

DAY-TO-DAY FORGIVENESS SUPPORTING THE CLERGY

August 8, 2010
11th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision F

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35
EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12

Table of Contents

Background: Slavery in Israel.....	154
Gospel Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35	155
Our Debt – The Lord Forgives Us.....	156
Other’s Sin – We Forgive Their Debt.....	157
We Are Measured by Our Own Standard.....	158
What Really Makes God Angry.....	162
Not Remembering Evil Done to Us.....	164
Thankfulness is the Key to Receiving Mercy	166
Praying Against Our Enemies.....	167
Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12.....	172
Muzzling the Ox While He Threshes	173
The Reward for Helping the Clergy	175
Repayment of Physical Things for Spiritual Service.....	178
The Wives of the Apostles.....	180
Paul as a Spiritual Father to Corinth.....	182

Background: Slavery in Israel

The key figures in the story Jesus used to illustrate day-to-day forgiveness are a king and his slaves. The Greek word used here (*doulos*) means slave and not servant. (The Greek word *huperetes* is used to mean servant or subordinate). Thus the Old Testament laws regarding slavery apply to this situation¹.

Hebrew slaves of Hebrew masters had a sunset clause on their bondage. In the 7th year, the slave and his family were to be freed (Exodus 21:1-4). Anyone in Hebrew society could become a slave due to poverty (Leviticus 25:39); also in the case of theft, fourfold-restitution was required to avoid being sold as a slave (Exodus 22:1-3). For Hebrew slaves of non-Hebrew masters, the sunset clause was the year of Jubilee (the 50th year) rather than the 7th year (Leviticus 25:39-42). For non-Hebrew slaves of Hebrew masters, the sunset clause didn’t apply at all and the slave could be a permanent slave (Leviticus 25:45-46).

Slaves could be treated harshly since they were the property of the owner. If the slave died because of being struck by his master, however, the master was subject to being punished

Copyright © Mark Kern 2007

¹ For further study on the implications of Old Testament slavery laws, see Gospel and Epistle for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost.

(Exodus 21:20-21). If the slave was injured in certain ways due to mistreatment, the slave may obtain his freedom (Exodus 21:26-27). If a slave owner gave his slave a wife, she still belonged to the slave owner (along with her children) even if her husband were freed (Exodus 21:4). The freed slave then had the option to redeem his wife and children (Leviticus 25:47-55) if he was able or to remain a slave of his master for life (Deuteronomy 15:16-17, Exodus 21:5-6).

While the Mosaic Law decreed these and other regulations, this doesn't mean they were always followed, especially when Israel was occupied by a foreign power (Babylon, Rome, etc.) or when Israel was apostate. For example, the Roman commander who rescued Paul from the Jewish mob (Acts 22:24) wanted to "examine Paul under scourging" (that is, to torture him until he got the answers he was looking for). This was a violation of Hebrew law and Roman law (Acts 22:25-29). In a time of apostasy, Elisha miraculously prevented the creditor of a prophet's widow from taking her two children into slavery (2 Kings 4:1). Special provisions were made under Mosaic Law for widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 24:19-21; 16:10-11) and a special third tithe was set-aside for them (Deuteronomy 14:29; 26:12). They were not to be opposed or neglected (Ezekiel 22:7, Malachi 3:5) as was done by the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day under the guise of legality (Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47).

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35

In the Western lectionary, today's Gospel lesson is also used at about this time in the Church year.

In the Eastern lectionary, the Sunday before Lent, called Forgiveness Sunday, has a similar theme as today. Forgiveness Sunday follows the Sunday of the Last Judgment and presents a more global perspective in preparation for Lent and a clean beginning leading up to Pascha. Today's theme of forgiveness is more a day-to-day viewpoint in response to Peter's question, "How many times shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?"

The setting of the Gospel lesson is autumn of 29 AD, where Jesus knew He would be crucified the following spring. Jesus had already sent the Twelve out two by two to heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead (Matthew 10:5-23). In a few weeks, He would send the Seventy out to do the same (Luke 10:1-24). In preparing His disciples for their role at the following Pentecost, Jesus focused in on things the Church will need to know. Therefore, leading up to our Gospel lesson Jesus describes:

- Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Answer: he who humbles himself as a little child (Matthew 18:1-6).
- The importance of finding lost sheep. The Twelve will need to do this next spring (Matthew 18:10-14).
- What do you do if a brother sins against you? When 3,000 people are added next Pentecost, living in close quarters with all things in common, this will need to be addressed! (Matthew 18:15-20).

Today's Gospel lesson goes into detail with regard to a brother sinning against another brother.

Our Debt – The Lord Forgives Us

Peter raised the issue and the theme of the day. “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” In a similar discussion, Jesus stated that if a brother sinned against you and came to ask forgiveness seven times per day, you must be ready to forgive him seven times per day (Luke 17:4). Peter may have thought that seven times per day was the limit. The Lord’s answer of up to 70 times 7 represents a sinning rate of once every two minutes figuring 16 waking hours to a day. John Chrysostom stated² that the Lord was not setting a limit here, but instructing His disciples to forgive an infinite number of times and perpetually and forever.

To illustrate the point, Jesus made an analogy where indebtedness equated to sin. One slave owed the king 10,000 talents³, which equates to 63 million denarii, (where one denarius was a day’s wage for a laborer). This is a staggering amount of wealth: 375 Tons of silver, or about eleven 18-wheelers each loaded to the legal weight limit with silver.

This was a debt that was impossible to pay off through just daily labor⁴. One might wonder just how the slave managed to accumulate this much debt. It couldn’t have been just an accidental bad investment, but it had to have been a concerted effort of abuse of his master’s funds over a long period of time. John Chrysostom referred⁵ to this slave as having “devoured all his master’s wealth” and having “eaten up the 10,000 talents”. The parable begins with the words, “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves” (Matthew 18:23). The slave in the parable was worse than the Prodigal Son in that he squandered far more wealth, and in that the wealth was not even his own. The slave’s master had every right to be furious with the slave’s behavior.

The slave did not want to be sold along with his wife and kids so he prostrated himself and begged for time. But even this is ludicrous! If he worked this debt off himself, working all day, six days per week, it would take him about 200,000 years, and the king knew it. But the king was moved with compassion and freed him from slavery and forgave him the entire debt.

If we equate the slave’s indebtedness to sin, Chrysostom compared⁶ our forgiveness for our brother to the Lord’s forgiveness for us in terms of a drop of water as compared to an endless sea.

Chrysostom noted⁷ that the king exhibited “surpassing benevolence”, in that he gave far more than the slave asked for.

“The slave asked only for a delay in the time of payment, but He gave more than he asked: remission and forgiveness of the entire debt. For it had been the king’s will to give it even from the first, but He desired that the gift extend to

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

³ 1 talent = 75 lb of silver, and 84 denari = 1 lb of silver.

⁴ If 4000 members of an extended family all worked six days a week at their own expense for 50 years, they could pay off this debt. Alternately, if the slave himself worked 200,000 years six days a week, and applied his entire earnings to the debt, he could pay it off. Both of these are impossible alternatives.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXX, 4.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 1.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 3-4.

others also. The king was “moved with compassion” at the slave’s entreaty and did not want him to go away uncrowned. He wished the slave, himself, to contribute something in order that he might not be covered with shame. By being schooled in his own calamities, the king wished that he might be more indulgent to his fellow slaves.”

“Up to this point then, the slave was good and acceptable: For he confessed, and promised to pay the debt, and fell down before him, and entreated, and condemned his own sins, and knew the greatness of the debt. But the sequel is unworthy of his former deeds”.

For us, the analogy is that we are slaves of sin – if we allow it. Jesus said, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not stay in the house forever; only a son does” (John 8:32-36). Peter wrote, “By whom a person is overcome, by that he is brought into bondage (2 Peter 2:19). If we are overcome by any of the things important to this world (e.g. sports, gossip, passions, TV, etc.), we need to beg the King to free us from our debt that we might have true freedom.

Other’s Sin – We Forgive Their Debt

The slave, who was forgiven and freed, turned right around and demanded payment from a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii (about 100 days’ wages). Note that the fellow slave prostrated himself and begged for time using the same words the first slave used in addressing the king. But the first slave did not have compassion but seized his fellow slave by the throat (Matthew 18:28) and had him thrown in debtors’ prison.

Chrysostom commented⁸ that the slave didn’t even recognize his own words coming from the mouth of his fellow slave.

“The wicked slave did not regard even the words by which he had been saved, for he himself on saying this was delivered from ten thousand talents. He did not recognize so much as the harbor by which he escaped shipwreck. The gesture of supplication did not remind him of his master’s kindness, but he put away from him all these things from covetousness, cruelty and revenge. He was more fierce than a wild beast, seizing his fellow slave by the throat”.

When the king found out what happened, he reneged on his pardon and delivered the first slave over to the torturers until all was paid. And following the revocation of the slave’s pardon, there would appear to be no sunset clause on his slavery. Chrysostom noted⁹ that “when the first slave owed 10,000 talents, his master did not call him wicked, nor reproach him but showed mercy on him. When he became harsh to his fellow slave, then his master said, ‘O you wicked slave’”.

For us, the analogy is that refusal to forgive others brings the Lord’s judgment down on our own heads. Chrysostom stated¹⁰ it this way:

“Let us listen, the covetous, for even to us the word is spoken. Let us listen also, the merciless and the cruel, for not to others are we cruel, but to

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 4.

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 4.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 4-5.

ourselves. When then you are minded to be revengeful, consider that against yourself are you revengeful, not against another; that you are collecting up your own sins, not your neighbor's. For as to you, whatever you may do to a man, you do as a man and in this present life. But God not so; more mightily will He take vengeance on you, and with the vengeance hereafter."

