

THE “GOOD TEACHER” HERESIES OF THE RESURRECTION

August 31, 2014
12th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

Gospel: Matthew 19:16-26
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The subject of today’s Gospel lesson, The Rich Young Ruler, is also read in the Orthodox lectionary from Luke 18 on the 30th Sunday after Pentecost. In commenting on this, the Church Fathers have followed two main themes. One theme is the hazard of wealth, which we will cover on the 30th Sunday after Pentecost. The other theme centers on the ruler’s reference to Jesus as “Good Teacher” and Jesus’ reply. This we will address today, especially in the light of how this passage has been interpreted and misinterpreted over the years. In the West, today’s Gospel lesson is read from either Matthew or Mark on either the 6th Sunday after Trinity or the 23rd Sunday after Trinity.

Today’s Epistle lesson is used often in the West also, either for Easter Sunday, the 5th Sunday after Epiphany or the 11th Sunday after Trinity.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30.....	1
The Rich Young Synagogue Ruler’s Problem	2
Keeping the Commandments	4
The “Good Teacher”	9
Heretical Misinterpretation	11
Doing What the Good Teacher Asks	13
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11	16
Background: The Heresies in Corinth.....	16
Ex-Deacon Nicolas of Antioch	18
The Guidelines: Everything Must Be According to the Scriptures.....	19
Christ’s Resurrection on the Third Day	23
The 500 Brethren Who Were Eyewitnesses.....	26
Paul the “Abortion” – “Born Out of Due Time”	27
Paul: the Least of the Apostles?.....	29
Unworthy to Be Called an Apostle	30
The Grace of God with Paul	34
Paul Labored More Abundantly.....	37
All the Apostles Preach the Same Message	40

Gospel: Matthew 19:16-26, (Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30)

The central figure in today’s Gospel lesson is a young man (Matthew 19:20) who was referred to as “a certain ruler” (Luke 18:18). He was not a ruler, in the Roman sense, but a ruler of the local synagogue in Perea, east of the Jordan River. He would be equivalent to the pastor of a church today. As a synagogue ruler, he would be expected to know the Mosaic Law very

well and would also be expected to have kept the Commandments from his youth as he stated he had (Matthew 19:20). On the 30th Sunday after Pentecost, we will see how he had overlooked one of the Commandments: his wealth was a god that came before God (Matthew 19:21-22).

Yet he seemed to realize he was missing something and asked Jesus, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16, Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). In keeping with his dutiful observation of the Law, he figured there was something he could do for Jesus or for His disciples or for the poor that would guarantee him eternal life. This practice was common for political leaders then (today, also!). For example, King Herod the Great, whom the Jews despised, spent many years rebuilding the Temple into the ornate structure it was in Jesus’ day. [The Virgin Mary and some other skilled young virgins helped in the embroidery of the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place]. All this Herod did to curry the Jews’ favor, even though they still despised him.

Jesus replied to the rich young synagogue ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is God” (Matthew 19:17, Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19). John Chrysostom commented¹ that the young synagogue ruler came to Jesus as if He were a common man and one of the many.

“Why then does Christ reply to him, ‘No one is good but One?’ Because he came to Him as a mere man, one of the common sort, and a Jewish teacher; therefore as a man Jesus spoke to him. In many instances Jesus replied to the secret thoughts of those that came to Him; as when He said, ‘We worship what we know’ (John 4:22); and, ‘If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true’ (John 5:31). When therefore He said, ‘No one is good but One’, He does not put Himself down as not being good; far from it. He did not say, ‘Why do you call me good? I am not good’; but, ‘No one is good but One’, that is, no one among men”.

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

The Rich Young Synagogue Ruler’s Problem

Jesus told the rich young ruler, “if you want to enter into life, keep the Commandments” (Matthew 19:16-17). When the rich young ruler asked which commandments he needed to keep, Jesus replied with the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17, Deuteronomy 5:7-21) plus a summary statement of commandments 4 to 10: “Love your neighbor as yourself”

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

(Leviticus 19:18). Jesus listed these first and not the first three of the Ten Commandments, because He knew what the rich young ruler's problem was. The expected response was that the rich young ruler had kept all these from his youth.

The Ten Commandments can be summarized as the two Great Commandments (Matthew 22:36-39). On these two Great Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets². The two Great Commandments (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18) were part of a Creed³ used in the 1st century synagogue worship. Breaking down the Ten Commandments in terms of the two is as follows:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Number	Commandment	Exodus 20	Deuteronomy 5
1	Have no gods before Me	v.3	v.7
2	Do not make or serve idols	vv.4-6	vv.8-10
3	Do not take the Name in vain	v.7	v.11

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

4	Keep the Sabbath Day holy	vv.8-11	vv.12-15
5	Honor your parents	v.12	v.16
6	Do not murder	v.13	v.17
7	Do not commit adultery	v.14	v.18
8	Do not steal	v.15	v.19
9	Do not lie	v.16	v.20
10	Do not covet	v.17	v.21

Some people today feel that we don't need the Ten Commandments or the Mosaic Law anymore. Does this mean that we don't need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength or our neighbor as ourselves? Not at all! The Lord said He didn't come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. "For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one piece of a Hebrew letter will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these Commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19). We need to take the precepts of the Law to heart and apply them to our thoughts and intentions as well as to our deeds (Matthew 5:21-48).

Jesus, who could see into the rich young ruler's heart, discerned that he had a problem with the First Commandment (Luke 18:23). His great possessions were a god that came before God. He couldn't let that go even to obtain treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22).

In other places Jesus gave more definition to the First Commandment: the First Commandment includes (from Matthew 10):

- Willingness to confess the Lord before men (10:32-33)

² Matthew 22:40. See also Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27

³ Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, pp. 245, 101-104

- Loving the Lord more than parents (10:37)
- Loving the Lord more than children (10:37)
- Taking up one's cross willingly (10:38)

Following are some things that we might ask ourselves regarding whether we are obeying the First Commandment:

1. Have I believed in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
2. Have I failed to trust God and His mercy?
3. Have I complained against God while I am having difficulty?
4. Have I been thankful for God's Blessing?
5. Have I doubted the Christian faith and the teachings of the Church?
6. Have I tried to serve God and keep His Commandments?
7. Have I given way to superstition?
8. Have I frequented the religious meetings of heretics and schismatics?
9. Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution?
10. Have I failed to pray to God faithfully?
11. Have I put myself before God?

Keeping the Commandments⁴

At the time of the giving of the Mosaic Law, Israel was stiff-necked (Deuteronomy 31:27) and prone to idolatry (Exodus 32:4-6). On the other hand, the Patriarchs c. 500 years earlier had kept the intent of the Law in faith, obedience and love toward God. The written Law was given then as a yoke on the necks of a rebellious people. Its intent was to expose sin and lead people to Christ in repentance by offering an animal sacrifice for sin, where the animal represented Christ.

Irenaeus gave a great summary of the Early Church's perspective on the Mosaic Law. He spoke⁵ of how Christ upgraded the Mosaic Law to its original intent as applied to free men, rather than continue to force it as a yoke on slaves. With the coming of Grace, our souls are set free to serve God without hindrance, that we might be more worthy of Him. This is not contrary to the Law, but this clarifies what the Lord meant by fulfilling the Law. By following Grace, and disregarding the things of this world, we can attain the same reward as the Apostles.

“The Law beforehand taught mankind the necessity of following Christ; He Himself made this clear, when He replied to him who asked Him what he should do to inherit eternal life. ‘If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments’. Upon the other asking ‘Which?’ again the Lord replied, ‘Do not commit adultery, kill, steal, or bear false witness; honor father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself’. Regarding the precepts of the Law, he set as an ascending series and as the entrance into life to those who wished to follow Him; what He then said to one He said to everyone. The former said, ‘All these I have done’. Most likely he had not kept them; if he had, the Lord would

⁴ Other aspects of the Mosaic Law are addressed in the Studies for the Epistle Lesson for the 6th and 18th Sundays after Pentecost, in the Gospel Lesson for the 15th Sunday After Pentecost and in the Gospel Lesson for the 9th, 10th and 13th Sundays of Luke.

⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xii, 5; xiii, 1-3.

not have said to him, 'Keep the commandments'. The Lord, exposing his covetousness, said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and distribute to the poor; and come, follow me' (Matthew 19:17-21); promising to those who would act thus, the portion belonging to the Apostles."

"The Lord did not repeal the natural precepts of the Law, which those who were justified by faith, and who pleased God, observed prior to the giving of the Law. Instead He extended and fulfilled them, which is shown from His words. 'It had been said to them of old, Do not commit adultery. But I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matthew 5:27-28). Again, 'It has been said, you shall not murder. But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment' (Matthew 5:21-22). All these do not imply an opposition to or an overturning of the precepts of the past, as Marcion's followers strenuously maintain; but they exhibit a fulfilling and an extension of them, as He Himself declares. 'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:20). We must believe not only in the Father, but also in His Son now revealed; for He it is who leads man into fellowship and unity with God. In the next place, we must not only say, but we must do; for the heretics said, but did not do. We must not only abstain from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. Jesus did not teach us these things as being opposed to the Law, but as fulfilling the Law, and implanting in us the righteousness of the Law. That would have been contrary to the Law, if He had commanded His disciples to do anything, which the Law had prohibited. But He commanded us not only to abstain from things forbidden by the Law, but even from longing after them. This is not contrary to the Law, neither is it the utterance of one destroying the Law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and affording greater scope to it."

"The Law was laid down for those in bondage, and was used to instruct the soul by means of external physical objects, drawing men, as by a bond, to obey its commandments, that men might learn to serve God. But the Word set the soul free, and taught that through the soul the body might be willingly purified. It followed that the bonds of slavery, to which man had now become accustomed, are removed, and that he should follow God without shackles. The laws of liberty were extended; subjection to the King increased, so that no one who is converted should appear unworthy to Him, who set him free. Piety and obedience due to the Master of the household should be equally rendered both by servants and children. The children possess greater confidence than the servants, inasmuch as the working of liberty is greater and more glorious than obedience from a state of slavery."

"Besides forbidding lust and anger and commanding the giving of tithes, He told us to share all our possessions with the poor. Instead of loving our neighbors only, we are told to love even our enemies; and not merely to be liberal givers, but even presenting a gift to those who take away our goods. 'To him that takes away your coat', He says, 'give to him your cloak also; and from him that takes away your goods, don't ask them back; and as you want men to do to you, do to them' (Luke 6:29-31). We should not grieve as those who are attached to

their possessions, but rejoice as those who have given willingly, and as conferring a favor upon our neighbors than yielding to necessity. 'And if anyone', He says, 'shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two miles' (Matthew 5:41). You do not need to follow your neighbor as a slave, but may as a free man go before him, showing yourself in all things kindly disposed and useful to him, not reacting to his evil intentions, but performing kindly service, like your Father, 'who makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust' (Matthew 5:45). All these precepts were not the injunctions of one doing away with the Law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and widening it among us. The more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us. He did not set us free that we should depart from Him, but that the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him. The more we have loved Him, the more glory shall we receive from Him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father."

Tertullian noted⁶ that while the Law and the Prophets were in place until John the Baptist, we do not make the Law void, but establish it in its enhanced mode, and apply it according to its original intent, as the Patriarchs kept it.

"I must prescribe to you a Law, not to stretch out your hand after the old things (Isaiah 43:18 LXX):

- Not to look back after putting your hand to the plow (Luke 9:62),
- Not to look for 'the old things have passed away' (Revelation 21:4, Compare Isaiah 42:9 LXX), and
- 'To break up fresh ground for yourselves, and don't sow among thorns' (Jeremiah 4:3 LXX), and
- 'Forget those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead' (Philippians 3:13), and
- 'the Law and the prophets were until John' (Luke 16:16).

If we begin with the Law, using adultery as an example, that phase of the Law Christ has 'not dissolved, but fulfilled' (Matthew 5:17). It is the 'burdens' of the Law which were 'until John', not the remedial virtues. It is the 'yokes' of 'works' that have been rejected, not those of disciplines (Acts 15:10). 'Liberty in Christ' (Galatians 5:1, 13) has not prevented us from innocently doing good. The Law of piety, sanctity, humanity, truth, chastity, justice, mercy, benevolence, modesty, remains in its entirety; in this Law 'blessed is the man who meditates on the Law by day and night' (Psalm 1:1-2). About that Law David says, 'The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting souls. The ordinances of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is bright, enlightening the eyes' (Psalm 19:7-8 LXX). Paul says, 'Therefore the Law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good' (Romans 7:12). 'You shall not commit adultery', of course! But he had said, 'Do we then make void the Law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law' (Romans 3:31). These same points (like adultery) are prohibited by the New Testament, and are prohibited by an even more emphatic precept. Instead of, 'You shall not commit

⁶ Tertullian, On Modesty, IV, vii, 6.

adultery’, ‘whoever shall lust, has already committed adultery in his own heart’” (Matthew 5:27, 28).

