also said to the Colossians, 'Where there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all' (Colossians 3:11). Paul understood the unity and equality of Christ with God the Father, for the Son is not separated from the Father. In like manner as the Father works all and in all, so also Christ works all in all. If Christ also works all in all, He is not made subject in the glory of the Godhead, but in us. How is He made subject in us, except in the way in which He was made lower than the angels; I mean in the sacrament of His body? All things which have served their Creator from their first beginning seem not yet to be made subject to Him in that."

"But if you should ask how He was made subject in us, He Himself shows us, saying: 'I was in prison, and you came to Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these you have done it to Me'. You hear of Christ in subjection¹⁸¹, and are moved, though He is sick and weak in him in whom He is in subjection, in whom He was made sin and a curse for us."

"Let us sum up a conclusion on this whole matter. A unity of power puts aside all ideas of a degrading subjection. His giving up of power, and His victory as conqueror over death, have not lessened His power. Obedience works out subjection. Christ has taken obedience upon Himself, obedience even to taking on Him our flesh and the cross to gain our salvation. Thus where the work lies, there too is the Author of the work. When all things have become subject to Christ, through Christ's obedience, so that all bend their knees in His Name, then He Himself will be all in all. For now, since all do not believe, all do not seem to be in subjection. When all have believed and have done the will of God, then Christ will be all and in all. And when Christ is all and in all, then God the Father will be all and in all; for the Father abides always in the Son."

¹⁸¹ This is an eye-opening understanding. We really do serve Christ when we do things for the "least of these His brethren" (Matthew 25:34-40). Christ has permitted Himself to be dishonored by identifying Himself with the disadvantaged, in order that anyone may serve Him easily.

Unity of Spirit

Paul writes that we are co-crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). If the vine has died, so have the branches, for the life of the vine flows through the branches also. If the Head has died, so has the body for they share a common life. The death Paul speaks of is a death to sin and the life is an eternal life. Just as Christ took on the sin of the world when He died (John 1:29, 1 Peter 2:24), so we die to our sin in baptism.

Paul also writes that “if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection’ (Romans 6:5). The vine and the branches, the Head and the body are united in death and resurrection; all this is accomplished in a mystery through baptism (Romans 6:4). The ancient Church Fathers used the illustration of a sword in a fire to describe Christ’s two natures (God and man): the sword (humanity) doesn’t become fire (divinity). But after a while, the heat of the fire makes the sword glow like fire. The same is true about the branches being connected to the vine, and the body connected to the Head. We begin to take on characteristics of the Master. Similarly in ancient cultures, the queen (the wife) was empowered with the authority of the king (the husband) in his absence.

John Chrysostom wrote¹⁸² that there is a depth and a perfection of the Spirit’s relationship with the soul that goes beyond human understanding.

“In the human body there is a spirit which holds all together, though in different members. So it is here also; for to this end was the Spirit given, that He might unite those who are separated by race and by different manners. For old and young, rich and poor, child and youth, woman and man, and every soul become in a manner one, and more entirely so than if there were one body. For this spiritual relation is far higher than the other natural one, and the perfection of the union is more entire; because the conjunction of the soul is more perfect, inasmuch as it is both simple and uniform”.

How does this work in real life? Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:16-17). The Spirit in the vine bears witness with the spirit in the branches; the Spirit of the Head bears witness with the spirit of the body. This is how the organism functions as the Body of Christ. Vine and branches, Head and body suffer and are glorified together.

Cyprian of Carthage stated¹⁸³ that Christ established His authority in the Church around unity in the Bishop. He who separates himself from the Church or breaks the peace of Christ scatters the Church. The unity of God cannot be divided; this unity can be illustrated by the secure house of Rahab during the Conquest and by the eating of the Passover Sacrament. The unity of the Church can also be illustrated by the peaceful life of a dove, which is quite different than the lives of wolves, dogs, snakes and wild beasts.

“To all the Apostles, after His resurrection, Jesus gave an equal power, ‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. Receive the Holy Spirit; If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they

¹⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IX, v. 3.

¹⁸³ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatise on the Unity of the Church, I, 4, 6, 8-9.

are retained' (John 20:21-23). Yet, to establish unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. The rest of the apostles were the same as Peter, given a partnership both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity. The Holy Spirit designated the one Church in the person of our Lord, 'My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her' (Song of Solomon 6:9 LXX). The one who does not hold this unity of the Church does not hold the faith. He who strives against and resists the Church is not in the Church. Paul teaches the same thing, and sets forth the sacrament of unity, 'There is one body and one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God?'" (Ephesians 4:4)

"Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church; he who forsakes the Church of Christ cannot attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If anyone could escape, who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape, who shall be outside of the Church. The Lord warns, 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who gathers not with me scatters' (Matthew 12:30). He, who breaks the peace and the concord of Christ, does so in opposition to Christ. He who gathers elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ."

"Who is so wicked and faithless that he should believe that the unity of God can be divided? Christ says, 'There shall be one flock and one shepherd' (John 10:16). Paul urges us, 'I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment' (1 Corinthians 1:10). Again, 'Bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3). Do you think that you can stand and live if you withdraw from the Church, building for yourself other homes and a different dwelling?"