"For if we are willing, no one shall be able to injure us, but even our enemies shall benefit us in the greatest degree. And why do I speak of men? For what can be more wicked than the devil? Yet nevertheless, even now we have a great opportunity of approving ourselves; and Job showed it. But if the devil has become a cause of crowns, why are you afraid of a man as an enemy?"

While this relates directly to our forgiving others, by extension it also includes modeling our behavior such that we don't cause others to sin. In the chapter preceding the Epistle lesson, Paul cautions those who have more knowledge or liberty against causing a brother to stumble and wounding his weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:9-13). For more details of this, see the Epistle for Meat fare Sunday prior to Lent.

We are like the slave who owed his master a lot. In our Gospel lesson, a slave who owed his master almost 375 Tons of silver would not be regarded as a very profitable slave. And we owe our Lord a lot more than 375 Tons of silver for what He has done for us.

John Chrysostom put¹¹ our sin against God in a more practical light. "When a man looks at us, we back off and stop sinning; but when God sees us every day, we do not abstain, but we do and speak all things without fear. Not by this alone, but also because of the honor of which we have partaken, our sins become more serious. Our sins against Him really are 10,000 talents."

The Lord addressed our relationship to Him by saying that a slave is not expected to eat and drink before his master. Instead the slave prepares himself and serves his master until his master has finished eating. The master does not thank the slave for doing his job. Likewise us! When we have done all we've been commanded to do (no matter how great or small), we should still say that we are just unprofitable slaves, who just did what we ought to do (Luke 17:7-10).

We Are Measured by Our Own Standard

The Lord also said that with the same standard or measure we use, it would be measured back to us, whether judging, condemning or forgiving (Luke 6:37-38; compare also Luke 19:22-24). Therefore it behooves us to be merciful and forgiving always since we are essentially doing so to ourselves.

Gregory the Theologian stated¹² that we obtain our own forgiveness by extending forgiveness to our brothers.

"What is swifter than Mercy? The Disciples asked for the flames of Sodom upon those who drove Jesus away, but He forbid revenge. Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, one of those who outraged Him, but Jesus restored it. Peter

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 1.

¹² Gregory Nazianzen, Epistle 77.

also asked whether he must forgive a brother seven times who has offended him; is he not condemned for his stinginess, for to the seven is added seventy times seven? What of the debtor in the Gospel who will not forgive as he has been forgiven? Is it not more severely exacted of him for this? The pattern of prayer says that forgiveness may be earned by forgiveness.”

John Chrysostom stated¹³ that God has given us a way of repayment that is both ready and easy, and which is able to cancel all 10,000 talents that we owe. That is, simply don’t be revengeful.

Jesus had said, “With the same standards that you judge shall you be judged yourself; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:2). John Chrysostom noted¹⁴ that this means that if we condemn someone for some reason, we are setting that same standard of judgment for our own evaluation on Judgment Day. We are allowed to judge our brother, but the question that we should ask is whether we do so out of love and care for him.

“The beginnings of the forgiveness of our sins come from us. So also in this judgment, it is by ourselves that the standards of our condemnation are laid down. You see, we shouldn’t scold or trample on them, but admonish; not revile, but advise; not assault with pride, but correct with tenderness. For not him, but yourself, do you hand over to vengeance by not sparing him, when it may be necessary to correct his offences.”

“Do you see how these two commandments are both easy, and bring great blessings to the obedient, just as of evils on the other hand, bring the opposite to those who disregard? He that forgives his neighbor has freed himself first from the grounds of complaint, and that without any labor. In addition, he that with tenderness inquires into other men’s offenses has a great allowance of pardon laid up beforehand for himself by his judgment.

‘What then!’, you say, ‘if one commits fornication, am I forbidden to say that fornication is a bad thing, or correct him at all, who is playing the prodigal?’ No, correct him, but not as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician providing medicine. Christ did not say, ‘don’t stop him that is sinning’, but ‘don’t judge’; that is, don’t be bitter in pronouncing sentence.

Such judgment often comes not out of protecting care, but out of a hostile feeling toward man. When a man puts forward a mask of benevolence, he is doing a work of the utmost wickedness, causing rebukes without ground, accusations, dividing his neighbors, and usurping a teacher’s rank, when he is not worthy to be so much as a disciple.

The Lord doesn’t forbid judging, but commands us to clear the beam first from our eyes, and then to set right the doings of the rest of the world? For each person knows his own things better than those of others; and loves himself more than his neighbor. If you do it out of guardian care, I suggest you care for yourself first, in whose case the sin is both more certain and greater. But if you neglect yourself, it is quite obvious that neither do you judge your brother out of care for him, but in hatred, and wishing to expose him. If he ought to be judged, it should be by one who commits no such sin, not by someone who hates him.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 3.

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

Using the example of the unforgiving slave, John Chrysostom stated¹⁵ that we pass judgment on our own sins during our life in that we set the standard that will be used for our own judgment. By forgiving others liberally, we allow the Judge to do so to us also. Another example of this is the rich young synagogue ruler, who was unable to give up his wealth to come follow Jesus (i.e. as an Apostle). By showing love to our neighbor with our material possessions, we transfer the benefit of these possessions to the age to come

“Let us not carelessly pass by Christ’s words, but inquire closely into them all, everywhere considering the reason for what He said. Let us not say that ignorance and simplicity will be sufficient to excuse us, for He has asked us not merely to be ‘harmless’, but also ‘wise’ (Matthew 10:16). Let us therefore act towards our fellow-servants as we desire our Master to act towards us; for we say,’ “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors’ (Matthew 6:12). If we consider that by so doing, we do a kindness not to him who has wronged us but to ourselves, we shall soon let go the venom of our wrath. For he who didn’t forgive the hundred denarii to him who owed him, didn’t wrong his fellow-slave but himself, by rendering himself liable for the ten thousand talents, which he had been forgiven (Matthew 18:30-34). Therefore when we don’t forgive others, we don’t forgive ourselves. So let us not merely say to God, ‘remember not our offenses’; but let each also say to himself, ‘let us not remember the offenses of our fellow-servants done against us’”.

“You first pass judgment on your own sins, and God judges later; you propose the law concerning remission and punishment, you declare your decision on these matters, and therefore whether God shall or shall not remember, rests with you. Because of this Paul asks us, ‘forgive, if anyone has cause of complaint against any’ (Colossians 3:13), and not simply forgive, but so that not even any remnants are left behind. Christ not only did not publish our transgressions, but also did not remind us, the transgressors, of them, but also forgave and blotted out the handwriting, not remembering our offenses (Colossians 2:14). Let us do this also; let us wipe away all trespasses against us from our minds; and if any good thing has been done to us by him that has offended us, let us only remember that; but if there is anything hard to bear, let us blot it out, so that not even a trace of it remains. And if he has done no good to us, so much the greater recompense will be ours if we forgive. Others by night watching, by sleeping on the ground, by many hardships, wipe away their sins; but you do it by an easier way; by not remembering wrongs, you may cause all your trespasses to disappear.”

“Hear the Judge Himself conversing with a certain young man on this matter. 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. Perhaps others today will say, ‘that we also have kept these, we have neither robbed, killed or committed adultery’. Yet they will not be able to say that they have loved their neighbor, as they ought to have loved him. For if a man has envied or spoken evil of another, if he has not helped him when injured, or given alms for his benefit, then neither has he loved him. Christ has commanded not only this, but also, ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor;

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXIX, 4.

and come, follow Me' (Matthew 19:21), terming the imitating Him in our actions 'following' Him."

"What do we learn from this? First we learn that he who is not able to leave behind all these things cannot achieve the chief places in 'that' rest. For after the young man had said, 'All these things I have done', Christ, as though some great thing were lacking to his being perfectly approved, replied, 'If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me'. Second we learn that Christ rebuked the man for his vain boast. One who lived in such abundance, and didn't see others living in poverty, how could he love his neighbor? In this matter he didn't speak the truth, since he hadn't done all these things. But let us do these things; let us be eager to empty our substance, and to purchase heaven."

"If a man were being led to death, and it were proposed to him to give up all his goods in order to go free, we would think a favor was conferred upon him. Shall we, who are being led to the pit, when it is allowed us to give up half our goods and be free, prefer to be punished, and uselessly to retain what is not ours, even to the losing of what is ours? What excuse shall we have, what claim for pardon, when so easy a road has been cut for us leading to 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 at least stop now, and come to ourselves; let us rightly dispose of things present, that we may easily receive those which are to come."

Chrysostom also noted¹⁶ that Christ died for us when we were enemies of God. If we love as He did, we should be willing to do the same. We can show this love for our brother, not like the slave who couldn't forgive a hundred denarii, but by freely giving our goods to those in need.

"What love did Christ show for us? He shed His precious Blood for us at a time when we were enemies, and had done the greatest wrong to Him. We should do this also in our brother's case. This is what He means when He says, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you so love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34). If it was in behalf of His enemies that He did this, are you unwilling to shed your blood for your brother? Why do you disobey the commandment, even reversing it, trying to shed your brother's blood? What Christ did was not something that was due to us; whatever we do in response to Him, we are only fulfilling a debt. He who, after receiving forgiveness for the ten thousand talents, demanded the hundred denarii, was punished not merely for the fact that he demanded them, but because even by the kindness done to him he had not become any better. He did not even follow where his Lord had begun, or forgive the debt. For on the part of the slave, the thing done was but a debt after all. All things that we do are towards the payment of a debt. This is why He said, 'When ye have done everything, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do' (Luke 17:10). If then we show love, if we give our goods to those that need, we are fulfilling a debt. This is true not only in that it was He who first began the acts of goodness, but also because it is His goods that we are distributing if we give. Why then deprive yourself of what He wants you

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, v. 31.

to have the right to? The reason why He asked you give them to another was so that you might have them yourself. So long as you have them for yourself, you yourself do not have them. But when you have given them to another, then you have received them yourself.”