Ambrose of Milan made a distinction⁷ between keeping the written Commandments of the Mosaic Law, which he called “ordinary duties”, and keeping the higher standards that Christ gave, which he called “perfect duties”:

“Every duty is either ‘ordinary’ or ‘perfect’, a fact which the Scriptures confirm. The Lord said, ‘If you will enter into life, keep the commandments’. The young man said, ‘Which commandments?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 19:18-19). These are ordinary duties, to which something is lacking.”

“The young man replied to Him, ‘All these things have I kept from my youth up; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your goods and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). Earlier the same is written, where the Lord says that we must love our enemies, and pray for those that falsely accuse and persecute us, and bless those that curse us. This we are bound to do, if we want to be perfect as our Father, Who in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). He commands the sun to shed his rays over the evil and the good (Matthew 5:45), and makes the lands of the whole earth fertile with rain and dew without any distinction. This, then, is a perfect duty, whereby all things are put right.”

“Mercy is a good thing, for it makes men perfect, in that it imitates the perfect Father. Nothing graces the Christian soul so much as mercy; mercy as shown chiefly towards the poor, that you may treat them as sharers in common with you in the produce of nature. Thus you may freely give to a poor man what you have, and in this way help him, who is your brother and companion. You bestow silver; he receives life. You give money; he considers it his fortune.”

John Cassian compared⁸ the words of the Gospel encouraging us to seek perfection, to the words of the Law, which relates mostly to this present life. Those who voluntarily give up the use of lawful things out of reverence for Him are rewarded accordingly. On the other hand, those who disregard even the basic requirements of the Law invoke a curse on themselves. Christ does not order us to do this; it must be voluntary. In the Law, Moses laid a burden that cannot be refused on those who were unwilling; in the Gospel Christ counsels those who are willing and eager for perfection.

“The word of the Gospel daily tells us, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). When we offer to God our tithes, we are still in a way under the burden of the Law, and are not able to rise to those heights of the Gospel. Those who conform to the Gospel are recompensed not only by blessings in this present life, but also by future rewards. For the Law promises to those who obey it no rewards of the kingdom of heaven, **but only comforts in this life**, saying, ‘The man that does these things shall live in them’ (Leviticus

⁷ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy*, I, 11, 36-38.

⁸ John Cassian, *1st Conference of Abbot Theonas*, XXI, 5

18:5). But the Lord said to His disciples, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:3); and, ‘Everyone that leaves house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or field for My Name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life’ (Matthew 19:29). He said this with good reason; it is not so praiseworthy for us to abstain from forbidden things as from lawful things, giving up the use of lawful things out of reverence for Him, Who has permitted us to use them because of our weakness. If those, who faithfully offer tithes of their fruits, are obedient to the Law, but cannot climb the heights of the Gospel, you can see very clearly how far short of it those fall, who do not even do this⁹. How can people be partakers of the grace of the Gospel, who disregard the fulfillment even of the lighter commands of the Law? A curse is actually invoked on those who do not fulfill them; for it says, ‘Cursed is everyone that does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them’” (Deuteronomy 27:26 LXX).

“Regarding the superiority and excellence of Christ’s Commandments He said, ‘He that can receive it, let him receive it’ (Matthew 19:12). In the Mosaic Law the forced compulsion of the lawgiver shows the easy character of the precepts; for he says, ‘I call heaven and earth to record against you today, that if you do not keep the Commandments of the Lord your God you shall perish from the face of the earth’ (Deuteronomy 4:23-26). Christ does not order, but exhorts, saying, ‘If you want to be perfect go’ and do this or that. There Moses lays a burden that cannot be refused on those who are unwilling; here Paul counsels those who are willing and eager for perfection. This was not required as a general charge for all, owing to its wonderful and lofty nature; everything is rather stimulated by grace, that those who are great may deservedly be crowned by the perfection of their virtues. Those who are small, and not able to come up to ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Ephesians 4:13), may seem to be lost to sight and hidden by the brightness of larger stars, who sell everything. But yet they may still be free from the darkness of the curses, which are in the Law, and not be condemned to suffer present evils or be visited with eternal punishment. Christ constrains no one by compulsion to those lofty heights of goodness, but stimulates them by the power of free will, and urges them on by the desire of perfection.”

Ambrose of Milan noted¹⁰ that those who fall into habitual sin, need to keep the Commandments after they repent. There may be a time of penance, but it is not lifelong; similarly, the Lord treats differently those who have never fallen into habitual sin.

“It is necessary that he who stops sinning must keep the Commandments of God and renounce his sins. We do not condemn people to penance for life after they renounce their sins and keep the Commandments of the Lord; Christ teaches us this, as one Who does not refuse forgiveness. Even to those who do

⁹ That is, the Old Testament required a threefold tithe; one was used to support the priests, one was used for the Festivals, and one was collected every three years for the poor. In the New Testament, Christ counseled His disciples to sell everything. Those who don’t even tithe fall short of the simplistic Old Testament Laws.

¹⁰ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Repentance, I, xii, 56-58.

not keep His Commandments, 'If they profane My statutes and don't keep My Commandments, I will visit their offenses with the rod and their sins with scourges; but My mercy I will not take from them' (Psalm 89:31-33 LXX). So, then, He promises mercy to everyone."

"Yet there is mercy with this judgment; He makes a distinction between those who have been continually obedient to His Commandments, and those who at some time have fallen, either by error or by compulsion. Christ said, 'If the servant knew his Lord's will and didn't do it, he shall be beaten with many stripes, but if he didn't know it, he shall be beaten with few stripes' (Luke 12:47-48). Everyone who believes is received, for God 'chastens every son whom He receives' (Hebrews 12:6), and him whom He chastens, He does not give over to death. For it is written, 'The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death'" (Psalm 118:18).

The "Good Teacher"

Jesus had addressed the subject of "goodness" almost two years earlier. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:11). Chrysostom said¹¹ that He did not call the whole human race evil, but was comparing the goodness that is in men with the goodness of God.

Ambrose of Milan noted¹² that Jesus did not say that only the Father was good, but that "goodness" belongs to each person of the Trinity as part of the Nature of God. Jesus did not deny His own goodness, but directed the rich young ruler to the Nature of God in his inquiry.

"With divinely inspired comprehension, our Lord did not say, 'There is none good but the Father alone', but 'There is none good but God alone'. But the unity of God doesn't exclude the Godhead of each of the Three Persons, and therefore it is the Nature of God that Jesus was referring to. Goodness, therefore, is of the nature of God, and in the nature of God, the Son of God exists. Goodness belongs not to one single Person, but to the complete unity of the Godhead."

"The Lord, then, does not deny His goodness; He rebukes this sort of disciple. When the scribe said, 'Good Master', the Lord answered, 'Why do you call Me good?' Which is to say: 'It is not enough to call Him good, whom you believe not to be God'. I don't seek such to be My disciples, men who rather consider My manhood and reckon Me a good master, than look to My Godhead and believe Me to be the good God."

Cyril of Alexandria added¹³ that in the Divine nature that transcends all, only in God is found the attribute of being by nature, and unchangeable good; but the angels, and we on earth, are good by resembling Him, or rather by participation in Him.

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

¹² Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, II, 1, 18-19.

¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 122, Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983.

“Those whose minds are perverted by sharing in the wickedness of Arius will probably not agree to the correctness of this explanation. For they make the Son inferior to the supremacy and glory of God the Father. For they assert, as though they had obtained a reason for their blasphemy from the passage now before us, ‘Behold, He has clearly and expressly denied that He is good, and set it apart as something appropriate only to God the Father’. But had He been equal to Him in substance, and sprung from Him by nature, how would He not also be good, being God? Let this, then, be our reply to our opponents. Since all correct and exact reasoning acknowledges a son to be consubstantial with the father, how is He not good, as being God? He cannot be anything but God, if He is consubstantial with Him, Who is by nature God. We have His own testimony, ‘A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits’ (Matthew 7:18). How from a good root has there shot forth an evil sprout? Or how from a sweet fountain can there flow a bitter river? Was there ever a time when there was no Father, seeing that He is the Father eternally? We conclude, therefore, that the fruit of the good God is the good Son.”

Ambrose of Milan added¹⁴ that Christ, in His Deity, laid the foundations of the world, and that He Who is God can only be good, eternal, perfect, almighty and true, as we find Him in the Law and the Prophets due to His eternal nature.

“The grace of Christ’s submission to the Father agrees with our teaching, and His acts of power are not at variance with that. For whatever things the Father does, the Son does in like manner (John 5:19, 30). But it is the Father’s will that we ask Christ, that you may understand that there is one power displayed. Truly the Son of God is to be adored and worshipped, Who, by the power of His Godhead, has laid the foundations of the world (John 1:3), and by His submission in the flesh informed us how to live” (Hebrews 5:7-10).

“Therefore we ought to believe that God is good, eternal, perfect, almighty and true, such as we find Him in the Law and the Prophets, and the rest of the Scriptures¹⁵, for otherwise there is no God. For He Who is God can only be good, seeing that fullness of goodness is of the nature of God (Daniel 9:9, Exodus 34:6). God, Who made time, cannot be in time¹⁶; nor can God be imperfect, for a lesser being is plainly imperfect, seeing that it lacks somewhat what is needed to make it equal to a greater. This, then, is the teaching of our faith — that God is not evil, that with God nothing is impossible, that God doesn’t exist in time, and that God is beneath¹⁷ no being.”

“Seeing that Christ is God, He is, by consequence, good, almighty, eternal, perfect and true; for these attributes belong to the essential nature of the Godhead.”

When Jesus replied to the rich young ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is God” (Matthew 19:17). He did not deny His Deity or His Goodness. He simply

¹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, I, ii, 13-15.

¹⁵ For example Psalm 25:8, Jeremiah 10:10, James 1:17-18, Daniel 9:9-10.

¹⁶ That is, in His Deity.

¹⁷ For example James 1:13, Luke 18:27, Psalm 90:2-4, 89:6.

challenged the hypocrisy of the synagogue ruler who called Him Good, but treated Him as a mere man. John Chrysostom stated¹⁸ that when the rich young ruler addressed Jesus as “Good Master”, he thought by such flattery to gain His favor. Jesus immediately stopped him in his tracks by saying, “Why do you call Me good?” thus exposing the young ruler’s deceit.

Chrysostom added¹⁹ that the rich, young ruler meant well in his question to Jesus. He was very forward in his desire for eternal life, and he had prepared himself by keeping the Commandments; but the multitude of the thorns choked the seed (Matthew 13:22). Note at any rate how he is prepared thus far for obedience to the Commandments. At which point Christ said, “If you want to enter into life, keep the Commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

Unfortunately the thorns had left the rich young ruler with a blind spot regarding the effect his riches had on his love for God. Even though Christ offered him a hundredfold exchange for his earthly riches (Matthew 19:29), he couldn’t do it. Similarly, most of the major heretics throughout the ages have been sincere in their desire for eternal life. But because of one blind spot or another, they overlooked one or more of the Commandments.

Heretical Misinterpretation

One example of the misinterpretation of the “Good Teacher” is the heresy of Arius, which is still widespread today, and which caused a major division in the Church that had to be addressed by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

Hilary of Poitiers explained²⁰ how the heretics took a few of the things that Jesus said out of context, including “Why do you call Me good?” in order to claim that Jesus was not God. Hilary explained that first, Jesus did not resent being called “good”. Instead He resented being called “good master” by an unbeliever, who did not acknowledge Him to be the Christ. Christ’s subsequent words and actions are those of the power, the goodness and the nature of the one God. When the Apostles referred to Him as “good master”, He accepted the title with words of praise.

“He, Who is by nature God of God, must possess the nature of His origin, which God possesses; the unity of a living nature cannot be divided by the birth of a living nature. Nevertheless the heretics, under cover of the confession of the Faith, subvert the truth. By forcing their own interpretations on Jesus’ words, with other meanings, they rob the Son of His natural unity. To deny the Son of God, they quote the authority of His own words, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God’ (Mark 10:18). They say these words proclaim the Oneness of God; anything else, which shares the Name of God, cannot possess the nature of God, for God is One. From His words, ‘This is life eternal, that they may know You the only true God’ (John 17:3), they theorize that Christ is called God by a mere title, not as really being God. To exclude Him from the proper nature of the true God, they quote, ‘The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do’ (John 5:19). These passages they neither

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

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIII, 1.

²⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 2, 14-18.

understand rationally, nor distinguish as to their occasions, nor apprehend in the light of the Gospel mysteries, nor realize in the strict meaning of the words. So they impugn the divine nature of Christ with crude rashness, quoting single detached utterances to catch the ears of the unwary. Keeping back either the sequel, which explains, or the incidents which prompted them, they ignore the meaning of the words in their context.”

“We should not forget that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Person of two natures, since He, Who existed in the form of God, took the form of a servant, in which He was obedient even to death (Philippians 2:8). The obedience of death has nothing to do with the form of God, just as the form of God has nothing to do with the form of a servant. Yet through the Mystery of the Gospel Dispensation the same Person is in the form of a servant and in the form of God, though it is not the same thing to take the form of a servant and to exist in the form of God. He, Who existed in the form of God, could not take the form of a servant without emptying Himself, since the combination of the two forms would be incompatible²¹. Yet it was not a different Person Who emptied Himself and Who took the form of a servant. The emptying of the form does not imply the abolition of the Divine nature; He emptied Himself, but did not lose His self; He took a new form, but remained what He was. This is a mystery, in that He emptied Himself, and took the form of a servant, but He does not come to an end, so as to cease to exist after emptying Himself. The emptying did not prevent Christ, Who was in the form of God, from continuing to be Christ.”

“The only true faith lies in the confession of Jesus Christ as Word and flesh, that is, God and Man. The heretics consider it necessary to deny that our Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of His nature, was divine, because He said, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God’” (Matthew 19:17).

“A satisfactory answer must address all these issues. First I would ask those who misinterpret, ‘Do you think that the Lord resented being called good?’ Would He rather have been called bad, as seems to be signified by the words, ‘Why do you call Me good?’ I do not think anyone is so unreasonable as to say He confessed wickedness, when it was He Who said, ‘Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light’ (Matthew 11:28-30). He says He is meek and lowly; can we believe that He was angry because He was called good? He Who witnesses to His own goodness would not repudiate the name of Good. Plainly, then, He was not angry because He was called good; and if He didn’t resent being called good, we must ask what was said of Him that He did resent.”

“The questioner, beside calling Him good, said, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I do?’ (Matthew 19:16), adding to the title of “good” that of master. If Christ did not reprove him because He was called good, it must have been because He called Him ‘good Master’. The manner of His reproof shows that it was the disbelief of the questioner, rather than the name of master, or of good, which He resented. The young man, who prided himself on the observance of the

²¹ This does not mean that the two forms are incompatible following the Resurrection.

Law, did not know the end of the Law (Romans 10:4), which is Christ. He thought himself justified by works, without perceiving that Christ came to those who believe that the Law cannot save. The young man questioned the Lord of the Law, the Only-begotten God, as though He were a teacher of the common writings of the Law. But the Lord, abhorring this declaration of irreverent unbelief, which addressed Him as a teacher of the Law, answered, ‘Why do you call Me good?’ To show how we may know, and call Him good, He added, ‘No one is good but One, that is, God’ (Matthew 19:17). God did not repudiate the name of good, if it was given to Him as God.”

“As a proof that He resented the name ‘good master’, on the ground of the unbelief, which addressed Him as a man, He replied to the vain-glorious young man, and his boast that he had fulfilled the Law. ‘One thing you lack; go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). Christ did not shrink from the title of ‘good’ in the promise of heavenly treasures; He was not reluctant to be regarded as ‘master’ in offering to lead the way to perfect blessedness. But He did reprove the unbelief, which asked an earthly opinion of Him. Christ’s words and actions are those of the power, the goodness and the nature of the one God.”

“This may also be proved from the difference in His language, when the Apostles confessed Him as their Master, ‘You call Me Master²², and Lord, and you say well, for so I am’ (John 13:13); and on another occasion, ‘do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, the Christ’ (Matthew 23:10). From the faithful, to whom He is master, He accepts the title with words of praise; but here He rejects the name ‘good master’, when He is not acknowledged to be the Lord and the Christ.”

Doing What the Good Teacher Asks

Jesus had told the rich young ruler, “‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22). Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to follow through on his statements. The Twelve Apostles had already done what Jesus asked the rich young ruler to do (Matthew 19:27-29). Jesus was not being harsh to the rich young ruler; he was just being consistent, and offering the rich young ruler the same opportunity that he offered to the Twelve Apostles.

Justin Martyr, addressing the Emperor Antoninus Pius in 155 AD, stated²³ that it is not just those who say the right words that are Christians, but those who do what He said. Quite appropriately, when the rich young ruler came to Jesus, the issue Jesus raised was doing what He said, and not just in saying the right words.

“We ought to worship God alone; He thus persuaded us. The greatest commandment is, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve, with all your heart, and with all your strength, the Lord God that made you’

²² The Greek word is *didaskalos*, meaning teacher or master, both in John 13:13 and in Matthew 19:16. A different Greek word is used in Matthew 23:10, *kathegetes*, meaning a leader.

²³ Justin Martyr, First Apology, 16.

(Mark 12:30 loosely). When a certain man came to Him and said, 'Good Master', He answered, 'No one is good but One, that is, God, who made all things' (Matthew 19:17). And let those who are not found living as He taught, be understood to be not Christians, even though they profess with the lip the precepts of Christ. For not those who make profession, but those who do the works, shall be saved, according to His word. 'Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 7:21). 'For whoever hears Me, and does what I ask, hears Him that sent Me' (Luke 10:16 loosely). 'Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:22-23) 'Then shall there be wailing and gnashing of teeth, when the righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and the wicked are sent into everlasting fire' (Matthew 13:42-43). 'For many shall come in My name, clothed outwardly in sheep's clothing, but inwardly being ravenous wolves. By their works you shall know them' (Matthew 7:15-16). 'Every tree, that does not bear good fruit, gets cut down and thrown into the fire' (Matthew 7:19). And as to those who are not living pursuant to His teachings, and are Christians only in name, we ask that you punish them all."

Jerome wrote²⁴ to a wealthy nobleman, Julian, to console him over the death of his wife and two of his daughters, encouraging Julian to imitate the Apostles and remain celibate. In doing so, Jerome advised Julian to do what is best with his deceased daughters' inheritance, donating it to the poor; by doing this, he could do what the rich young synagogue ruler was unable to do.

"Once a rich young man boasted that he had fulfilled all the requirements of the Law. But the Lord said to him, 'One thing you lack; if you will be perfect, go sell whatever you have, and give to the poor; and come follow me' (Mark 10:21; Matthew 19:21). He, who declared that he had already done everything, gave in at the first challenge by the power of riches. Those, who are rich, find it hard to enter the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that desires that its citizens' souls soar aloft free from all ties and hindrances. The Lord said to sell not a part of your substance but 'all that you have, and give to the poor'; not to your friends or relatives, not to your wife or your children. Give everything to the poor and make to yourself friends by the mammon of unrighteousness that, when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home" (Luke 16:9).

"Your wife can no longer draw you earthward, but you can follow her as she draws you heavenward. Provide good things for your children who have gone home before you to the Lord. Use their portions of their inheritance to ransom your own soul and to give sustenance to the needy. These are the necklaces your daughters expect from you; these are the jewels they wish to see sparkle on their foreheads. The money, which they would have wasted in buying silks, may well be considered saved when it provides cheap clothing for the poor. They ask you for their portions. Now that they are united to the Lord, their spouse, they don't

²⁴ Jerome, Letter to Julian, CXVIII, 4.

wish to appear poor and undistinguished; they desire to have the ornaments that fit their rank.”

HERESIES OF THE RESURRECTION

August 31, 2014
12th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision F

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

At first glance, the Epistle lesson is little more than Paul's summary of some of the eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection. In some places in the West, this text is part of the Easter Sunday reading for that reason. But as John Chrysostom points out, there's a lot more involved.

Background: The Heresies in Corinth

To begin, let us understand the context. Paul founded the Church in Corinth in about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey. With Paul at the time were Timothy, Andronicus, and Silas and he met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). All these were members of the original Seventy, except Paul. Paul stayed and taught in Corinth for a year and a half, one of his longest stays anywhere. Prior to writing this Epistle in 55 AD, Apollos (another of the Seventy) and the Apostle Peter had visited and taught in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12). Both Apollos and Peter had spoken very vigorously defending the Faith (Acts 18:27-28, 1 Corinthians 3:6-8). When Paul left Corinth in 52 AD, Silas stayed behind to confirm what Paul established and tradition recognizes²⁵ Silas as the first bishop of Corinth (ordained jointly by Paul and Peter). Silas also was one of the leading men of the Church in Jerusalem and was a prophet (Acts 15:22, 32).

So then, with all this high-powered teaching, why does Paul need to remind the Corinthians about the Resurrection? This is not something new to them! We get a hint in the verses following the Epistle lesson; some among the church in Corinth had been saying that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12). About 12 years later (67 AD) Paul wrote to Timothy about Hymenaeus and Philetus who taught that the resurrection is already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Hymenaeus and Philetus were followers of the Heresiarch Simon Magus²⁶, and Paul referred to their teaching as spreading like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17). This heresy had been having some effect on the churches and a few years earlier, Paul had felt it necessary to deliver Hymenaeus over to Satan in order that he might learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20). Paul is recorded as doing something this drastic only one other time: to the man in Corinth who married his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Obviously this is no small matter! Other notable followers of Simon Magus are listed in Table 1:

John Chrysostom had to address a similar heresy in his day that was promoted by Manichaeus (known as Manes in the East). The Manichaeans contended that death means being in sin and resurrection means being delivered from sin. By death, the Manichaeans contended, Paul means nothing else than our being in sin; and by resurrection, he means our being delivered from our sins. Thus, after one is baptized, the resurrection is already past, according to Manichaeus, since one is delivered from sin. In this aspect, the Manichaean heresy was similar

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²⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 30.

²⁶ For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

Table 1
Apostles Who Apostatized to Follow Simon Magus

Name	Background	Notes	References
Nicholas	Seventy, 1 st Deacon	Follower of Simon	Acts 6:5, Revelation 2:14-15
Demas	Seventy	Follower of Simon	Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:10
Phygellus	Seventy	Follower of Simon	2 Timothy 1:15
Hermogenes	Seventy	Follower of Simon	2 Timothy 1:15
Hymenaeus		Follower of Simon	1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17-18
Philetus		Follower of Simon	1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17-18

to that of Hymenaeus, and both heresies derived from the teachings of Simon Magus. Chrysostom addressed²⁷ how the subject of the Resurrection of Christ was being abused in Corinth by those associated with Hymenaeus and Philetus. This was a very serious heresy that Paul called “gangrene”; it was being promoted by very crafty demons, and Paul was not ignorant of their devices.

“In men’s bodies, when fever lays hold of their nerves, veins and the primary elements, the problem becomes incurable unless it receive much attention; this was likely to happen in Corinth. Their heresy was proceeding to the very elements of godliness; therefore Paul uses strong conviction. He was not speaking now of morals, fornication, covetousness, or head covering; they were at variance with the resurrection itself. Because this is all our hope, against this point did the devil make a vehement stand! At one time he was wholly subverting it; at another time his word was that it was ‘already past’, which Paul called gangrene, as a wicked doctrine, and those that brought it in he branded heretics. ‘Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some’ (2 Timothy 2:17, 18). At one time they said this; but at another time, they said that the body does not rise again but the purification of the soul is the resurrection.”

“These things that wicked demon persuaded them to say, not wishing to overturn the resurrection only, but also to show that all the things done for our sakes are a fable. For if the Corinthians were persuaded that there is no resurrection of the body, he would have gradually persuaded them that neither was Christ raised. Then he would introduce in due course, that Christ had not come nor had He done what He did. For such is the craft of the devil! Therefore Paul calls it ‘cunning craftiness’, because he does not immediately indicate what he intends to effect, for fear of being detected, but dressing himself up in a mask of one kind, he fabricates arts of another kind. Like a crafty enemy attacking a city with walls, he secretly undermines it from below, where it is hardly guarded against; thus he succeeds in his endeavors. Paul continually detected such snares on his part, and his crafty ambushes; he said, ‘For we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11). Here Paul unfolds the deceit of the devil and points out his whole strategy; whatever he intended to do, Paul discloses to us, with great exactness, going over everything. He secures agreement not by reasoning, but by

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVII, 1.

things, which had already happened, and which the Corinthians had received and believed to have taken place, a thing, which was most of all apt to shame them, and grab them. For this cause then he begins here, implying that he needs no other witnesses to prove he is speaking the truth, but those very persons who were deceived.”