"Therefore the Holy Spirit came as a dove, a simple and joyous creature, not bitter with gall, cruel in its bite, violent with the tearing of its claws, loving human dwellings, knowing the association of one home. When they have young, they bring out their young together; when they migrate, they remain in their flight by the side of one another, spending their life in mutual communication, acknowledging the concord of peace with the kiss of the beak, in all things fulfilling the law of unanimity. This is the simplicity that ought to be known in the Church; this is the love that ought to be attained; in order that the love of the brotherhood may imitate the doves that their gentleness and meekness may be like lambs and sheep. What does the fierceness of wolves, the savageness of dogs, the deadly venom of snakes, and the bloody cruelty of wild beasts have to do with Christianity? We should be congratulated when such as these are separated from the Church, lest they should lay waste the doves and sheep of Christ with their cruel and venomous disease. Bitterness cannot coexist with sweetness, darkness with light, battle with peace. Let no one think that the good can depart from the Church. The wind does not carry away the wheat, nor does the hurricane uproot the tree that is based on a solid root. It is the light straws that are tossed around by the wind; the feeble trees are overthrown by the twisters. The Apostle John

denounces these, ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, surely they would have continued with us’” (1 John 2:19).

Clement of Rome wrote of a counter example to Unity of Spirit in a letter strongly criticizing¹⁸⁴ the Corinthians about 40 years after the Apostle Paul wrote his epistles to them. Some of the Corinthians had deposed several of the Corinthian Bishops for no apparent reason. Clement noted that throughout history it is only evil men that have persecuted the righteous. The Corinthians should consider the Lord’s words concerning stumbling blocks and how their schism subverts the faith of some people. The Corinthians had been renowned for their brotherly love; they now need to beg the Lord with tears to restore them to their former practice.

“You are fond of contention, brethren, and are full of zeal about things which do not pertain to salvation. Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust character is written in them. The righteous were not cast off by men who themselves were holy. The righteous were indeed persecuted, but only by the wicked. They were thrown into prison, but only by the unholy; they were stoned, but only by transgressors; they were killed, but only by the accursed, and such as had conceived an unrighteous envy against them. Exposed to such suffering, they endured it gloriously. Was Daniel thrown into the lions’ den by those that feared God? (Daniel 6:16) Were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shut up in a fiery furnace by those who observed the great and glorious worship of the Most High? (Daniel 3:20) Far from us be such a thought! Who, then, were those that did such things? The hateful and those full of wickedness were roused to such a pitch of fury, that they inflicted torture on those who served God with a holy and blameless purpose of heart, not knowing that the Most High is the Defender of all who venerate His all-excellent Name with a pure conscience. Those who with confidence endured these things are now heirs of glory and honor.”

“We should follow such examples; since it is written, ‘With the holy will you be holy, and with an innocent man will you be innocent; and with a perverse man will you show disobedience’ (Psalm 18:25-26 LXX). Let us cling to the innocent and righteous, since these are the elect of God. ‘Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?’ (James 4:1) Have we not all one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? Have we not one calling in Christ? (Ephesians 4:4-6) Why do we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ, and raise up strife against our own body. You have reached such a height of madness as to forget that ‘you are members of one another’ (Romans 12:5). Remember the words¹⁸⁵ of our Lord Jesus Christ, ‘Woe to that man by whom offenses come! It would have been better for him if he had never been born, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of my elect. It would be better for him that a millstone should be hung around his neck, and he should be sunk in the depths of the sea, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of my little ones’. Your schism has subverted the faith of many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continues.”

¹⁸⁴ Clement of Rome, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, 45-48.

¹⁸⁵ This is a combination of Matthew 18:6, 26:24, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2.

“What did Paul write to you? He wrote concerning himself, Cephas and Apollos, because even then factions had been formed among you (1 Corinthians 3:3-5). But that inclination for one above another generated less guilt upon you than now. Then your partialities were towards Apostles, already of high reputation, and towards a man whom they had approved. But now reflect who those are that have perverted you, and lessened the renown of your far-famed brotherly love. It is highly disgraceful and unworthy of your Christian profession, that the most steadfast and ancient Church of the Corinthians should engage in sedition against its presbyters on account of one or two persons. This rumor has not only reached us, but also those who are unconnected with us. Through your infatuation, the name of the Lord is blasphemed, and danger is also brought on yourselves.”

“Put an end to this, fall down before the Lord and beg Him with tears, that He would mercifully be reconciled to us, and restore us to our former holy practice of brotherly love. Such conduct is the gate of righteousness, which is set open for the attainment of life, as it is written, ‘Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go in by them, and give praise to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter in by it’ (Psalm 118:19-20 LXX). Although many gates have been set open, this gate of righteousness is that gate in Christ by which blessed are all they that have entered in and have directed their way in holiness and righteousness, doing all things without disorder. Let a man be faithful; let him be powerful in the utterance of knowledge. Let him be wise in judging words; let him be pure in all his deeds. Yet the more he seems to be superior to others in these respects, the more humble-minded he ought to be, seeking the common good of all.”

John Chrysostom stated¹⁸⁶ that this brotherly connection is true freedom and is a stronger relationship than anything else:

“This is a bond that doesn’t bruise, nor does it cramp the hands it binds, but it leaves them free, and gives them ample play, and greater courage than those which are at liberty. The strong, if he is bound to the weak, will support him and not allow him to perish. If he were tied to the lazy, him he will rouse and animate. ‘Brother helped by brother is as a strong city’ (Proverbs 18:19 LXX). This chain no distance of place can interrupt, neither heaven, nor earth, nor death, nor anything else, but it is more powerful and strong than all things”.

The result is that we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37). For anything to prevail against the branches it has to take on the Vine; for anything to prevail against the body, it has to take on the Head.

¹⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IX, v. 3.