Chrysostom further noted¹⁷ that “The gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable” (Romans 11:29), but wickedness has had such power so as to set aside even this law. What then can be a more grievous thing than to be revengeful, when it appears to overthrow such a great gift of God?

Chrysostom also noted¹⁸ that loving our enemies causes us to be an object of veneration to him. He will marvel at us! If our enemy injures us, we might mourn for him, just as Christ mourned for those who crucified Him. After all, we haven’t offended God, but they have!

“By loving your enemies instead of taking revenge on them, you will be an object of veneration even to your enemies, even though they are demons; or rather, you will not even have an enemy while you are of such a disposition.”

“And what is greater than all, you gain the favor of God. Should you have sinned, you will obtain pardon; should you have done what is right, you will obtain a greater confidence. Let us therefore hate no one, that God also may love us. Though we are in debt for 10,000 talents, He may have compassion and pity us. Have you been injured by your enemy? Pity him then, do not hate him; weep and mourn, do not turn away from him. For you are not the one that has offended God, he has; but you have approved yourself, if you endure it. Consider that Christ, when about to be crucified, rejoiced for Himself, but wept for them that were crucifying Him. This ought to be our disposition also; and the more we are injured, so much the more should we lament for them that are injuring us. Many are the benefits arising to us from this, but to our enemies the opposites.”

What Really Makes God Angry

We note that the master of the unforgiving slave was very angry when he found out that the slave that he had forgiven a huge debt turned around and immediately had a fellow slave thrown in debtor’s prison.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁹ that nothing so angers God as when we are unmerciful and forgetful of His mercy to us. Showing mercy comes from love and goodness.

“Why did God, being alone, create so many human beings? Was it not through goodness; was it not through love to men? If you ask why such and such things are, you will always find your answer in Goodness. Let us show mercy to our neighbors, that mercy may be shown to us. These acts of mercy that we show not so much benefit the recipients, as they lay up for ourselves benefits against That Day. When the flame of the fire is great, this oil of mercy quenches the fire, and brings light to us. By this means we shall be freed from the fire of hell. Why will Christ be compassionate and show mercy? Mercy comes of love! Nothing incenses God so much as to be pitiless. ‘A man was brought to him who owed

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 4.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 5.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, IV, v. 30.

him 10,000 talents, and he was moved with compassion, and forgave him. This same man was owed by his fellow-slave a hundred denarii and he caught him by the throat. Therefore the Lord delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay what was due'. Let us on hearing this be merciful to those who are our debtors in money or in sins. Let no one remember evils; that is, if he does not want to injure himself; for he does not hurt the other as much as he injures himself."

Chrysostom spoke²⁰ of covetous men as acting like greedy dogs, swallowing everything and never satisfied. They don't see men as men or heaven as heaven. Seeing the struggles of the poor, like a wild beast, they only see a profit to be made, and have no thought of relieving poverty. Real men are humane and full of mercy and loving-kindness. Such covetous behavior imitates demons and makes God really angry.

"When a man does anything cruel or savage, inhuman is the title we give to such a person. The characteristic of man as we portray him is his showing mercy; of a beast, the contrary; according to the saying, 'What *is* your servant -- a dog, that he should do this gross²¹ thing?' (2 Kings 8:13) For men relieve poverty; they do not aggravate it."

"But were one to search out the mind of that sort of people, he would no longer call them beasts only, but demons. For first, they are full of great cruelty and of hatred against their 'fellow-slave' (Matthew 18:33). Neither is love of the kingdom of God there; there is no fear of hell, no reverence for men, no pity, but shamelessness, audacity, and contempt of all things to come. To them the words of God concerning punishment seem to be a fable, and His threats laughter. Such is the mind of the covetous man. Inside they are demons, and to others they are wild beasts. Let us then become men at last, and let us look up to heaven; that which is according to His image, (Colossians 3:10), let us receive and recover, that we may obtain the blessings to come."

Chrysostom also pointed out²² that it is necessary to be forgiving to everyone, not just to important people. As the Lord had said, 'With what measure you use, it shall be measured back to you' (Matthew 7:2). Sometimes we act differently to a master, like a landlord or supervisor, than we do to a fellow tenant or fellow employee. To God, however, everyone is a slave, and He is not a respecter of persons.

"Never threaten anyone or irritate them or be oppressive. Know that both their Master and yours are in Heaven. He hints at how mighty a Master we have when He says, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt'" (Matthew 18:32).

"Think not, some people may say, that because something is done towards a slave, He will therefore forgive, because it was done to a slave. Heathen laws, as being the laws of men, recognize a difference between these kinds of offenses. But the law of the common Lord and Master of all, as doing good to all alike, and dispensing the same rights to all, knows no such difference. But should anyone ask, where does slavery come from, and why has it found entrance into human

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IX, 9-10.

²¹ This was the response of Hazael, the servant of King Ben-hadad of Aram to Elisha. Elisha had predicted that Hazael would become king in place of Ben-hadad, and that as king, he would slaughter Israel, including children and pregnant women. Elijah had anointed Hazael as king of Aram before Elijah was taken up (1 Kings 19:15).

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, v. 9.

life? Many I know are both glad to ask such questions, and desirous to be informed of them. Slavery is the fruit of covetousness, of degradation, of savagery. Noah, we know, had no slave, nor had Abel, nor Seth, nor those who came after them. The thing was the fruit of sin, of rebellion against parents. Let children listen to this, that whenever they are undutiful to their parents, they deserve to be slaves. Such a child strips himself of his nobility of birth; for he who rebels against his father is no longer a son; and if he who rebels against his father is not a son, how shall he be a son who rebels against our true Father? He has departed from his nobility of birth; he has done outrage to nature. From this come wars, battles, and the taking of prisoners. Well, but Abraham, you will say, had servants. Yes, but he didn't use them as servants²³."

Not Remembering Evil Done to Us

In forgiving others who have offended us, we should avoid even remembering the evil done to us by others. In doing so, we treat others as God treats us in that He does not remember the sins of our past (Hebrews 10:17, Jeremiah 31:34).

John Chrysostom used²⁴ the example of the life of the Patriarch Joseph to teach us how to not remember evil done to us by others, and how God rewards us for doing so. Joseph's brothers acted worse than murderers to him, yet he did not remember it as evil, but as a dispensation from God to preserve them from famine. This is a striking contrast to the slave who had been forgiven 10,000 talents, yet demanded payment of 100 denarii from a fellow slave.

"Let us teach you from the example of servants, and to make the lesson stronger, from those in the Old Testament, that you may know that we have no ground of defense when we remember a wrong. The more ancient the instances that can be pointed out, the more we are surprised, because virtue was then more difficult. Those men had no written precepts (like the Mosaic Law), no patterns of living, but their nature fought, unarmed, by itself, and was forced to float like a ship in all directions with no ballast to keep it upright. When praising Noah, God called him not simply perfect, but added, 'in his generation' (Genesis 7:1); signifying, 'at that time', when there were many hindrances. Many others shone after him, yet he will have nothing less than they; for in his own time he was perfect. Who then before Moses was patient? The blessed and noble Joseph, who having shone by his chastity, shone no less by his long suffering. He was sold by his brothers, when he had done no wrong, but was waiting on them, and performing all the duties of domestics. They brought against him an evil accusation, and he did not defend himself, though he had his father on his side. He even went to carry food to them in the desert, and when he didn't find them, he did not turn back, even though he had an excuse for doing so (Genesis 37:12-17), but remained near the wild beasts and those savage men, preserving the feeling of a true brother."

"Again, when he was thrown in prison, and was asked the cause, he spoke no evil of his brothers, but only, 'I have done nothing wrong', and, 'I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews' (Genesis 40:15). After this, when he was

²³ That is, Eliezer of Damascus was Abraham's heir (Genesis 15:2) until the birth of Isaac. Thus Abraham treated his servants as part of his family.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXI, 3.

made Lord of Egypt, he nourished his brothers, and delivered them from ten thousand dangers. If we are sober, the wickedness of our neighbor is not strong enough to expel us from our own virtue. But his brothers were not like him; they stripped him, wanted to kill him, and criticized him for his dream. Though they had just received their food from him, they planned to deprive him of life and liberty. They ate his food, but didn't care for their brother, lying naked in the pit. What could be worse than such brutality? Were they not worse than any number of murderers? After this, having drawn him out of the pit, they gave him over to ten thousand deaths, selling him to barbarian and savage men, who were on their journey to barbarians (Genesis 37:18-36). Yet when he became ruler, he not only forgave them their punishment, but also even acquitted them for their sin against him, calling what had been done a dispensation of God, not any wickedness of theirs (Genesis 45:3-8). The things which he did against them (Genesis 42-44), he did not because he remembered their evil, but he was concealing himself, for his brother Benjamin's sake."

"After this, when he saw them clinging to him, he immediately threw away the mask, wept out loud, and embraced them, as though he had received the greatest benefits (Genesis 45:1-4). He, who formerly was sold by them, brought them all down into Egypt, and repaid them with ten thousand benefits. What excuse then shall we have, if after the Law, after grace, and after the addition of so much heavenly wisdom, we do not strive to rival him who lived before grace and before the Law? Who shall deliver us from punishment? For there is nothing, there is nothing worse than the remembrance of injuries. This the man has showed that owed the 10,000 talents, from whom payment was at one time not demanded, at another time again demanded. It was not demanded, because of the loving-kindness of God; but demanded again, because of his own wickedness, and because of his malice toward his fellow-slave. Knowing all these things, let us forgive our neighbors their trespasses, and repay them by deeds of an opposite kind, that we too may obtain mercy from God."