The heresies of Hymenaeus had major implications for the Christian Faith. For if there is no resurrection, then (1) Christ is not raised; (2) Paul’s preaching is empty; (3) your faith is in vain; (4) Paul is a false witness; and (5) you are still in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:13-17).

Manichaeus went beyond this to say that Christ did not take a human body; thus he denied the Incarnation also. This was part of the teachings of Simon Magus²⁸ also, and one of the purposes of icons in the early Church -- especially the ones “written” by the Evangelist Luke -- is the testimony of the Incarnation that comes from displaying the Virgin Mary holding her young Child. That is to say, looking at the icon, “Here is the Virgin Mary holding her young Son! How can you say that He is not a man? Are you daft?” Chrysostom applied reason²⁹ to Manichaeus’ claims that death means being in sin:

“If this is death and Christ did not take a body, as you suppose, and yet died, He was in sin according to you. Therefore Paul did not simply say, ‘He died’, but added, ‘for our sins’ (1 Corinthians 15:3). For He who dies for others’ sins, it follows that He must Himself be without sin.”

Ex-Deacon Nicolas of Antioch

Another of the individuals involved in these heresies was ex-deacon Nicolas of Antioch, one of the original Seventy Apostles. Although Jesus chose Nicolas as one of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-17), and the saints in Jerusalem chose him as one of the first seven deacons for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3), Nicolas later abandoned the Faith to follow the teachings of the sorcerer and arch heretic Simon Magus. This has rather dire implications since he performed miracles when Jesus sent him out with the Seventy, and he did so again along with the other six deacons.

Hippolytus referred³⁰ to Nicolas as the Bishop of Samaria. The Apostles must have sent Nicolas to Samaria to oversee the work started by Deacon Philip (Acts 8:5-13). Simon Magus, who had grown up in Samaria, must have turned Nicolas from the Faith, after Philip, Peter and John left Samaria (Acts 8:25-26). Simon remained in Samaria for some time, and a great debate occurred³¹ later between him and the Apostle Peter in c. 40 AD. After his debate with the Apostle Peter, Simon went to Antioch, and Nicolas may have followed Simon there.

²⁸ For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVIII, 3.

³⁰ Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 12.

³¹ For details of this debate, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2002. Also see Clement of Rome in Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, I:72 to III:49, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

When Simon went to Antioch in the 40's AD, Nicolas began to follow Simon's teaching that God is the author of evil. Nicolas took this to its extreme, and ended up³² with "lechery that knew no rest by night or day, where Nicolas indulged in his filthy dreams".

Simon taught that only the spirit was resurrected (and that at baptism); it did not matter what one did with the body. Nicolas' followers therefore engaged in grossly immoral practices in keeping with the teachings of Simon³³, who said that to enter fully into their mysteries, they needed to practice all the worst kinds of wickedness in order to escape the cosmic powers³⁴. Because of the grossness of his practices, early writers³⁵ were too embarrassed to even write down the details of what Nicolas and his followers did.

Eusebius gave³⁶ a good description regarding how Nicolas came to be this way. Nicolas tried to imitate the holiness of the Apostles, where they gave up the things of this world for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:29). Since the Apostles had given up the pleasures of the flesh in their relationship with their wives (those Apostles that were married), Nicolas did this also. But whereas the Apostles traveled with their wives (1 Corinthians 9:5), living as brother and sister³⁷, Nicolas gave blanket permission to anyone to marry his wife. Nicolas' followers took his words literally and practiced open fornication with her (Revelation 2:6, 15), and Nicolas was branded a heretic because he didn't correct them. Thus he sought to be perfected in the flesh instead of setting his mind on the Spirit (Galatians 3:3, 4:9).

The effect of Nicolas doing this was the same as Balaam's counsel to the king of Moab, and the Apostle John criticized Nicolas very strongly for doing this. Balaam had been hired by Moab to get God to curse Israel, but he couldn't curse what the Lord had blessed (Numbers 23-25). Therefore he taught Moab to entice Israel into fornication using young Moabite prostitutes, telling them that by doing so, Israel would become defiled and the Lord would then curse Israel.

Matthias, in his life, illustrated³⁸ what the Apostle Paul later wrote down regarding restricting the flesh. Paul counseled his Churches that in our flesh nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). If we set our mind on the things of the flesh and live according to the flesh, this is death. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6, 13). This happens because the fleshly mind is at enmity with God and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8). Therefore, Paul counseled, do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4), and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:14).

The Guidelines: Everything Must Be According to the Scriptures

In addressing the heretics in Corinth, Paul stated, "I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was

³² Jerome, "Dialogue Against the Luciferians", 23, Treatises, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6.

³³ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

³⁴ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

³⁵ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

³⁶ Eusebius, Church History, III, 29.

³⁷ Paul referred to the other Apostles, including Peter and the brothers of the Lord (Jude and Joseph Barsabbas) as traveling with "a sister, a wife" (1 Corinthians 9:5).

³⁸ Eusebius, Church History, III, 29, quoting Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, 4.

buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This statement by Paul has also been incorporated into the Nicene Creed: “He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures”.

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote³⁹ about some of the things that Paul meant by “according to the Scriptures” in describing Christ’s Passion. The Prophets describe the details of His Passion, thus giving us confidence that this is of God.

“The sun was darkened⁴⁰, because of the Sun of Righteousness⁴¹. Rocks were split⁴², because of the spiritual Rock⁴³. Tombs were opened, and the dead arose⁴⁴, because of Him who was free among the dead⁴⁵; He sent forth His prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water⁴⁶. Don’t be ashamed of the Crucified, but be bold to say, ‘He bears our sins, and endures grief for us, and with His stripes⁴⁷ we are healed’. Let us be thankful to our Benefactor. And again; ‘for the transgression⁴⁸ of my people He was led to death; and I will give the wicked for His burial, and the rich for His death’. Therefore Paul says plainly that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

“We seek to know clearly where He has been buried. Is His tomb made with hands? Is it like the tombs of kings, raised above the ground? Is the Sepulcher made of stones joined together? What is laid upon it? Tell us, Prophets, the exact truth concerning His tomb; where is He laid, and where may we seek Him? They say, ‘Look into the solid rock⁴⁹ which you have hewn’. Look in and behold. You have in the Gospels, ‘In a sepulcher hewn⁵⁰ in stone, which was hewn out of a rock’. What kind of door does the sepulcher have? Another Prophet says, ‘they cut off My life in a dungeon, and laid a stone upon Me⁵¹. I, who am the Chief corner-stone⁵², the elect, the precious, lie for a little time within a stone. I, who am a stone of stumbling⁵³ to the Jews; I am a stone of salvation to them who believe. The Tree of life⁵⁴ therefore was planted in the earth, that the earth which had been cursed⁵⁵ might enjoy the blessing, and that the dead might be released.”

³⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIII, 34-35.

⁴⁰ Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44-45.

⁴¹ Malachi 4:2.

⁴² Matthew 27:51

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 10:4, Exodus 17:6.

⁴⁴ Matthew 27:52-53

⁴⁵ Psalm 88:4-5 LXX.

⁴⁶ Zechariah 9:11.

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:5.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 53:8-9.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 51:1 LXX.

⁵⁰ Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53.

⁵¹ Lamentations 3:53; Jeremiah 37:16 in the sense that Jeremiah prefigured Christ in his work.

⁵² Isaiah 28:16, 1 Peter 2:6.

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:8,

⁵⁴ Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24; Revelation 22:7, 22:2, 14; Proverbs 3:13-18.

⁵⁵ Genesis 3:17.

Hilary of Poitiers said⁵⁶ that unsupported statements, those not predicted by the Scriptures, could lead to error; basing everything on the Scriptures is always safe, especially for weak and sensitive believers. The reverent confession of the hidden mystery of God is always safe. Paul was careful to leave no room for doubt, so that we would not be driven about by every wind of vain teaching.

“Paul stated, ‘I delivered to you first of all that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures’ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is no unsupported statement of his own, which might lead to error, but a warning to us to confess that Christ died and rose after a real manner, not a nominal, since the fact is certified by the full weight of Scripture authority. We must understand His death in that exact sense in which Scripture declares it. In his regard for the perplexities of the sensitive believer, he adds these solemn concluding words, according to the Scriptures, to his proclamation of the death and the resurrection. He would not have us grow weaker, driven about by every wind of vain teaching, or bothered by false doubts. He summons in us faith to return to the haven of piety, before we get shipwrecked, confessing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God, according to the Scriptures. This is the safeguard of reverence against the attack of the adversary, to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as it was written of Him. There is no danger in faith: the reverent confession of the hidden mystery of God is always safe. Christ was born of the Virgin, but conceived⁵⁷ of the Holy Spirit according to the Scriptures. Christ wept; but according to the Scriptures, that which made⁵⁸ Him weep was also a cause of joy. Christ hungered; but according to the Scriptures, He used⁵⁹ His power as God against the tree, which bore no fruit, when He had no food. Christ suffered; but according to the Scriptures, He was about to sit⁶⁰ at the right hand of Power. He complained that He was abandoned to die; but according to the Scriptures, at the same moment, He received⁶¹ in His kingdom in Paradise the thief who confessed Him. He died; but according to the Scriptures, He rose⁶² again and sits at the right hand of God. In the belief of this mystery there is life; this confession resists all attack.”

“Paul was careful to leave no room for doubt. We can say, ‘Christ was born, suffered, was dead and buried, and rose again’, but we cannot say how. He rests the merits of faith entirely on the confession of unquestioning reverence. The righteousness, he says, which is of faith says thus, ‘Say not in your heart, “Who has ascended into heaven”, that is, to bring Christ down; or “Who has descended into the abyss”; that is, to bring Christ up from the dead? But what does the Scripture say? Your word is near, in your mouth, and in your heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach. Because if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart, that God has raised Him up

⁵⁶ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, X, 67-68.

⁵⁷ Matthew 1:18 versus Matthew 1:20.

⁵⁸ John 11:35 versus Luke 24:52 and John 16:21-24

⁵⁹ Matthew 21:18-21, Mark 11:13-22.

⁶⁰ Luke 22:63-71.

⁶¹ Matthew 27:46 versus Luke 23:43.

⁶² Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23.

from the dead, you shall be saved' (Romans 10:9, Deuteronomy 30:12-14). Faith perfects the righteous man, as it is written, 'Abraham believed God⁶³ and it was reckoned to him for righteousness'. Did Abraham criticize the word of God, when he was promised the inheritance of the Gentiles, and posterity as many as the sand or the stars for multitude? (Genesis 22:17, Hebrews 11:12) To the reverent faith, which trusts implicitly on the omnipotence of God, the limits of human weakness are no barrier."

Tertullian emphasized⁶⁴ that the resurrection was the issue in Corinth; the issue revolved around what the Scriptures foretold and around what happened with Christ's human body.

"The point that Paul labors hard to make us believe, is the resurrection of the dead, which the heretics denied. He wished them to believe on the strength of the example, which he cited: the Lord's resurrection. An example is borrowed from like circumstances. How then did Christ rise again? In the flesh, no doubt, since you are told that He 'died according to the Scriptures', and 'that He was buried according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), no other way than in the flesh. It was also in the flesh that He was raised from the dead. The same body, which fell in death, and which lay in the sepulcher, also rose again; it was not so much Christ in the flesh, as the flesh in Christ. If, therefore, we are to rise again after the example of Christ, who rose in the flesh, we shall certainly rise in the flesh like Him."

Cyril of Jerusalem noted⁶⁵ that given the evidence and testimony about the Resurrection, it is more difficult to disbelieve than to believe.

"He who descended into the regions beneath the earth came up again; Jesus truly rose again the third day. If the Jews ever confront you, meet them face to face by asking thus. Did Jonah come out from the sea monster on the third day, and has not Christ risen from the earth on the third day? If a dead man was raised to life after touching the bones of Elisha, is it not much easier for the Maker of mankind to be raised by the power of the Father? He truly rose, and after He had risen, His disciples saw him. Twelve disciples were witnesses of His Resurrection; they bore witness not in pleasing words, but maintained their testimony even to torture and death for the truth of the Resurrection. 'Every word shall be established by the mouth of two or three⁶⁶ witnesses', according to the Scripture, and, though twelve bear witness to the Resurrection of Christ, are you still incredulous in regard to His Resurrection?"