Ambrose of Milan stated²⁵ that we have changed creditors at our baptism. At one time we were under a hard creditor, the devil, who was only satisfied with our death. Now we are free, and we are creditors to others (i.e. others need forgiveness from us). If we refuse to treat our debtors as the Lord treated us, we bring our previous debt back down on our own head. In all this, we need to remember that we are more acceptable to God the more we forgive.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ judged that men could more readily be led to do the things that are right by kindness than by fear. When He came, He sent forth His grace that sin might be forgiven in baptism in order to make us more grateful to Himself. Then if we repay Him by services befitting men who are grateful, He has declared that there will be a reward for this grace to all men. If He had forgiven only our original debt, He would have seemed more cautious than merciful, and more careful for our correction than magnificent in His rewards. It is the cunning of a narrow mind that tries to entice, but it is fitting for God that He should lead on those He has invited by increase of that grace. So He first grants on us a gift by baptism, and afterwards gives more abundantly to those who serve

²⁵ Ambrose of Milan, Letters, XLI, 6-9.

Him faithfully. So, then, the benefits of Christ are both incentives and rewards of virtue.”

“Let no one be startled at the word ‘creditor’ (Luke 7:41). We were before under a hard creditor, who was only satisfied by our death. The Lord Jesus saw us bound by a heavy debt; no one could pay his debt with his innocence; I had nothing of my own by which to free myself. He acquitted me in a new way, changing my creditor, because I had nothing by which to pay my debt. But it was sin, not nature, which had made us debtors, for we had contracted heavy debts by our sins. We who had been free were bound, for he is a debtor, who received any of his creditor’s money. Now sin is of the devil; these riches were in his possession. Just as the riches of Christ are virtues, so crimes are the wealth of the devil. He had reduced the human race to perpetual captivity by the heavy debt of inherited liability, which our debt-laden ancestor had transmitted to his posterity by inheritance. The Lord Jesus came; He offered His death for the death of all; He poured out His Blood for the blood of all.”

“We have then changed our creditor, not escaped wholly, or rather we have escaped, for the debt remains but the interest is canceled; for the Lord Jesus said, ‘To those who are in bonds, Come out, and to those who are in prison, Go out’ (Isaiah 49:9); so your sins are forgiven. All are forgiven; there is no one whom He has not loosed. He has forgiven ‘all transgressions, doing away the handwriting of the ordinance that was against us’ (Colossians 2:14). Why, then, do we hold others bound, and desire to exact the debts of others, while we enjoy our own remission? He, who forgave all, required of us that everything that we remember that was forgiven to us; we should also forgive others.”

“Take care that you do not begin to be in a worse case as creditor than as debtor, like the man in the Gospel, to whom his Lord forgave all his debt, and who afterwards began to exact from his fellow-slave that, which he himself had not paid (Matthew 18:24-30). For which reason his master was angry, criticized him bitterly, and retracted what he had before forgiven him. Let us, therefore, pay attention lest this happen to us, that by not forgiving that which others owe us, we should incur the payment of what has been forgiven us. Thus is it written in the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother’ (Matthew 18:35). Let us, then, forgive few things since we have been forgiven many; let us understand that the more we forgive the more acceptable shall we be to God; for we are the more well pleasing to God, the more we have been forgiven.”

Thankfulness is the Key to Receiving Mercy

The bottom line for the unforgiving slave is that he was ungrateful for his master’s forgiveness and self-centered on his own profit. We may not owe anyone 375 Tons of silver, but we need to guard our hearts that we are grateful to the Lord for what He has given us.

Athanasius of Alexandria compared²⁶ the unforgiving slave to those who are unthankful at Pascha and to the slave who hid his one talent in the ground. All these neglect and hide the grace of God that has been given to them.

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Paschal Letters, III, 2 (for Pascha 331 AD).

“The Paschal Feast is the service of the soul, and is prolonged prayer to God, and unceasing thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17). The unthankful, departing far from the Feast, are rightly deprived of the joy that springs from it; for ‘joy and gladness are taken from their mouth’ (Jeremiah 7:28, 34). Therefore, the Divine word does not allow them to have peace; ‘for there is no peace to the wicked, says the Lord’ (Isaiah 48:22); they labor in pain and grief. So, not even to him who owed 10,000 talents did the Gospel grant forgiveness in the sight of the Lord (Matthew 18:24). Having received forgiveness of great things, he was forgetful of kindness in little ones, so that he paid the penalty also of those former things. And justly so, for having himself experienced kindness, he was required to be merciful to his fellow slave. He too that received the one talent, and bound it up in a napkin, and hid it in the earth, was consequently thrown out for ungratefulness, hearing the words, ‘You wicked and slothful slave! You knew that I reap where I didn’t sow, and gather where I have not sown; you ought therefore have put my money in the bank, and on my return, I should have received my own with interest. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents’ (Matthew 25:28). When he was required to deliver up to his Lord that which belonged to him, he should have acknowledged the kindness of him who gave it, and the value of that which was given. For he who gave was not a hard man; had he been so, he would not have given in the first place. That which was given was profitable and useful, and the master rightly found fault for not using it. Both he who gave was good, and that which was given was capable of bearing fruit. As therefore ‘he who withholds grain at seed-time is cursed’ (Proverbs 11:26), according to the divine proverb, so he who neglects grace, and hides it without using it, is properly thrown out as a wicked and unthankful person. On this account, he praises those who increased their talents, saying, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you have been faithful in a little, I will place you over much; enter into the joy of your Lord’” (Matthew 25:23).

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁷ that mercy may be available, but it seeks out those who are worthy to receive it.

“On him that owed the 10,000 talents He had mercy after he fell at His feet; (Matthew 18:24, 27), although it is written, that ‘being moved with compassion, He freed him from the debt’. Again to the ‘woman of Canaan’, it was after that long discussion of hers, (Matthew 15:22) that He finally granted the healing of her daughter, where He healed her through His mercy. We learn from this that even though we are to receive mercy, we must first make ourselves worthy of the mercy; for though there may be mercy available, yet it seeks out those that are worthy. It will not come upon all without distinction, especially those who have no feeling; for He says, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’” (Romans 9:15).

Praying Against Our Enemies

Many Christians pray to God against their enemies, using such words as, “Avenge me on my enemies; show them that I too have God on my side”. Much of this mistaken prayer may

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, II, 5.

come from a misunderstanding of some of the Psalms²⁸. Many of the Psalms must be understood as directed against demons and not other men. These Psalms may appear to be addressed to men, but there is a very sinister influence behind them. For example:

“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become good for nothing, and there is none that does good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Psalm 14:3).

The significance of this is that the Psalmist would be teaching us to hate our enemies, which is blasphemy, if the Psalms are all about men. While we are instructed to love our enemies, we are not instructed to love the demons, since they have already been condemned. John Cassian addressed²⁹ this demonic undertone as follows:

“As it is said, ‘His sorrow shall be turned on his own head’ (Psalm 7:16 LXX); and again, ‘Let the snare which he knows not come upon him, and let the net which he has hidden catch him, and into that same snare let him fall’ (Psalm 35:8 LXX); that is, that which he contrived for the deception of men.

“And so when we read or chant all these Psalms, unless we take them as written against that spiritual wickedness, which lies in wait for us night and day, we shall not only fail to draw any edification from them to make us gentle and patient, but shall actually meet with some dreadful consequence, that is quite contrary to evangelical perfection. We shall be taught to avoid praying for or loving our enemies; we shall be stirred up to hate them, to curse them and to pour out prayers against them. And it is terribly wrong and blasphemous to think that these words might be uttered in such a spirit by holy men and friends of God.”

John Chrysostom was very embarrassed³⁰ at people praying against their enemies. This is like attacking our enemy in the King’s presence during a peace conference. By doing this, we become worse than the slave who wouldn’t forgive the hundred denarii. When we pray, we should remember our own sins and not those of others.

“We have God when we are gentle, meek, subdued, and practice love of wisdom. God said, ‘Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in the heavens’ (Matthew 5:16). It is an insult to God to make a request to God against our enemies. He Himself said, ‘pray for your enemies’ (Matthew 5:44). When you claim that the legislator should relax his own laws; when you call on him to legislate in opposition to Himself; when you ask Him, who had forbidden you to pray against your enemies, to listen to you now praying against your enemies; you are not praying in doing this, nor calling upon Him. You are insulting the lawgiver, and acting like a violent drunk towards Him, who is sure to give to you the good things, which result from prayer. How is it possible to be heard when praying, when you infuriate him who is listening? For by doing these things you are pushing your own salvation into a pit, and are rushing down a precipice, by striking your enemy before the King’s eyes. For even if you don’t do this with the hands, with your

²⁸ See for example Psalm 18:37-40, 54:5-7, 59:10. See also Romans 12:19.

²⁹ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 20-21.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Against Publishing the Errors of the Brethren, 11-12.

words you strike him, a thing which you don't dare do even in the case of your fellow-slaves. If you dare to do this in a ruler's presence, though you have done countless public services, you will immediately be led away to execution³¹. In the presence of a ruler you don't dare to insult your equal, but when doing this in God's presence, do you not fear when, in the time of entreaty and prayer, you display greater lack of feeling than he who demanded payment of the hundred denarii? (Matthew 18:28) You are more insolent than he was, according to the story. A certain man owed 10,000 talents to his master; then, not having the means to pay, he begged him to be patient, in order that he might settle his master's claim without his wife, his house and his children being sold. And the master seeing him lamenting had compassion on him, and forgave the 10,000 talents. As he went out he found another slave owing him a hundred denarii; seizing him by his throat, he demanded payment with great cruelty and inhumanity. The Master having heard this threw him into the prison, and laid on him again the debt of the 10,000 talents, which he had before forgiven; and he paid the penalty of the cruelty shown towards his fellow-slave."

"Consider how much more insensible you have acted than he, praying against your enemies. The slave did not beg his master to demand the hundred denarii, but he himself demanded; whereas you even call on the Master for this shameless and forbidden demand. He seized his fellow-slave's throat not before his lord's eyes, but outside; while you in the very moment of prayer, standing in the King's presence, do this. For doing this, the slave met with no forgiveness; but you, stirring up the Master to exact this forbidden payment, and doing this before his eyes, what sort of penalty will you have to pay? But your mind is inflamed by the memory of the enmity, and you are unable to reduce the swelling of your thought. But set against this inflammation the memory resulting from your own sins and the fear of the punishment to come. Recall how many things you are accountable for to your master, and that for all those things you owe Him satisfaction; this fear will surely overcome that anger, since indeed this is far more powerful than that passion. Recall the memory of hell, punishment and vengeance during the time of your prayer; and you will not be able to even think about your enemy. Make your mind contrite; humble your soul by the memory of your offenses, and wrath will not be able to trouble you. The cause of all these evils is this: we scrutinize the sins of others with great exactitude, while we let our own pass with great carelessness. We ought to do the contrary — to keep our own faults in mind, but never to admit a thought of those of others. If we do this we shall both have God kindly disposed, and shall cease cherishing anger against our neighbors, and we shall never have anyone as an enemy. Even if we should have at any time, we shall both quickly put an end to his enmity, and obtain speedy pardon for our own sins. He who treasures up the memory of wrong against his neighbor does not permit the punishment of his own sins to be done away. Similarly he who is clear of anger will speedily be clear of sins also. Wicked as we are and enslaved to passion, if we overlook all the faults committed against us, much more will He, who is a lover of mankind, good, and free from any passion, overlook our delinquencies. He will render to us the recompense of our kindly spirit towards our neighbor in the forgiveness of our own sins."

³¹ In Chrysostom's day, striking anyone within the "precincts of the court" was made a capital offense.

Chrysostom also stated³² that revenge is so great an evil that it revokes the mercy of God and cancels forgiveness. If a man can avoid injuring himself by seeking revenge, no one can harm him. Wealth can lead us into sin of this kind as we seek to acquire, protect and enjoy our possessions. Chrysostom used the example of Lazarus lying at the rich man's gate as an example of how wealth can lead us to ignore our fellow man.

“Do you wish to take vengeance on those who have annoyed you? This is a good reason why wealth ought especially to be avoided. It prepares you to thrust the sword against yourself; it renders you liable to a heavier account in the future day of reckoning; and makes your punishment intolerable. For revenge is so great an evil that it actually revokes the mercy of God, and cancels the forgiveness of countless sins. He who received remission of the debt of 10,000 talents, after having obtained so great a gift by merely asking for it, then demanded 100 denarii from his fellow slave. His demand for satisfaction in his severity towards his fellow slave recorded his own condemnation. For just this reason he was delivered to the tormentors, and racked, and required to pay back the 10,000 talents. He was not allowed the benefit of any excuse or defense, but suffered the most extreme penalty, having been commanded to deposit the whole debt which the loving kindness of God had formerly forgiven” (Matthew 18:23-35).

“Do you pursue wealth for this reason, because it so easily conducts you into sin of this kind? This is why you ought to abhor it as an enemy accompanied by countless murders. Someone will say that poverty inclines men to be discontented and often to utter profane words, and condescend to being nasty. It is not poverty, which does this, but littleness of soul. Lazarus also was poor, very poor; and besides poverty he suffered from disease, which makes poverty more bitter and more severely felt. In addition there was a total absence of protectors, and difficulty in finding any to supply his needs, which increased the bitterness of poverty and disease. Each of these things is painful in itself, but when there are none to help, the suffering becomes greater, the flame more painful, the distress more bitter, the tempest fiercer, the waves stronger, the furnace hotter. If one examines the case thoroughly, there was yet a fourth trial besides these: the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who lived nearby. If you would find a fifth thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that Lazarus was bothered by it. Not only was that rich man living luxuriously, but several times in the day he saw the poor man, for Lazarus had been laid at his gate, a spectacle of pity, where the sight of him was sufficient to soften even a heart of stone. Yet this did not induce that unmerciful man to assist this case of poverty, but he had his luxurious table spread, goblets wreathed with flowers, pure wine poured plentifully, a grand army of cooks, parasites and flatterers from early dawn, and troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters. He spent his whole day in devising every species of dissipation, and drunkenness, in reveling in dress and feasting. But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by severe hunger and the oppression of his many sores, he never even gave him a thought. Yet the parasites and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their need; but the poor man, was not even granted the crumbs, which fell from that table, although he

³² John Chrysostom, A Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, 10.

greatly desired them. Yet none of these things injured Lazarus; he did not give vent to a bitter word; he did not utter profane speech; but like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by excessive heat, he was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which is produced by them. If poor men, when they see rich men, are consumed with envy and deem life not worth living, and this even when they are well supplied with necessary food and people to help, what would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble hearted? He lay in the midst of the city as if in a remote desert, and wasted away with hunger, and saw all good things being poured upon the rich man as out of a fountain. He didn't have the benefit of any human consolation, but lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of the dogs, for he was so feeble and broken down in body that he could not scare them away. Do you perceive that he who does not injure himself suffers no evil?"

SUPPORTING THE CLERGY

August 8, 2010
11th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision F

Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12

Today's Epistle lesson is not used at all in the Western Sunday lectionary. The theme of the Epistle lesson is that the people who work in the things of the Lord have a right to be supported by the people they serve. This has extensive precedent in the Mosaic Law. Under Mosaic Law, the priests and Levites had no land for their inheritance (Numbers 18:20). The other tribes had defined land and boundaries for their inheritance, which reverted back to their families even if it was sold (Leviticus 25:13-28). To provide for the priests and Levites, the Lord provided cities for them, where they and their families might live, and where each of the other tribes donated cities for their use (Joshua 21:13-19, Numbers 35:2-5). The borders of the priestly cities extended 2000 cubits outward for pastureland. This 2000 cubits later came to be known as "a Sabbath's day journey", since there were also Mosaic Law limits on travel (Exodus 16:29) during the Sabbath rest.

To prevent the priests and Levites from degenerating into a pauper caste, the Lord established an income for them from the services they performed. The source of income for the priests and Levites came from:

- The entire first tithe (Numbers 18:20-21).
- Part of the third tithe every three years (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13), which was split between the widows, orphans, strangers and Levites.
- Redemption money (Numbers 18:15-17) where every first born of men and unclean animals were redeemed.
- All offerings offered to the Lord, whether meat, grain, oil or fruit (Numbers 18:8-13).
- A portion of the spoils of war (Numbers 31:26-29; 47).

To bring this concept home to the Corinthians, Paul pointed out other similar illustrations from the world around them:

- No one goes to war at his own expense. The people a soldier is fighting for pay him good wages (1 Corinthians 9:7).
- People who plant and tend a vineyard get to eat of the fruit – even if they don't own the vineyard (1 Corinthians 9:7).
- Shepherds who tend a flock drink of the milk produced by the animals (1 Corinthians 9:7).
- From the Mosaic Law: "You shall not muzzle an ox while he is treading out the grain" (1 Corinthians 9:9; Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Timothy 5:18).
- Those who work hard at plowing or threshing should be the first to partake of the crops (1 Corinthians 9:10; 2 Timothy 2:6).
- Those who work with the holy things in the Temple eat of the things from the altar (1 Corinthians 9:13).

Copyright © Mark Kern 2007

Muzzling the Ox While He Threshes

1st Century agricultural practices used oxen to thresh grain. After grain was harvested, it was brought to a “threshing floor”, which was a large flat surface, and piled about one cubit (18 inches) high. A team of oxen was then yoked together and the yoke attached to vertical pole in the center of the floor. The oxen dragged a heavy sledge in circles over the grain to separate the grains from the stalks. As the oxen worked, the grain settled to the floor, but the stalks were eventually blown away by the wind. The oxen were not muzzled, but were allowed to eat the stalks of grain that they were threshing.

Clement of Alexandria cited³³ many requirements in the Mosaic Law for being humane to all of God’s creatures. This has been so pervasive a command in the Law that some of the Gentile nations adopted it as part of their own laws. This same humaneness in the Law is applied to those who work in the Church, comparing them to the ox, who works hard to thresh grain or grind flour, and who is given the privilege of eating of the grain he is threshing. Thus humaneness, according to the Mosaic Law, states that those, who work in the Church, should be supported in their physical needs; on this point, Old and New Testament present a strong, consistent witness.

“The Law, which leads us to Christ, is humane and mild. The same good God, while characterized by righteousness from the beginning to the end, employs different methods in order to lead us to salvation. ‘Be merciful’, says the Lord³⁴, ‘that you may receive mercy; forgive, that you may be forgiven. As you do, so shall it be done to you; as you give, so shall it be given to you; as you judge, so shall you be judged; as you show kindness, so shall kindness be shown to you; with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you’. Furthermore, the Law prohibits servants from being branded with disgrace; and to those, who have been reduced to slavery, through money borrowed, it gives a complete release in the seventh year” (Leviticus 25:39-55, Deuteronomy 15:1-9).

“Pythagoras seems to me, to have derived his mildness towards irrational creatures from the Law. For instance, he forbids the immediate use of the young in the flocks, on the instant of their birth, not even for sacrifice, training man to gentleness by means of the irrational creatures beneath him. ‘Resign’, he says, ‘the young one to its mother for the first seven days’. For if nothing takes place without a cause, and milk comes in a shower to animals after birth giving for the sustenance of the young, he that tears the young away from the supply of the milk, dishonors nature. If the Mosaic Law prohibits the young of the irrational creatures from being separated from the mother before nursing, much more in the case of men does it provide a cure for cruelty and savagery.