Paul was not content to say that Jesus died for our sins but also said "according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4). For example, some prophecies of Christ's Resurrection are:

- "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Psalm 22:16)
- "They will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10)
- "He was wounded for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5).

⁶³ Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23

⁶⁴ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, II, vi, 48.

⁶⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, IV, 12.

⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

- “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. After my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27).
- “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption: (Psalm 16:10).
- “O Lord, You brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit” (Psalm 30:3).
- “After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (Hosea 6:2).
- “I have been reckoned with them that go down to the pit; I became as a man without help; free among the dead⁶⁷, as the slain ones cast out, who sleep in the tomb; whom You remember no more; and they are rejected from Your hand. They laid me in the lowest pit, in dark *places*, and in the shadow of death” (Psalm 88:4-7).
- The illustration of Jonah, which was the only sign given to the generation who crucified Him (Matthew 12:39). Jonah cried in his affliction out of the belly of Hell (Jonah 2:2 LXX). Though in the sea monster, he said that he was in Hell, and his head went down to the chasms of the mountains. Though he was in the sea, Jonah said he went down to the earth (Jonah 2:5-6). On the third day, Jonah came up out of the grave (Jonah 1:17, Matthew 12:40).
- Then Elisha died, and they buried him. The raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet” (2 Kings 13:20-21)
- “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise”, says the Lord; “I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns” (Psalm 12:5).

Christ’s Resurrection on the Third Day

Paul stated, “He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4). To understand where and how the Scripture states this takes a little searching, since there is no direct statement in the Prophets that Christ would rise on the third day. Instead this prophecy was hidden in plain sight, and Israel celebrated the event every year, without knowing what it meant. To understand this in the context of the ancient Israel, we need to be familiar with the ancient Feast Days of Israel at the time of Passover. Seen in this perspective, we can say, “Of course, Christ was supposed to rise from the dead on the third day, just like grain, that is planted in the earth and dies” (John 12:24).

The Passover Feast consisted of four distinct feast days, the first three of which are celebrated today in the Orthodox Church as Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Pascha. The fourth, which speaks of the final deliverance from sin, will be fulfilled when the Lord returns at the Second Coming. These are summarized in Table 1.

⁶⁷ That is, free as opposed to being bound like the others in Hades.

Table 1
Events of the Week of Passover

Day	Sabbath?	Event Remembered	Fulfilled By	Meaning
14 th Nisan	No	Slaying Paschal Lamb	The Crucifixion	Turning from Sin
15 th Nisan	Yes	Exodus from Egypt	Death of Christ	Deliverance
16 th Nisan	No	First Fruit Barley Sheaf	The Resurrection	Holiness
21 st Nisan	Yes	Crossing Red Sea	Second Coming	The Power of Sin

The Day of the Lord's Passover: (14th Nisan). This was the day (not a Sabbath) that the lamb was slain in Egypt and its blood was applied to the door and the lintel of the houses using a motion that traced out a cross (Exodus 12:7, 12:22). The lamb was roasted whole on a spit that formed the shape of a cross, where this roasting indicates the suffering of the Cross⁶⁸. As a result of the blood of the lamb on the door of the house, where the "house" is the soul or the dwelling of the spirit, the Lord "passed over" that house during the tenth plague on Egypt (Exodus 12:23). At the same hour of the day as the slaying of the lamb, Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:33-37) as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36). In both cases, the blood of the lamb provided deliverance from death (Heb 9:26-28, 1 Pet. 3:18). Passover thus represents a repentance or turning to the Lord for salvation and a deliverance from the "Egypt of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-26) and "slavery to sin" (Deuteronomy 6:12). The Passover was eaten with loins girded, sandals on the feet and the staff in their hand (Exodus 12:11). We also eat sandaled and girded for two reasons. Both we must depart out of our Egypt, and we must live this life as in a strange country (Philippians 3:20). Also taking place on the 14th of Nisan was the institution of the Lord's Table. This is the blood of the New Testament (Matthew 26:26-29), which replaced the Passover, and which prefigures the Kingdom of God in glory (Luke 22:16). Athanasius encouraged⁶⁹ his people not to celebrate the Passover after an earthly manner, but as keeping festival with the angels in heaven.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread: (15th to 21st of Nisan). On the 15th of Nisan, a Sabbath, Israel left Egypt, never to return (Exodus 12:11-13, 51). Also on this day, Jesus descended into hell and led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-10). From the 15th to 21st of Nisan, the Lord began to lead His people personally as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). John Chrysostom stated⁷⁰,

"We too have a pillar of fire, the grace of the Spirit. We too have our encampment (Revelation 20:9), and we dwell in the desert even now; for a desert without virtue, is the earth even now, even more desolate than that wilderness which was not as barren of fruits as is this human nature. Yet let us not be afraid; for the leader of this our Exodus is not Moses, but Jesus."

During the eight days of Passover, no leaven was allowed in any of the houses of the people of God (Exodus. 12:15). Leaven represents malice and wickedness as opposed to the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Chrysostom stated⁷¹,

⁶⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Trypho*, 40.

⁶⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* VI, 12.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XXIII, Moral.

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XV, 8.

“For if they so carefully clear their houses of leaven, and pry into mouse-holes, much more ought we to search through the soul so as to cast out every unclean thought”.

We need to examine ourselves before partaking of the blood of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:28). The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures separation from an old life of a bondage to sin and various wickedness, and the beginning of a life of real righteousness, having been purified from former sins (2 Peter 1:9). Athanasius encouraged⁷² his people to as follows:

“Approach the feast, not with filthy clothing, but having clothed your minds with pure garments. For we need to put on our Lord Jesus, that we may be able to celebrate the feast with Him. For to those who keep the feast in purity, the Passover is heavenly food; but to those who observe it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and reproach. For it is written, ‘Whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 11:27). Therefore let us be prepared to draw near to the divine Lamb, and to touch heavenly food. Let us cleanse our hands, let us purify the body, let us keep our whole mind from guile”.

The Day of First Fruits: (16th of Nisan). This was the first of the harvest festivals and was only celebrated on entering the Land. On this day, the third day after Passover (not a Sabbath), the first sheaf of the barley harvest was offered as a wave offering (Leviticus 23:10-14). Also on this day, Israel recalled the resurrection of the nation by a mighty Hand, an outstretched arm, awe-inspiring terror, signs and wonders. Then Jew and Gentile together rejoiced in all their blessings (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). Also on this day, Jesus rose from the dead as the first fruits of man’s compound nature (i.e. body and soul), the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep and the first fruits of those who are His at His Coming (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). In becoming the first fruits of the Resurrection, He made Himself the way, the image and the pattern, in order that we, too, may become by adoption what He is Himself by nature. “If the first fruit is holy, the lump also is holy” (Romans 11:16). Thus the Resurrection of Christ was hidden in plain sight for almost 1500 years, and the people of God rehearsed it every year without knowing what they were rehearsing.

Additionally, John of Damascus referred⁷³ to the bread of the Lord’s Table as another kind of first fruit. This bread is the first fruits of the future bread, which is necessary for existence. It is fitting to speak so of the Lord’s body, for the Lord’s flesh is life-giving spirit because it was conceived of the life-giving Spirit. For what is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

The Crossing of the Red Sea: (21st of Nisan). This Feast Day is also a Sabbath, and is the traditional date for the crossing of the Red Sea. In the history of Israel, this day represented the final deliverance of Israel from the power of Egypt; the analogy for us is that we will one day be delivered from the power of sin. Israel had been freed on the 15th of the month of Nisan, and left Egypt; but Pharaoh changed his mind about their freedom and pursued them. Unlike the other three feast days of Passover, there is nothing recorded in the Gospels that occurred on the

⁷² Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, V, 5.

⁷³ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Christian Faith, IV, 13.

21st of Nisan to fulfill this Feast Day. Since this day is a Sabbath, a very important day, we must conclude that this day gives us prophetic insight into the Second Coming of Christ. In our lives, we go about carrying around the body of this sin (Romans 7:13-25). When the Lord returns, we will finally be delivered from the power of sin, just as Israel was delivered from the power of Egypt.

John Chrysostom, in showing the Manichaean fallacy, pointed out⁷⁴ other parts of Scripture that speak of Christ rising from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4).

- “No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the Prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so the Son of man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39-40).
- “By the bush in the desert. For even as that bush burned, yet it was not consumed (Exodus 3:2); so also that body died indeed, but was not continuously held by death.”
- “In a Messianic account from Isaiah, ‘His life is taken from the earth’” (Isaiah 53:8, 10, 11).
- “And from David, ‘For You will not leave My soul in Sheol, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption’” (Psalm 16:10).

The 500 Brethren Who Were Eyewitnesses

Paul was presenting an argument against a heresy, attributed to Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-23), that stated that Christ was not a man, and that would grow to be a major obstacle to the Faith. Paul had a distinct advantage in refuting this heresy that John Chrysostom didn't; namely, that there were a number of eyewitnesses to all these things that were still alive and would testify to its accuracy. These included (from 1 Corinthians 15:5-8):

- Peter
- The Twelve (except James Zebedee who had already been martyred)
- 500 Brethren at once, most of whom were still alive
- James, the Lord's brother, now Bishop of Jerusalem
- All the Apostles, including the Seventy
- Paul himself

The battle Paul faced with these heretics continued for centuries, and Paul warned the Ephesian elders about them (Acts 20:17-31). In another letter that Paul wrote later that same year (55 AD), he referred to these heretics as “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his servants also transform themselves into servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁵ that there were many appearances of Christ to various disciples, and Paul probably did not list all the appearances. Paul also did not place the order of appearances in order of importance; that is, the 500 brethren were not necessarily more important

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVIII, 4.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVIII, 5.

than James, His brother, whom the Lord Himself ordained and made Bishop of Jerusalem first. Christ had a reason regarding who He appeared to first.

“Christ first sowed the seeds of faith. He that saw Him first and was exactly and fully assured told it to the rest. Their report came first and placed the hearer in expectation of this great wonder, making way for the faith of sight. He did not appear to all together, nor in the beginning to many, but to one alone first, and him the leader of the whole company and the most faithful, since there was great need of a most faithful soul to be first to receive this sight. Those who saw him after others had seen him, and heard it from them, had in their testimony what contributed in no small degree to their own faith and tended to prepare their mind beforehand. He who was first counted worthy to see Him, had need of great faith, so as not to be confused by a sight so contrary to expectation. Therefore he appeared to Peter first. He that first confessed Him to be Christ was justly also counted worthy first to behold His resurrection. Not on this account alone does He appear to him first, but also because he had denied Him. Christ desired to comfort him and to signify that he need not despair; before He appeared to the rest, He granted Peter this sight and to him first entrusted His sheep. For the same reason He appeared to the women first. Because they were made inferior, therefore both in His birth and in His resurrection, they first tasted of His grace.”

Paul the “Abortion” – “Born Out of Due Time”

After listing a number of witnesses to Christ’s Resurrection, Paul stated that “last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8). The words “one born out of due time” (Greek: *to ektromati*) means literally *the abortion*. A literal translation is, “last of all, as if to an abortion, He was seen by me also”. Unwanted by his people after his conversion, Paul felt like an unwanted child. In the following paragraphs, the euphemism “one born out of due time” will be translated “abortion” to better portray Paul’s words in the graphic way it was written.

Others of the saints have spoken similarly about themselves. John Chrysostom noted⁷⁶ that while Paul called himself an abortion and unworthy of the title of Apostle (1 Corinthians 15:8-9), Peter said, “Depart from me because I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). Likewise Matthew styled himself a publican even in the days of his Apostleship (Matthew 10:3). David cried out, “My iniquities have gone over my head, and as a heavy burden have been burdensome to me” (Psalm 38:4). Isaiah lamented, “I am unclean, and have unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). The three youths in the furnace confessed that they had sinned and transgressed, and had not kept the commandments of God⁷⁷. Daniel made the same lamentation (Daniel 9:5-6).

Chrysostom also pointed⁷⁸ out the links between pride, true understanding and knowing ourselves. Paul, along with the greatest of the saints was very humble, but knew himself well; Satan on the other hand was very arrogant, and was ignorant of everything.

⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say that Demons Govern Human Affairs, I, 1.

⁷⁷ Lancelot Brenton, “Song of the Three Children”, 5-6, in The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990.

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXV, 5.