“What cause is there for the murder of a newborn child? For the man who did not desire to have children had no right to marry in the first place; certainly not to have become, through licentious indulgence, the murderer of his children. The Romans, in the case of a pregnant woman condemned to death, do not allow her to undergo punishment till she has delivered. The Law too, expressly prohibits the slaying of such animals as are pregnant till they have delivered,

³³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II, 18.

³⁴ See Matthew 5:7, 6:12, 7:1, 11; Luke 6:35-37.

remotely restraining the proneness of man to do wrong to man. It has extended its clemency to the irrational creatures; that we might practice abundant humanity in the case of creatures of different species. The same Law commands ‘not to muzzle the ox which treads out the grain; for the laborer must be reckoned worthy of his food’” (Deuteronomy 25:4, 1 Timothy 5:18).

“The Law also prohibits an ox and a donkey from being yoked in the plow together (Deuteronomy 22:10); pointing to the lack of agreement of strength³⁵ in the case of the animals; at the same time, it teaches us not to wrong anyone belonging to another race. To me the allegory also seems to signify that the business of the Word is not to be assigned equally to the clean and the unclean, the believer and the unbeliever; for the ox is clean, but the donkey has been reckoned among the unclean animals. The Word, abounding in humanity, teaches that neither is it right to cut down cultivated trees, or to cut down the grain before the harvest; cultivated fruit is not to be destroyed at all, either the fruit of the soil or that of the soul; for it does not permit the enemy’s country to be devastated.”

“Growers take advantage of the Law in such things. For it orders newly planted trees to be nourished for three years, and suckers to be cut off, to prevent things that hinder its growth. The Law does not allow imperfect fruit to be plucked from immature trees, but only in the fourth year, where the first-fruits are dedicated to God after the tree has attained maturity.”

“This agricultural practice may serve as a mode of instruction, teaching that we must cut the growth of sins and the useless weeds of the mind, that spring up around the vital fruit, till the shoot of faith is perfected and becomes strong. In the fourth year, since he that is being solidly catechized needs time, the four virtues are consecrated to God.”

Tertullian stated³⁶ that the references to oxen are speaking about men, making provision for them. But Paul declined to take advantage of this provision in the Law.

Paul says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain’, and adds: ‘Is it oxen God is concerned about? Yes, for the sake of men!’ For, he says, ‘it is written for our sakes’ (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). Thus he showed that the Law had a symbolic reference to ourselves, and that it addresses those who live off the Gospel. He showed also, that those who preach the Gospel are on this account sent by no other God than Him to whom belongs the Law. He made provision for them, when he says, ‘For our sakes this was written’. Still Paul declined to use this power, which the Law gave him, because he preferred working³⁷ without any restraint.

John Chrysostom stated³⁸ that Christ used the care of animals and agriculture as an illustration of how He cares for us.

“Whatever is said by the Old Testament about the care of animals, in its principal meaning, bears on the instruction of human beings. Similarly all the rest

³⁵ That is, an ox can pull a much heavier weight than a donkey. Yoking them together requires the donkey to pull with equal strength as an ox, which is cruelty to animals.

³⁶ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 5, 7.

³⁷ That is, Paul worked at his tent-making trade so as to avoid burdening the Churches with supporting him in his preaching.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XXI, 5.

of the precepts, concerning various clothing, those concerning vineyards and seeds, avoiding the ground bear different crops, and those precepts concerning leprosy. They were not really bright; He was speaking to them using these topics, advancing them little by little.”

“In what follows he does not even bother confirming it, as being clear and self-evident. For having said, ‘is it oxen God is concerned about?’ he added, ‘Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes?’ (1 Corinthians 9:9-10) He added the ‘altogether’ that he might not leave the hearer anything whatever to reply.”

The Reward for Helping the Clergy

The Lord said, “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward” (Matthew 10:41). This implies that those who are eager to assist the clergy out of love might be rewarded far more than they might imagine.

John Chrysostom stated³⁹ that there is a mutual help relationship between teacher and disciple that promotes love. The teacher concentrates on supplying the Word to his disciples, to the neglect of physical necessities, while the disciples supply the teacher's necessities out of love. For doing so, the disciples are rewarded the same as the teacher.

“This Law, ‘that they which preach the Gospel should live off the Gospel’ (1 Corinthians 9:14), is laid down in the New Testament; and likewise in the Old Testament (Numbers 31:47; 35:1-8). The Levites accrued much revenue from the people; what is the reason that He ordained this? Was it not for the sake of laying a foundation of lowliness and love? The dignity of a teacher often causes him to feel superior; in order to repress his spirit, the Lord has imposed on him the necessity of requiring help at the hands of his disciples. To the disciples in turn, by training them, through the kindness required of them to their Teacher, he has given them the means of cultivating kindly feelings in gentleness towards others. By this means great affection is generated on both sides. If this were not true, why should He, who fed the dull-minded Jews with manna, have reduced the Apostles to the necessity of asking for help? It is clear He aimed at the great benefits of humility and love, and that those who were being taught might not be ashamed of Teachers, who had little to show in appearance? To ask for help gives the appearance of disgrace, but it ceased to be so, when their Teachers asked for help, so that their disciples were taught to despise appearances. Paul says, ‘Let him who is taught the Word share in all good things with him who teaches’ (Galatians 6:6); that is, let him show him generosity; this he implies by the words, ‘in all good things’. Let the disciple remember that what he receives is better than what he gives, as much better as heavenly are better than earthly things. This he expresses in another place, ‘If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your earthly things?’ (1 Corinthians 9:11) Therefore he gives the procedure the name of a ‘communication’, showing that an interchange takes place. Love is greatly promoted and confirmed. If the teacher asks merely for necessities, he doesn't detract from his own dignity by receiving it. This is praiseworthy, so persistently to apply to the Word, as to require the help of others,

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Ch. 6, v. 6.

to be in abject poverty, and to take no thought of the means of subsistence. If the teacher exceeds asking for just necessities, he injures his dignity, not by receiving, but by receiving too much. In case vices of the Teacher make the disciples unwilling to give, and the disciples neglect him, though poor, on account of his conduct, Paul proceeded to say, ‘And let us not be weary in well doing’” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

John Chrysostom also stated⁴⁰ that those, who share their physical things with the teacher to receive the spiritual things that he brings, obtain more than just the teaching. They also share his eternal reward. When Paul stated that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7), there is a reason that these givers are cheerful! They are going to be granted a significant reward. In this way it is very worthwhile for us to help the saints in any way we can.

“Great is what Paul testifies of the Philippians, ‘I thank my God for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now’ (Philippians 1:3, 5). It is like one might have witnessed the Apostles. Because you were entrusted with one city, you did not help these only, but you were everywhere working with me, sharing my labors, and taking part in my preaching. It is not once, or twice, or three times, but always, from the time you believed until now; you have assumed the readiness of Apostles. Those that were in Rome turned away from him, ‘This you know, that all that are in Asia turned away from me’ (2 Timothy 1:15). And again, ‘Demas⁴¹ abandoned me, having loved this present world’; and ‘at my first defense no one stood with me’ (2 Timothy 4:10, 16). But the Philippians, although absent, shared in his tribulations, both sending men to him, and serving him according to their ability, leaving out nothing at all. So then it is a ‘fellowship in furtherance of the Gospel’. For when one preaches, and you wait on the preacher, you share his crowns. Even in the contests that are outside the Church, the crown is not only for him that strives, but for the trainer, the coach, and all that help to prepare the athlete. Those that strengthen him participate in his victory. In war too, not only he that wins the prize for bravery, but all those that helped him, may claim a share in the trophies, and partake of the glory, as having shared in his conflict by helping him. For it is very worthwhile to wait on saints. It makes us sharers in the rewards that are laid up for them. Suppose someone has given up great possessions for God, continually devotes himself to God, practices great virtue, even to words, and thoughts, and in everything observes extreme strictness. It is open to you too, even without showing such strictness, to have a share in the rewards that are laid up for him for these things. How? There are rewards for helping him, both in word and deed, if you encourage him both by supplying his needs, and by doing him every possible service.”

“If you admire those in the deserts that have adopted the angelic life, those in the churches that practice the same virtues with them; if you admire, and are saddened that you are far behind them; you may, in another way, share with them, by helping them. Loving-kindness too is of God, to bring those that are less zealous, and are not able to undertake the hard, rugged and strict life into the same

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, I, v. 5.

⁴¹ Demas was one of the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20), but he abandoned his calling to follow the teachings of the Arch heretic Simon Magus. For details, see Mark Kern, The Heresiarch Simon Magus, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

rank with the others. This is what Paul means by ‘fellowship’. They give a share to us, he means, in earthly things, and we give a share to them in spiritual things. For if God grants the kingdom for little and worthless things, His servants too, for little and material things, give a share in spiritual things. Or rather it is He that gives both the one and the other by means of them. You cannot fast, live alone, sleep on the ground, or watch all night? Yet may you gain the reward of all these things, if you go about the matter another way, by helping him that labors in them, and refreshing him constantly, and lightening the pains of his work. He, for his part, stands fighting and taking blows. Wait on him when he returns from the combat, receive him in your arms, wipe off the sweat, and refresh him; comfort, soothe, restore his wearied soul. If we serve the saints with such readiness, we shall be partakers of their rewards.

John Chrysostom added⁴² that support of the clergy implies that they are worthy, and that they are not living in sloth and luxury. If they are laboring like an ox in the heat of the day and among thorns, they certainly deserve a supply of their necessities.

“The ‘honor’ of the clergy, which he speaks of, is paying attention to them, and the supply of their necessities, as is shown by his adding, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain’ (Deuteronomy 25:4); and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages’ (Luke 10:7). So when he says, ‘Honor widows’, he means, ‘support’ them in all that is necessary. Thus he says, ‘That it may relieve those that are really widows’ (1 Timothy 5:3); and again, ‘Honor widows that are widows indeed’ (1 Timothy 5:16), that is, who are in poverty, for the greater their poverty, the more truly they are widows. He quotes the Law, he quotes the words of Christ, both agreeing on this. See how he would have the teacher labor! For there is no other labor such as his. Let us look not only to the reward, but also at the terms of the commandment. If anyone lives in sloth and luxury, he is unworthy of it. He is not worthy unless he is as the ox treading out the grain, and bearing the yoke, in spite of heat and thorns, and doesn’t cease till he has carried the grain into the granary. Therefore to teachers should be granted a supply of their necessities without grudging, that they may not faint nor be discouraged, nor by attention to inferior things deprive themselves of greater. The point is that they may labor for spiritual things, paying no regard to worldly things. It was thus with the Levites; they had no worldly concerns, because the laity took care to provide for them, and their revenues were appointed by the Law, as tithes, offerings of gold, first fruits, vows, and many other things. The Law properly assigned these things to them, that those who preside ought to have food and clothing, that they may not be distracted by care for these things.”

John Chrysostom commented⁴³ on the qualities a priest should possess in serving the Lord:

“Paul shows what kind of man a priest ought to be. He ought to possess the courage of a soldier, the diligence of a vinedresser and the carefulness of a shepherd, and after all these to seek nothing more than necessities. In fact, the Apostles (and those who followed) were both soldiers, vinedressers and

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XV, vv. 17-18.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXI, 4.

shepherds, not of the earth, nor of irrational animals, nor in such wars as are perceptible by sense; but shepherds of reasonable souls and soldiers in battle array with the demons”.

For us who receive the spiritual things sown by our clergy, it should not be a great thing if we let them reap our material things (1 Corinthians 9:11).

Repayment of Physical Things for Spiritual Service

Related to obtaining rewards for helping godly men and women is a repayment of physical things in gratitude for receiving spiritual help. For example, Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth suggesting an exchange between them and the Churches in Macedonia⁴⁴. The Church in Corinth was wealthy, but the Churches in Macedonia were very poor. On the other hand, the Churches in Macedonia were very healthy and godly, while the Church in Corinth had many spiritual problems⁴⁵. Paul wrote, “I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written⁴⁶, ‘He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack’” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). John Chrysostom commented⁴⁷ on this situation as follows:

“That there may be equality between their abundance and your need. Now what is it that he said? ‘You are flourishing in money; they in life and in boldness towards God.’ Give to them, therefore, of the money which you abound in, but they have not; that you may receive of that boldness that they are rich in and you are lacking’. See how he has covertly prepared for their giving beyond their power and of their need. ‘If you desire to receive of their abundance, give of your abundance’. He does not say this directly, but leaves it to the reasoning of his hearers; and he himself works out his object adding in the words, that ‘there may be equality at this time’. How is this equality? You and the Macedonians mutually giving out of your superabundance can meet each other’s needs. And what sort of equality is this, giving spiritual things for earthly? Great is the advantage on the side of the Macedonians⁴⁸; how then does he call it ‘equality’? This equality takes place by each abounding but also needing. Therefore after saying ‘equality’, he added, ‘at this time’. Now this he said, both to subdue the high-mindedness of the rich, and to show that after our departure, the spiritual possess the greater advantage. In this life, we all enjoy much equality of honor; but then there will be a wide distinction and a very great superiority, when the just shine brighter than the sun. Paul showed that they were not only giving, but also receiving, and more, in return; he tries by a further consideration to make them forward, showing that if they did not give of their substance to others, they would not gain anything.

⁴⁴ That is, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.

⁴⁵ For example, factions (1 Corinthians 1:11-13), heresy (1 Corinthians 15:12-14), open fornication (1 Corinthians 5:1-2), disrespect for the Lord’s Table, resulting in sickness and death (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 27-30).

⁴⁶ Paul was referring to the gathering of manna in the wilderness, where some gathered too much and others gathered too little (Exodus 16:14-18).

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XVII, 2.

⁴⁸ That is, the Macedonians, who are poor, will be getting a much-needed infusion of cash.

And he brings up an ancient story about the manna, saying, ‘He that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had no lack’ (Exodus 16:18). Now this happened in the case of the manna. For both they that gathered more, and they that gathered less, were found to have the same quantity, God in this way punishing insatiableness. And this he said both to alarm them by what then happened, and to persuade them never to desire to have more nor to grieve at having less. One may see this happening now in things of this life. For if we all fill but one belly, and live the same length of time, and clothe one body, the rich will not gain anything by his abundance and the poor will not lose anything by his poverty.

Paul, who was a Roman citizen from birth, could have supported himself from the property that he owned before his conversion; but he didn’t. Similarly the saints in Jerusalem could have done the same, but instead they sold everything and laid it at the Apostles’ feet. Coupled to the voluntary poverty of the saints in Jerusalem was the ravaging of the Churches by Saul and those that followed him after his conversion. As they raided houses and dragged Christians off to jail, they also confiscated all their property, which further impoverished the Jerusalem Church. Paul ordered a collection be taken among the Gentile Churches to help out. John Cassian commented⁴⁹ on this as follows:

“Those men, who were possessors of lands and houses in Jerusalem, but sold everything and kept back nothing whatever for themselves, brought the sale price and laid it at the feet of the Apostles. They might have supplied their bodily necessities from their own property, had the Apostles considered this the best plan, or had they themselves deemed it preferable! But they gave up all their property at once, and preferred to be supported by their own labor, and by the contributions of the Gentiles, of whose collection Paul speaks in writing to the Romans. Paul spent time asking for this, and then took the time to deliver it himself, urging them on to make this collection. ‘But now I go to Jerusalem to serve the saints. For it has pleased those of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem; it has pleased them indeed, and the Gentiles are debtors to Jerusalem. If the Gentiles are made partakers of the spiritual things from Jerusalem, they ought also to serve them with material things’ (Romans 15:25-27). To the Corinthians also he shows the same misgiving about this, and urges them the more diligently to prepare a collection before his arrival, which he was intending to send for their needs at Jerusalem. ‘Concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that when I come the collections do not have to be made. But when I come whoever you approve by your letters, them I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem’ (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). That he might stimulate them to make a larger collection, he added, ‘But if it be appropriate that I go also, they shall go with me’ (1 Corinthians 16:4); meaning if your offering is of such a character as to deserve to be taken there by my hand. To the Galatians too, he testifies that when he was settling the division of the ministry of preaching with the Apostles, he had arranged this with James, Peter, and John. Even when he undertook the preaching to the Gentiles, he would never forget care and

⁴⁹ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 17.

anxious thought for the poor who were at Jerusalem, who for Christ's sake gave up all their goods, and submitted to voluntary poverty.”

Yet Paul, himself, did not take advantage of these things. He had a right to be fed by the Corinthians while he gave them spiritual things. He had a right to bring along a wife, as did the other Apostles (1 Corinthians 9:5). He had a right to work full-time in preaching the Gospel, rather than having to support himself (1 Corinthians 9:6-9, 14). While in Corinth, however, Paul worked at his tent-making trade to support himself and those with him so as not to burden the believers in Corinth and thus not hinder the preaching of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:12, Acts 18:1-3ff, 2 Corinthians 11:9).

While Paul and Barnabas did not ask the Corinthians for support, others did, and it was not Peter or the other Apostles. John Chrysostom noted⁵⁰ Paul's running battle with these heretics and usurpers.

“Paul said, ‘others partake of this right over you’ for support. For it is not Peter whom he mentions here nor the Apostles, but certain other spurious ones, with whom he afterwards enters into combat, and concerning whom he says, ‘If a man devours you, if he enslaves you, if he exalts himself, if he strikes you on the face’ (2 Corinthians 11:20). Already he is sounding the prelude to a fight with them. He didn't say, ‘If others take of you’, but pointing out the insolence and tyranny of these heretics, he says, ‘if others partake of this right over you’; i.e., ‘rule you, exercise authority, use you as servants, not enslaving you only, but with much authority’. Therefore he added that if others have this right, ‘do not we even more?’ (1 Corinthians 9:12). He would not have said, if he were speaking of the Apostles. But it is clear that he hints at certain pestilent men and deceivers.”

When Paul said, “Have we no right to eat and drink?” (1 Corinthians 9:4), he implies that he didn't do much eating and drinking. Earlier he mentioned this also, saying that he and the Apostles with him “both hunger and thirst” (1 Corinthians 4:11). Like the other Apostles, Paul lived a life of fasting and prayer. All the Apostles had learned the lesson of the mute, epileptic, demon-possessed child, where the demon could not be cast out except by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:17). In order to be able to perform the countless miracles that they performed, the Apostles needed to live a different kind of life than the multitude.

We get the idea from Paul's letters that the Corinthian Church was weak, even though there may have been a desire for godliness among a majority. Paul had just finished cautioning them about eating meat and wounding the conscience of some weak brother (1 Corinthians 8:12). His argument about not eating food at all while he was among them (1 Corinthians 9:4, 1 Corinthians 4:11) gives them a different perspective about the use of the things of this world.

The Wives of the Apostles

Paul said to the Corinthians, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife⁵¹, as *do* also the other Apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Corinthians 9:5) We know that Peter was married (Matthew 8:14). The “other Apostles among the Twelve” that Paul

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXI, 6.

⁵¹ The literal reading of the Greek text is “a sister, a wife”.

referred to, that were married, were Philip⁵² and Simon the Zealot. The brothers of the Lord, that were married, were Jude and Joseph Barsabas (Acts 1:23, 15:22, 30-33). The rest of the Twelve never married.