“Ungratefulness numbs and deadens the soul and springs from pride, from thinking one’s self worthy of something. But the contrite will acknowledge grounds of thanksgiving to God, not for good things only, but also for what seems to be adverse. No matter how much he may suffer, the contrite will count none of his sufferings undeserved. Let us then also, the more we advance in virtue, so much the more make ourselves contrite; for indeed this, more than anything else is virtue. The sharper our insight is, the more thoroughly do we learn how distant we are from the sky; so the more we advance in virtue, so much the more are we instructed in the difference between God and us. This is no small part of true wisdom, to be able to perceive what we deserve. He best knows himself, who accounts himself to be nothing. Thus we see that both David and Abraham, when they attained the highest pitch of virtue, then best fulfilled this; and would call themselves, the one, ‘earth and ashes’ (Genesis 18:27), the other, ‘a worm’ (Psalm 22:6). All the saints too, like these, acknowledge their own wretchedness. So that he surely who is lifted up in boasting, is the person who is most ignorant of himself. In our common practice we tend to say of the proud, ‘he doesn’t know himself’, ‘he is ignorant of himself’. He that doesn’t know himself, whom will he know? Just as he that knows himself will know all things, so he who doesn’t know this, neither will he know the rest.”

“Such a one was Lucifer (i.e. Satan) who said, ‘I will exalt my throne above the Heavens’ (Isaiah 14:13 LXX). Being ignorant of himself, Lucifer was ignorant of everything else. But not so Paul; he rather used to call himself ‘an abortion’ (1 Corinthians 15:8), and last of the saints (Ephesians 3:8), and did not account himself to be worthy so much as of the title of Apostle (1 Corinthians 15:9), even after so many great deeds⁷⁹ of goodness. Therefore let us emulate and follow Him! We shall follow Him, if we rid ourselves of earth, and of things on earth. For nothing makes a man to be so ignorant of himself, as being riveted to worldly concerns. Nothing else causes men to be riveted to worldly concerns, as ignorance of one’s self, for these things depend upon each other. Just as he that is fond of outward glory, and highly esteems the things present, if he strives forever, is not permitted to understand himself. So he that overlooks these things will easily know himself; and having come to the knowledge of himself, he will proceed in order to all the other parts of virtue.”

Chrysostom noted⁸⁰ that even though Paul implied that no man is worthy to pass judgment on him (1 Corinthians 4:3-5), but yet this does not mean that Paul is arrogant:

“First, Paul said these things not for his own sake, but wishing to rescue others from the odiousness, which they had incurred from the Corinthians. Second, he doesn’t limit only the Corinthians from judging, but himself also.”

“Paul knew how to speak eloquently, but he didn’t speak out of pride or arrogance. He said what he did, not as lifting up himself, but as taking down other men’s sails, and seeking to honor the saints at Corinth. To prove that Paul

⁷⁹ Paul did so many miraculous good deeds that people took handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul’s body, and used these garments to heal the sick (Acts 19:11-12). This was similar to the effect of Peter’s shadow in healing the sick (Acts 5:15).

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XI, 2.

was very humble, hear what his enemies said on this point. ‘His bodily presence is weak, and his speech is despicable’ (2 Corinthians 10:10). And again, ‘Last of all, as to an abortion, He appeared to me also’ (1 Corinthians 15:8). But see this lowly man, when he was called, to what a fervor he raises the spirit of the disciples, not teaching pride but instilling a wholesome courage. In the same context he said, ‘If the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?’” (1 Corinthians 6:2)

Paul: the Least of the Apostles?

Paul, in his humility, stated, “I am the least of the Apostles, who am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9). And also, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

Yet Paul also stated, “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent Apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge” (2 Corinthians 11:5-6). He was speaking of Peter, James, the Lord’s brother, and John, where James, the son of Zebedee was already martyred (Acts 12:2). This implies that most people considered Paul to be inferior to the other Apostles.

John Chrysostom stated⁸¹ that those who corrupted the Corinthians had an advantage in that they were well trained in public speaking. Paul was not ashamed of his inability as a good orator, but even prided himself in it. Not only does being a good orator contribute nothing to the preaching, but also it even throws a shadow on the glory of the Cross. Paul said, “I did not come to you with excellence of speech or of wisdom lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect” (1 Corinthians 2:1, 1:17).

“When a comparison was necessary, Paul compared himself with the Apostles; but when no necessity urged him, he said that he is ‘the least of the Apostles’, and not worthy even of the title. He knew that this would be most advantageous to the disciples (2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5:11-12). He accused the false Apostles as ‘walking in craftiness’, yet he did not live by concentrating on outward appearances, nor preach ‘handling the word deceitfully’ (2 Corinthians 4:2), and corrupting it. Those men were one thing and appeared another, but not Paul. He did nothing to curry men’s opinion and concealed nothing about himself. ‘In everything we have made it clear to you’. But what does this mean? ‘We are not eloquent’, he said, ‘and do not conceal it; we receive from some persons and we do not keep it secret. We receive then from you, and we don’t pretend that we received nothing, as they do when they receive, but we make everything that we do clear to you’”.

Jerome observed⁸² that the very fact of Paul’s humbling himself shows that there is the possibility that there are Apostles of higher or lower rank. God is not unjust that He will forget

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIII, v. 6.

⁸² Jerome, Against Jovinianus, II, 23, in Treatises.

the work of him, who is called the chosen vessel of election, and who labored more abundantly than they all, or assign equal rewards to unequal merits.

Gregory Nazianzen noted⁸³ the contrasts in the life of the Apostle Paul. All this occurred because Paul, in his humility, didn't seek his own interests, but those of his Churches.

“He gives laws for slaves and masters, rulers and ruled, husbands and wives, parents and children, marriage and celibacy, self-discipline and indulgence, wisdom and ignorance, circumcision and uncircumcision, Christ and the world, the flesh and the spirit. On behalf of some he gives thanks, others he criticizes. Some he names his joy and crown, others he charges with foolishness. Some who are taking a straight course he accompanies, sharing in their zeal; others he checks, who are going wrong. At one time he excommunicates, at another he confirms his love; at one time he grieves, at another rejoices; at one time he feeds with milk; at another he handles mysteries. At one time he condescends, at another he raises to his own level; at one time he threatens a rod, at another he offers the spirit of meekness; at one time he is haughty toward the lofty, at another lowly toward the lowly. At one time he says that he is least of the Apostles, at another he offers a proof of Christ speaking in him. At one time he longs for departure and is being poured out as a drink offering; at another he thinks it more necessary for their sakes to remain in the flesh. Paul didn't seek his own interests, but those of his children, whom he has begotten in Christ by the Gospel. This is the aim of all his spiritual authority, in everything to neglect his own in comparison to the advantage of others.”

Unworthy to Be Called an Apostle

Paul stated, “I am the least of the Apostles, who am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9). He mentioned his former life many times in his letters and in Luke's account in Acts, not hiding anything from his former life. For example:

- At the stoning of Stephen, “the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58). Following the stoning of Stephen, Paul “made havoc of the Church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:3).
- In the next few years following the Stoning of Stephen: “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2).
- Paul's methods: “This I also did in Jerusalem and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:10-11).

⁸³ Gregory Nazianzen, In Defense of His Flight to Pontus, II, 54.

- Paul admitted this: “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished” (Acts 22:3-5). “So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him’” (Acts 22:19-20). “I persecuted the Church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13).
- Looking back at his life, Paul said: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:12-13).
- Everyone was aware of Paul’s activity: “Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. Here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name’” (Acts 9:13-14).

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁴ Paul’s humility in listing all the charges against him for his life before his conversion. Paul put it this way so as to make his testimony about the Resurrection more creditable.

“What do Paul’s expressions of humility mean? He spoke modestly in order to show himself worthy of credit and to enroll himself among the witnesses of the resurrection. He spoke modestly first and heaped up many charges against himself (1 Corinthians 15:9). When he came to say, ‘I labored more abundantly than all’ (1 Corinthians 15:10), his words were more acceptable because of its being spoken as a consequence of what went before. Paul first declared his own misery, and then spoke about how he worked harder than everyone. This he did partly to avoid the offensiveness of speaking about himself, and partly that he might recommend what he had to say afterwards. For he that conceals none of the things that are discreditable to him, such as that he persecuted the Church, that he laid waste the Faith, also causes the things that are honorable about him to be above suspicion. Consider the greatness of his humility. Having said, ‘last of all He appeared to me’ (1 Corinthians 15:8), he was not content with this, since ‘Many that are last shall be first and the first last’ (Matthew 20:16). Therefore he added, referring to himself, ‘as to an abortion’ (1 Corinthians 15:8). He didn’t stop here either, but added his own judgment and with a reason, ‘For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not fit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God’” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

“Paul didn’t say that he was the last of the Twelve, but the last of all the other Apostles⁸⁵, such as the Seventy. If he had come forward and said, ‘You ought to believe me that Christ rose from the dead; for I saw Him and of all I am the most worthy of credit, inasmuch as I have labored more’, he might have

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XXXVIII, 6.

⁸⁵ Paul knew most of the Seventy quite well, and he worked with at least 60 of the 70 at some point during his missionary journeys.

offended people who thought he was bragging. But by first dwelling on the humiliating topics, he eliminated what might be grating on the ears, and prepared the way for their belief in his testimony. Therefore he doesn't simply declare himself to be the last, and unworthy of being called an Apostle, but also states the reason, 'because I persecuted the Church' (1 Corinthians 15:9). All those things were forgiven, but nevertheless Paul never forgot them, desiring to signify the greatness of God's favor."

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁶ that Paul was different than the Jewish leaders, since he persecuted the Christians out of zeal for Jewish traditions rather than out of a love of power.

"Why then did other Jews not obtain mercy like Paul? Because what they did, they did willfully, not ignorantly, knowing well what they did. There were several reasons:

- 'Many of the Jews believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God' (John 12:42, 43).
- Christ said to them, 'How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from God' (John 5:44)?
- The parents of the blind man 'said these things for fear of the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue' (John 9:22).
- The Jews themselves said, 'You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him' (John 12:19)!

"Thus their love of power was always in their way. When they admitted that no one can forgive sins but God alone, and Christ immediately did that thing, which they had confessed to be a sign of divinity (Mark 2:5-12), this could not be a case of ignorance."

"Where was Paul at that time? Perhaps he was still sitting at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and took no part with the multitude, which conspired against Jesus⁸⁷, for Gamaliel does not appear to have been an ambitious man. Afterwards Paul joined the multitude when he saw the Christian Faith growing and prevailing. He did not act as the other Jews did, from the love of power, but out of zeal. What was the motive of his journey to Damascus? He thought the doctrine was malicious, and was afraid that the preaching of it would spread everywhere. But with the Jewish leaders, it was the love of power that influenced their actions. Because of this, they said, 'If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation'" (John 11:48).

"It is worthy of inquiry, how one as skillful in the Law as Paul could be so ignorant! It is Paul who says, 'which He had promised before by His holy prophets' (Romans 1:2). How is it that he didn't know? He was zealous for the Law of the fathers, and was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel? Yet the fishermen and the publicans embraced the Gospel, while he that studied the Law was

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, III, v. 13.

⁸⁷ Paul stated that Christ appeared to him last after His Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:8). The implication is that Paul hadn't met Christ before the Crucifixion.

persecuting it! It is for this that he condemned himself, saying, 'I am not fit to be called an Apostle' (1 Corinthians 15:9). He confessed his ignorance, which was produced by unbelief⁸⁸. Because of this, he says, he obtained 'mercy'. When Paul said, 'He counted me faithful?' (1 Timothy 1:12), he meant that he ascribed all his efforts to Him, and assumed nothing for himself, nor claimed for his own the glory, which was due to God. Paul said, 'I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me' (1 Corinthians 15:10). And again, 'It is God who works in you both to will and to do' (Philippians 2:13). In acknowledging that he 'obtained mercy', Paul acknowledged that he deserved punishment; mercy is for those who deserve punishment. Of the Jewish leaders he says, 'Blindness in part has happened to Israel'" (Romans 11:25).

Chrysostom also noted⁸⁹ that the Lord set an example with Paul: if Paul can receive forgiveness, anyone can. Paul had said, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Timothy 1:16).

"Paul further humbles himself, by naming a fresh reason. If he obtained mercy on account of his ignorance, this does not imply that he was a sinner, or under deep condemnation. But to say that he obtained mercy in order that no sinner afterward might despair of finding mercy, this is excessive humiliation. Even in calling himself the chief of sinners, 'a blasphemer and a persecutor, and one not fit to be called an Apostle' (1 Corinthians 15:9), he had said nothing like this."

"This will appear in perspective by an example. Suppose a populous city, where all inhabitants were wicked, some more so, and some less, but all deserving of condemnation. Let one among that multitude be more deserving of punishment than all the rest, and guilty of every kind of wickedness. If the king declared that he was willing to pardon everyone, it would not be so readily believed, as if everyone were to see this most wicked wretch actually pardoned. There could then be no longer any doubt. This is what Paul says, that God, willing to give men full assurance that He pardons all their transgressions, chose, as the object of His mercy, him who was a sinner more than any. 'When I obtained mercy', Paul argues, 'there could be no doubt about others'. We might say, 'If God pardons such a one, he will never punish anybody'; and thus he shows that he himself, though unworthy of pardon, for the sake of others' salvation, first obtained that pardon. Observe his humility; he doesn't say, 'that in me he might show His longsuffering', but 'all longsuffering'. This is as if he had said that greater longsuffering He could not show in any case than in mine, nor find a sinner that so required all His pardon, all His longsuffering."

⁸⁸ It is amazing that Paul could have been aware of Christ's miracles, and yet through unbelief that he could dismiss them as irrelevant. The implications of Paul's writings are that he never actually saw Christ personally. But yet Christ's miracles were the talk of the town, and everyone was aware of what had happened. Unbelief has such strong and blinding effects that one can see and hear, but not connect what has happened to what he knows by heart.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, IV, v. 16.

In this same fashion, as we approach the Lord's Table during the Divine Liturgy, we refer to ourselves as the chief of sinners out of humility.

Chrysostom compared⁹⁰ Paul's humility and gratitude to that of the centurion, Peter and John the Baptist. Paul said, "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). Chrysostom concluded, "Nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one's self with the last".

"When we have servants, we approve them most when, after having performed all their service with good will, they do not think they have done anything great. Therefore, if you want to make your good deeds great, do not think them to be great, and then they will be great. It was in this way that the centurion also said, 'I am not worthy that You should come under my roof' (Matthew 8:8); because of this, he became worthy, and was 'marveled at' above all Jews (Matthew 8:10). Similarly Paul said, 'I am not fit to be called an Apostle' (1 Corinthians 15:9); because of this he became first of all. So likewise John said, 'I am not worthy to loose His sandal strap' (Luke 3:16); because of this he was the 'friend of the Bridegroom' (John 3:29), and the hand, which he said was unworthy to touch His shoes, this Christ drew onto His own head⁹¹. So Peter too said, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8); because of this he became a foundation of the Church. Nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one's self with the last. This is a first principle of all practical wisdom. For he that is humbled, and bruised in heart, will not be vainglorious, wrathful, envious of his neighbor, and will not harbor any other passion. If we were to bruise our heart, though it was stirred by many swelling passions, it could not be lifted up, not ever so little. By mourning for things pertaining to this life, we drive out all the diseases of his soul; much more will he, who mourns for sins, enjoy the blessing of self-restraint."

The Grace of God with Paul

Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). In saying this, Paul not only expressed extreme gratitude to God for allowing him to do what he did, but he also gave all the credit to God, even though Paul worked hard at what he did.

Paul also said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:12-13). John Chrysostom noted⁹² that Paul spoke with great humility and assigned even his own efforts to the mercy of God. Paul needed great strength to do what he did. God "enabled"

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, III, 8.

⁹¹ That is, just as the hand of a priest today blesses the person being baptized, so John did when he baptized Christ.

⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, III, v. 13.

him for this as a “chosen vessel”, and he was grateful that God considered him worthy even though he persecuted those who were trying to be godly.

“Paul acknowledged both his own part and God’s part; and while he ascribed the greater part to the providence of God, he belittles his own. Paul had so heavy a burden to sustain, and he needed much help from above; therefore, ‘He enabled me’ (1 Timothy 1:12). For think what it was to be exposed to daily insults, mockery, snares, dangers, scoffs, rebukes, and death; and not to faint, slip, or turn backward, but though assaulted every day, to bear up manfully, and remain imperturbable. This was the effect of Divine influence, coupled with his own resolution. Christ chose him with a foreknowledge of what he would be; this is plain from the testimony He bore to him before he began his preaching. Paul ‘is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles and kings’ (Acts 9:15). Those who carry the royal standard in war require both strength and skill that they may not let it fall into the hands of the enemy. Similarly those who maintain the Name of Christ, in war and in peace, need strength, to present it uninjured from the attacks of accusers. Great is the strength required to carry the Name of Christ, to maintain it well, and to bear the Cross. For he who in action, word or thought does anything unworthy of Christ does not maintain His Name, and has not Christ dwelling in him. For he that maintains that Name bears it in triumph, not in the assemblies of men, but through the heavens, while all angels stand in awe, and watch him, and admire him.”

“Paul thanked God even for what he did himself, for God ‘enabled’ him. He acknowledged it as a favor from Him that he was ‘a chosen vessel’. Paul thanked God that He ‘thought me worthy of this ministry’ (1 Timothy 1:12); this was proof that He considered Paul faithful. The steward in a house is not only thankful to his master that he is trusted, but considers it as a sign that he holds him more faithful than others; so it is here. Paul magnified the mercy and loving-kindness of God, in describing his former life, ‘I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man’ (1 Timothy 1:13). When he speaks of the still unbelieving Jews, he makes excuses for their guilt. ‘I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge’ (Romans 10:2). Paul was so free from self-love, so full of humility, that he is not satisfied to call himself a persecutor and a blasphemer, but he aggravates his own guilt, showing that it did not stop with himself, that it was not enough that he was a blasphemer, but in the madness of his blasphemy he persecuted those who were willing to be godly.”

John Cassian wrote⁹³ about how impossible it is to escape the evil spirits or make any progress in godliness without the grace of God. We must be protected by Divine compassion. In this, Cassian compared the mercy of God to the Apostle Paul to the mercy shown toward the thief on the Cross and toward King David.

“We can escape the snare of the evil spirits, if in the case of every virtue, in which we feel that we make progress, we say these words of Paul. ‘Not I, but the grace of God with me’, and ‘by the grace of God I am what I am’ (1 Corinthians 15:10); and ‘it is God that works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure’ (Philippians 2:13). As the Author of our salvation Himself also

⁹³ John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia, XII, 9-11.

says, 'He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). And 'unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain'. It is vain for you to rise up early' (Psalm 127:1-2). And 'It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy'" (Romans 9:16).

"For the will and course of no one, however eager, is sufficiently ready for him, while still enclosed in the flesh, which wars against the spirit, to reach so great a prize of perfection, unless he is protected by the divine compassion, so that he is privileged to attain to that which he greatly desires and to which he runs. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights' (James 1:17). 'What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?'" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

"If we recall that thief who by reason of a single confession was admitted into Paradise (Luke 23:40-43), he did not acquire such bliss by the merits of his life, but obtained it by the gift of a merciful God. Or if we consider those two grievous sins⁹⁴ of King David, blotted out by one word of penitence (2 Samuel 12:13), we shall see that neither here were the merits of his works sufficient to obtain pardon for so great a sin, but that the grace of God abounded in excess. When the opportunity for true penitence was taken, He removed the whole weight of sins through the full confession of one word. If we consider also the beginning of the call and salvation of mankind, in which, as Paul says, we are saved not of ourselves, nor of our works, but by the gift and grace of God, we can clearly see how the whole of perfection is 'not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy' (Romans 9:16). He makes us victorious over our faults, without any merits of works and life on our part to outweigh them. No tortures of this body, and no contrition of heart, can be sufficient for the acquisition of that true chastity of the inner man so as to be able to gain that great virtue of purity (which is inherent in the angels alone and naturally occurs in heaven) merely by human efforts, i.e., without the aid of God. The performance of everything good flows from His grace, who by multiplying His bounty has granted such lasting gladness, and vast glory to our feeble will and short and petty course of life."

John Chrysostom, looking⁹⁵ at Paul's life in perspective, concluded that Paul brought many talents and a good work ethic to his ministry, but nothing would have resulted without the gift and power of the Spirit. We face a similar situation; we may have the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, but without a dedication to our ministry, we will not be able to do much.

"Paul had said, that everything is of God, 'according to the gift of His grace' (Ephesians 3:7); for the dignity of this privilege is proportional to the power of the gift. The gift would not have been enough, had it not also implanted power in him."

"This was a work of mighty power, such as no human diligence was equal to. Paul brought three qualifications to the preaching of the word: a fervent zeal, a soul ready to undergo any possible hardship, and knowledge and wisdom

⁹⁴ That is, adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11:2-27). For David's penitence, see 2 Samuel 12:1-14.

⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 7, Moral.

combined. His love of taking on difficult projects, his blamelessness of life, would have resulted in nothing, had he not also received the power of the Spirit.”

“What is the advantage of either taking up our Cross or laying down our life for another, unless we are at the same time prudent and discreet in ‘knowing how we ought to answer each one?’ (Colossians 4:6) Even if miracles are not in our power, yet both the ability to take up our Cross and lay down our life are in our power. Paul contributed so much by his own efforts, yet he attributed everything to grace. This is the act of a very grateful servant. We would never have heard of his good deeds, had not necessity brought him to declare them.”

“Are we worthy to be mentioned in the same context as the name of Paul? He had grace to help him, yet was not satisfied, but contributed ten thousand perils to the work. If we are destitute of that source of confidence, how do we expect either to preserve those who are committed to our charge, or to gain those who have not come to the fold? We have been making a study of self-indulgence, we are searching the world over for ease, and we are unable, or rather unwilling, to endure even the shadow of danger, and are as far distant from his wisdom as heaven is from earth.”

Paul Labored More Abundantly

What did Paul mean when he said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10)? Was Paul aware of what Thomas was doing in India and what Matthew was doing in Africa? How can he say that he labored more abundantly if he didn’t know what all the others of the Twelve were doing? Or is his statement referring to something more limited and local?

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁶ that Paul’s statement, ‘I labored more abundantly than they all’ (1 Corinthians 15:10), referred to his lifelong war with the Jewish leaders following his conversion. Everywhere that Paul went on his missionary journeys, he had great battles with the Jewish leaders⁹⁷. The intensity of the battle against Peter and the other Apostles by the Jewish leaders was not as intense as what Paul faced.

“Paul saw the whole Galatian people in a state of excitement, a flame kindled against their church, and the edifice shaken and tottering. They were filled with the mixed feelings of just anger and despondency, which he has expressed in the words, ‘I wish I could be present with you now, and to change my voice’ (Galatians 4:20). He writes the Epistle as an answer to these charges. This is his aim from the beginning, for those who undermined his reputation had said, ‘The others were disciples of Christ but this man is a disciple of the Apostles’. He began, ‘Paul, an Apostle not from men, neither through man’ (Galatians 1:1). These deceivers had said that Paul was the last of all the Apostles

⁹⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 1-3.

⁹⁷ For example, at Damascus (Acts 9:19-25), Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30), Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-51), Iconium (Acts 14:1-6), Lystra (Acts 14:8-20), Philippi (Acts 16:12-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), Berea (Acts 17:10-15), Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), Jerusalem again (Acts 21:17-23:22), Caesarea (Acts 23:33-26:32) and other places (2 Corinthians 11:24).

and was taught by them, for Peter, James, and John, were both first called, were first among the disciples, and had also been taught by Christ Himself. It was therefore fitting to obey them rather than Paul; and they permitted circumcision and the observance of the Law. In deceiving the Galatians they used this and similar language, belittling Paul. Seeming to exalt the honor of the other Apostles, they induced the Galatians to adhere rigorously to the Law.”

“As they discredited Paul’s teaching, saying it came from men, while Peter’s came from Christ, Paul immediately addressed this point, declaring himself an Apostle ‘not from men, neither through man’. It was Ananias who baptized him, but it was not Ananias who delivered him from the way of error and initiated him into the faith. Christ Himself sent from on high that wondrous voice, whereby He enclosed him in his net. For Peter and his brother, and John and his brother, He called when walking by the seaside (Matthew 4:18); but Paul after His ascension into heaven (Acts 9:3, 4). Just as Peter, Andrew, James and John did not require a second call, but immediately left their nets and all that they had, and followed Him, so Paul at his first call, waged, as soon as he was baptized, an implacable war with the Jews. In this respect he excelled the other Apostles, as he says, ‘I labored more abundantly than they all’ (I Corinthians 15:10). At present, however, he makes no such claim, but is content to be placed on a level with them. Paul’s object was not to establish any superiority for himself, but to overthrow the foundation of their error. The not being ‘from men’ has reference to the Gospel’s root and origin, which is divine. The not being ‘through man’ is peculiar to the Apostles, for He called them not by men’s agency, but by His own.”