Jesus referred to the faith of the Twelve in giving up the pleasures of marriage, along with their possessions, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matthew 19:29-30). The Twelve did this; their wives and children often traveled with them, helping as they could.

The way this worked can be illustrated by the aftermath of the martyrdom of the Apostle Philip (of the Twelve) in Hieropolis. After Philip was crucified, his wife and three daughters remained in Hieropolis to continue Philip’s work. As a result, Philip’s daughters became known⁵³ as some of the greatest luminaries of Asia Minor, along with the Apostle John, where their work included raising the dead.

In this context, Jerome mentioned⁵⁴ a Jewish custom where women served their teacher out of their inherited wealth. This applies not just to the Apostles’ wives, but also to the women who helped with the Lord’s public ministry (Luke 8:2-3) and to the Shunnamite woman serving Elisha.

“Peter and some of the other Apostles had wives, but they had married before they knew the Gospel. Once they were received into the Apostolate, they abandoned the offices of marriage. For when Peter, representing the Apostles, says to the Lord, ‘Lo we have left all and followed you’, the Lord answered him, ‘Truly I say to you, no one who has left house or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life’ (Luke 18:29-30, Matthew 19:29). Paul said, ‘Have we no right to lead about women⁵⁵ or wives even as the rest of the Apostles, and Cephas, and the brethren of the Lord?’ (1 Corinthians 9:5) Let him add what is found in the Greek text, ‘Have we no right to lead about women that are sisters, or wives?’ This makes it clear that the writer referred to other holy women, who, in accordance with Jewish custom, served their teachers out of their substance, as we read was the practice with our Lord himself (Luke 8:2-3). Where there is a reference to providing food and drink and the outlay of

⁵² That is, Philip of the Twelve. The Apostle Philip of the Seventy, also one of the first seven Deacons was also married and had four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).

⁵³ Roberts and Donaldson, “Polycrates, Epistle to Victor and the Roman Church”, Remains of the Second and Third Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Eusebius, Church History, III, 31.

Eusebius, Church History, V, 24.

Philip Schaff, ed., “Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men”, II, 45, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 3.

Salaminius Hermias Sozomenus, Ecclesiastical History, VII, 27.

Roberts and Donaldson, “Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord”, Fragments of Papias, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Eusebius, Church History, III, 39.

For more details of the life of the Apostle Philip, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Philip, St Athanasius Press, 2005.

⁵⁴ Jerome, “Against Jovinianus”, Treatises, I, 26.

⁵⁵ The Greek word *gunh* can mean “women” or “wives”.

money, and mention is made of women that are sisters, it is quite clear, that we must understand, not wives, but those women who served out of their substance. We read the same account of the Shunammite woman, who welcomed Elisha, and set for him a table, bread, and a candlestick (2 Kings 4:10). If we take the Greek word *gunaika* to mean wife, not woman, the addition of the word sister destroys the effect of the word wife, and shows that they were related in spirit, not by wedlock.”

Paul also took advantage of the service of women who were willing to help with his ministry. One of these women was Thecla⁵⁶ of Iconium, who traveled with Paul’s evangelistic group for a while, before leaving to begin a monastic life in Seleucia. Thecla later was referred to as “Equal to the Apostles” for her work as an Unmercenary Healer. Paul had given up the things of this world, including the pleasures of marriage, and therefore he didn’t marry after his conversion.

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁷ that we are often given permission to do many things in this world: eating, marriage, owning property, etc. The thing to watch for is whether our doing these things might offend someone.

“These things also let us listen to, beloved; that we may not despise those who are offended, nor ‘cause any hindrance to the Gospel of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 9:12), that we may not betray our own salvation. We should not say when your brother is offended, ‘this or that, in which he is offended, has not been forbidden; it is permitted’. I have something greater to say to you: ‘although Christ Himself has permitted it, yet if you see any injured, stop and do not use the permission’. Paul did this also; when he might have received, Christ having granted permission, he didn’t receive. Thus our Lord in His mercy has mixed gentleness with His precepts, that our life might be more than just following a commandment; we can do much also of our own mind. It was in Christ’s power, had He wanted, to extend the commandments further and 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 does not strip himself of all that he has, let him suffer the severest penalty’. But he did not do this, giving you opportunity, if you want, to do more. When He was speaking about virginity, He said, ‘He that is able to accept it, let him accept it’ (Matthew 19:11-12). 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). Our difficulty is not that we go too far, and go beyond the precepts, but we fall very short even of the measure of things commanded.”

Paul as a Spiritual Father to Corinth

Paul said, “Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an Apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 9:1-2). Also “For though you might have ten thousand instructors (i.e. pedagogues) in Christ, yet *you do*

⁵⁶ Thecla of Iconium was known in the Early Church as “Equal to the Apostles” for her work in Seleucia. See Nikolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 24.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XXI, 8.

not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

John Chrysostom emphasized⁵⁸ Paul’s great love for the Corinthians as a father. Peter and Apollos had spent a great effort to help them, and others had tried to take over as leaders with their own versions of the Gospel. As a true father, Paul tried to focus their attention on Christ, even if they had to imitate him first, as a child imitates his father.

“In speaking of himself as their spiritual father, Paul was not speaking of his dignity, but the greatness of his love for them. On this account he didn’t say, ‘You don’t have many masters’, but, ‘many fathers’. His object was not to put down anyone, or to argue that they had received the greater benefit from him. But granting to the others (Peter, Apollos, etc.) the great pains they had taken for the Corinthians, for that is the force of the word *pedagogue*⁵⁹, the superiority in love Paul had for them is the force of the word ‘Father’”.

“He didn’t say merely, ‘No one loves you so much’, a statement, which was not called into question; but he also brings forward a real fact. ‘In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel’ (1 Corinthians 4:15). He strikes at those in Corinth, who gave their own names to their teaching. ‘You are the seal of my Apostleship’ (1 Corinthians 9:2). And again, ‘I planted’ (1 Corinthians 3:6), and in this place, ‘I begot’. He didn’t say, ‘I preached the Word’, but, ‘I begot’, using the words of natural relationship. His one care at the moment was to show the love that he had for them. ‘They received you from me, and led you on; but that you are believers at all came to pass through me’”.

“To indicate that he was not just speaking flattery, Paul produced the facts. As a father, Paul said, ‘I ask you, be imitators of me (1 Corinthians 4:16), as I also am of Christ’. Astonishing! How great is our teacher’s boldness of speech! How highly finished the image, when he can even exhort others to it! As if he had said, ‘don’t tell me, “I am not able to imitate you. You are a Teacher and a great one”’. The difference between you and me is not as great as between Christ and me; and yet I have imitated Him’. On the other hand, writing to the Ephesians, he made no mention of himself, but leads them all straight to the one point, ‘Be imitators of God’ (Ephesians 5:1). But in this place, since his words were addressed to weak persons, he puts himself in by the way.”

“And besides, he indicates that it is possible to imitate Christ. For he who copies the perfect impression of the seal, copies the original model.”

John Chrysostom also noted⁶⁰ that Paul was so positive toward the Church in Corinth that he stated that the Church in Corinth was Paul’s best commendation as an Apostle.

“What does Paul mean by saying, ‘You are our Epistle?’ (2 Corinthians 3:2) ‘If we needed to be commended to others, we ought to have produced you before them instead of an Epistle.’ Paul also said this earlier, ‘You are the seal of my Apostleship’ (1 Corinthians 9:2). He does not say it here in this manner, but in irony, so as to make his question, ‘Do we need epistles of commendation?’ more cutting. In allusion to the false Apostles, he added, ‘as do some’. Then because what he had said was severe, he softens it by adding, ‘You are our epistle

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XIII, 4-5.

⁵⁹ A *pedagogue* was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, VI, 1.

written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

“Here he testifies not only to their love, but also to their good works; since they are able to show to all men by their own virtue the high worth of their teacher, for this is the meaning of, ‘You are our epistle’. The virtue of the disciples tends to adorn and to commend the teacher more than any letter.”

“That is, everyone knows; we carry you around everywhere and have you in mind. This is as though he said, ‘You are our commendation to others, for we have you continually in our heart and proclaim your good works to everyone. Because you yourselves are our commendation to others, we need no Epistles from you; but further, because we love you exceedingly, we need no commendation to you. To those who are strangers, one has need of letters, but you are in our mind. Yet he said not merely, ‘you are in our mind’, but ‘written in it’; that is, you cannot slide out of it. For just as from letters by reading, so from our heart by perceiving, everyone is acquainted with the love we have for you.”

John Chrysostom noted⁶¹ that the extraordinary signs and miracles that accompanied Paul’s work were proof that the Church in Corinth was the seal of his Apostleship. Luke records examples of these signs at Ephesus, where handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul’s body were used to heal the sick (Acts 19:11-12).

“‘If to others I am not an Apostle, yet at least I am to you’ (1 Corinthians 9:2). ‘You are the seal of my Apostleship’; i.e., it’s proof. ‘Should anyone, desire to learn why I am an Apostle, you are the persons whom I bring forward, for all the signs of an Apostle I have exhibited among you, and not one have I failed in’. Paul spoke of this again saying, ‘though I am nothing, truly the signs of an Apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty works. For what is it in which you were inferior to other Churches?’ (2 Corinthians 12:11-13) Therefore he said, ‘You are the seal of my Apostleship’ (1 Corinthians 9:2). ‘For I both exhibited miracles, taught by word, underwent dangers, and showed forth a blameless life’. And these topics you may see fully explained by these two Epistles, how he lays before them the demonstration of each very accurately.”

In late 28 AD, Jesus was rejected by the town folk at Nazareth. Jesus summarized the reason for this: “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (Matthew 13:57). As a result of the unbelief in Nazareth, “He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). If Paul was able to do many signs and wonders in Corinth, this implies that there was considerable faith among the Corinthians.

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXI, 2.