“The whole issue was whether Paul was called by man. Paul’s critics said that the office of a teacher had been committed to him by men, namely by the Apostles, and that he needed to obey them. But that men did not entrust it to him, Luke declares in the words, ‘As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate for me Barnabas and Saul”’ (Acts 13:2).

Paul had to deal head-on with 1st century Jewish nationalism, where circumcision represented national identity. The Zealot political party in Jerusalem had its focus on ridding the Holy Land of Roman rule, and they cared much less about spiritual values. To them, a Jew had been identified with circumcision for almost 2000 years because of God’s covenant with Abraham. For Paul, an ex-Pharisee, to come along and say that circumcision was unnecessary; this branded Paul as a national traitor and a religious heretic.

Coupled with Paul’s insistence that circumcision was unnecessary was the practice of the Churches in Judea. The other Apostles agreed with Paul regarding circumcision, as was seen at the Council of Jerusalem in c. 48 AD (Acts 15:22-29). But James, the Lord’s brother and Bishop of Jerusalem, had been teaching the people about the Christ very effectively using all the Old Testament imagery, including circumcision. By 31 AD, many of the Levitical priests had been won over to the Faith (Acts 6:7). By 48 AD, even some of the Pharisees had believed (Acts 15:5), but they had brought some of their nationalistic zeal with them.

John Chrysostom noted that when Paul referred to “the Gospel”, he was referring to the Gospel written by Luke, Paul’s constant traveling companion, and Luke documented Paul’s struggle with the Jewish leaders and circumcision everywhere he went. Since Paul referred to “Our Gospel” when he wrote⁹⁸ to the Thessalonians in c. 50 AD, this implies that Luke had at least a first draft of his Gospel by that time. Chrysostom stated⁹⁹:

“The greater part of the Book of Acts is occupied with the acts of Paul, who ‘labored more abundantly than they all’ (1 Corinthians 15:10). The author of the Book of Acts, Luke, was Paul’s companion, a man, whose high qualities are especially shown in his firm adherence to his Teacher, whom he constantly followed. At a time when everyone had left Paul, one to Galatia, another to Dalmatia, hear what he says of Luke, ‘Only Luke is with me’ (2 Timothy 4:10-11). Paul said that Luke’s ‘praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches’ (2 Corinthians 8:18). Again, when he says, ‘Christ was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve’ and, ‘according to the Gospel, which you received and in which you stand’ (1 Corinthians 15:1, 5), he means the Gospel written by this Luke. Luke did not relate everything, from when he was with Paul, but what was written was sufficient for those who would listen. The sacred writers addressed themselves to the matter of immediate importance, whatever it might be at the time. Their intent was not to be writers of books; in fact, there are many things, which they have delivered by unwritten tradition.”

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹⁰⁰ that the instruction of the Jews, even among the dispersion throughout the world, was an easy task compared to the instruction of the Gentiles, who had no background in the Law and the Prophets. The Gentiles first had to be persuaded that their gods were actually idols of demons; then they had to come to grips with basic morality. Thus Paul had a lot of work to do; but the result was a more noble Faith among the Gentiles.

“Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, says, ‘I labored more than they all’ (1 Corinthians 15:10). The instruction of the Jews was an easy task, because they could gather proofs from the Scriptures, and because they, who were in the habit of hearing Moses and the Prophets, also readily received the First-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the life of God. He who, by the spreading forth of hands, destroyed Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13), and raised man from the wound of the serpent (Numbers 21:8-9), by means of faith towards Him. Paul instructed the Gentiles to depart from the superstition of idols, and to worship one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the Framer of the whole creation. The Son was His Word, by whom He founded all things. He reformed the human race, but conquered the enemy of man, and gave to His handiwork victory against this enemy. Although those of the circumcision still did not obey the words of God, for they were despisers, yet they were previously instructed not to commit adultery, fornication, theft, and fraud; and that whatever things are done against our neighbors were evil, and detested by God. They agreed to abstain from these things, because they had been thus instructed.”

⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Thessalonians 2:14. See also 1 Thessalonians 2:2-9, 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Paul referred to “my Gospel” on other occasions also (Romans 2:16, 16:25). During Paul’s missionary journeys, Matthew’s Gospel (written in Hebrew – Aramaic) was available, and Barnabas carried a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew to Cyprus after he and Paul split up (Roberts and Donaldson, “The Acts of Barnabas”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8). Mark had just written his Gospel, but we don’t know if Paul had a copy of this. John’s Gospel would not be written until long after Paul’s death.

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, I, v. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, 24, 1-2.

“But they were also obligated to teach the Gentiles this¹⁰¹. The works of the service of idols were wicked, prejudicial, useless, and destructive to those who engaged in them. Therefore he, who had received the Apostolate to the Gentiles, labored more than those who preached the Son of God among those of the circumcision. The other Apostles were assisted by the Scriptures, which the Lord fulfilled, in coming just as He had been announced. In the case of the Gentiles, instructing them in the things of God seemed foreign to them even though it was great learning, and a new doctrine, namely that the gods of the Gentiles not only were not gods at all, but were even the idols of demons. Also new was that there is one God, who is ‘above all principality, dominion, power, and every name which is named’ (Ephesians 1:21). His Word, invisible by nature, was made visible among men, and descended ‘to death, even the death of the Cross’ (Philippians 2:8). Those who believe in Him shall be incorruptible and not subject to suffering, and shall receive the kingdom of heaven. These things were preached to the Gentiles by word, without the aid of the Scriptures; therefore, those who preached among the Gentiles underwent greater labor. But, on the other hand, the faith of the Gentiles was proven to be nobler, since they followed the word of God without the instruction derived from the sacred writings.”

All the Apostles Preach the Same Message

Paul said in conclusion, “Therefore, whether *it was* I or they (i.e. the other Apostles), so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11). That is to say, whether it was Peter or the rest of the Apostles, or whether it was I, we all speak the same message from the same Holy Spirit. Heretics may try to pit the words of one Apostle against another, but they have to twist the words of the Apostles to do this.

For example, Marcion, the 2nd century heretic, had rejected the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, and had edited the Gospel of Luke down to what he felt was true. In his interpretation of Paul’s letters, he emphasized Paul’s dispute with Peter, saying that Paul’s doctrine was true and Peter’s wasn’t.

Irenaeus of Lyon, addressing the heresies of Marcion, stated¹⁰² that all the Apostles, who saw Christ after the Resurrection, had one and the same preaching.

“With regard to the Marcionites, who allege that Paul alone knew the truth, and that to him the mystery was shown by revelation, let Paul himself convict them. He says, that one and the same God worked in Peter for the Apostolate of the circumcision, and in himself for the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7). Peter, therefore, was an Apostle of that same God that Paul belonged to; and Him whom Peter preached as God among those of the circumcision, and likewise the

¹⁰¹ Israel was supposed to be the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill and which cannot be hidden (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). This was demonstrated during the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-4). People should have been able to see the righteousness of God and seek to imitate Israel (Deuteronomy 4:8), where righteousness and justice are the foundation of the Throne of God (Psalm 89:14, 97:2).

¹⁰² Irenaeus of Lyon, Against Heresies, III, 13, 1.

Son of God, did Paul declare among the Gentiles. For our Lord never came to save Paul alone, nor is God so limited in means, that He should have but one Apostle who knew the dispensation of His Son. Again, when Paul says, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’ (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7), he shows clearly that it was not merely one, but there were many who used to preach the truth. Again, when Paul had recounted all those who had seen God after the resurrection, he says in continuation, ‘But whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed’ (1 Corinthians 15:11), acknowledging as one and the same, the preaching of all those who saw God after the resurrection from the dead.”

Tertullian also pointed out¹⁰³ that Paul and Peter taught the same things with perfect agreement. However, the focus of their work was different and there were false brethren involved who wished to return to Old Testament practices.

“Touching their public doctrine, however, Peter and Paul joined hands in perfect concord, and had agreed also in the division of their labor in their fellowship of the Gospel, as they had indeed in all other respects. ‘Whether it was I or they, so we preach’ (1 Corinthians 15:11). When Paul mentioned ‘certain false brethren as having crept in unawares’, who wished to move the Galatians into another gospel (Galatians 1:6-7, 2:4), he shows that that adulteration of the Gospel was not meant to transfer them to the faith of another god and christ, but rather to perpetuate the teaching of the Law. He blames them for maintaining circumcision, and observing times, and days, and months, and years (Galatians 4:10), according to those Jewish ceremonies, which they ought to have known were now abolished, according to the new dispensation purposed by the Creator Himself, who of old foretold this by His prophets. Thus He says, ‘Old things have passed away. Behold, I will do a new thing’ (Isaiah 43:19). And, ‘I will make a new covenant, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt’ (Jeremiah 31:32). In like manner, make yourselves a new covenant, ‘circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart’ (Jeremiah 4:4). It is this circumcision and this renewal, which Paul insisted on, when he forbid those ancient ceremonies concerning which their Founder announced that they were one day to cease. Thus ‘I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts’ (Hosea 2:11). So likewise, ‘The new moons, and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear; your fasts, your rest from work and feast-days, my soul hates’ (Isaiah 1:13-14 LXX). Now, if even the Creator had so long before discarded all these things, and Paul was now proclaiming them to be worthy of renunciation, the agreement of Paul’s meaning with the decrees of the Creator proves that none other God was preached by Paul than He whose purposes he now wished to have recognized. He branded as false those Apostles and brethren, who were pushing back the Gospel of Christ the Creator from the new condition, which the Creator had foretold, to the old one which He had discarded.”

¹⁰³ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 1, 20.

John Chrysostom compared¹⁰⁴ the different Apostles to different strings on the same lyre that is played by the Holy Spirit:

“As on one lyre, the strings are different strings, but the harmony is one; so also in the band of the Apostles, the persons are different, but the teaching is one. The craftsman is one, I mean the Holy Spirit, who moves their souls. Showing this Paul said, ‘Whether *it was* I or they, so we preach’” (1 Corinthians 15:11).

An interesting 1st century instruction to the Churches¹⁰⁵ on how to receive Apostles and Prophets notes that those that are really Apostles don’t ask anything for themselves, and don’t stay for more than a couple of days¹⁰⁶. This implies that there was a great need in the 1st century that all the Apostles teach the same things.

“Whoever comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. But if the teacher himself turns and teaches another doctrine to the destruction of this, don’t listen to him. If he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. Concerning the Apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do. Let every Apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall only remain one day; if there is a need, also the next day. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. When the Apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread to eat until he lodges elsewhere; if he asks for money, he is a false prophet. Every prophet that speaks in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3, 14:2), you shall neither try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven (Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-29). But not everyone that speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; only if he holds the ways of the Lord. Therefore from their ways the false prophet and the prophet shall be known. Every prophet, who orders a meal¹⁰⁷ in the Spirit, doesn’t eat from it, unless he is a false prophet. Every prophet, who teaches the truth, if he doesn’t do what he teaches, is a false prophet. Every prophet, proved true, working for the mystery of the Church in the world, yet not teaching others to do what he himself does, shall not be judged among you, for with God he has his judgment; for so did also the ancient prophets. But whoever says in the Spirit, ‘Give me money’, or something else, you shall not listen to him. But if he said to you to give for others’ sake, who are in need, let no one judge him.”

Thus the Church faced a number of heretics and heresies even as early as the mid-1st Century. These heretics were doing the work of the devil and the Apostles had to address it as such (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Revelation 2:2, 2:9-10, 2:13-14). Some might say today, “Why can’t we all just tolerate each other and get along?” Does one tolerate a wolf and let him devour the sheep? We are involved in a war where we do not contend against flesh and blood but

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ignatius and Babylas.

¹⁰⁵ “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”, Chapter 11, in Roberts & Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

¹⁰⁶ Paul may have done this also, even though Luke’s account says that he remained two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Since “all who dwelt in Asia” heard the Gospel, this implies that Paul moved around a lot.

¹⁰⁷ This may refer to the Love Feast, which usually accompanied the Lord’s Table in the mid 1st Century. This Love Feast was abandoned in the late 1st Century because of problems with drunkenness at the Love Feasts like at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:21).

against principalities and powers (two of the ranks of angels), against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). The intent of these hosts of demons is to undermine the truth and lead the people of God away. The devil was whittling away at the Church in Corinth. First it may be just the definition of the term resurrection; but the end aim was to deny the Resurrection of Christ and to remove the great hope of the Christian Faith. The Church Fathers have had to take a stand against this, starting with the Twelve Apostles and continuing to this present day.