

THE HAZARD OF WEALTH
The Rich Young Ruler
THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

November 27, 2016
13th Sunday of Luke
Revision F

Gospel: Luke 18:18-27

Epistle: Ephesians 2:4-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Camel passing Through the Needle's Eye

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

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

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

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

² Jerome, *Against the Pelagians*, I, 10.

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

this pack as “the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas (one of the Seventy) sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Everyone else in the Early Church did the same, except the price of their property wasn’t as much as that of Barnabas. Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

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

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

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

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

The early Church Fathers made a connection between the life of the Early Church after Pentecost and the Lord’s words, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to

⁴ Jerome, Letter to Salvina, LXXIX, 3.

the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). The Early Church after Pentecost exhibited one method regarding how to sell everything they had and follow Christ; there are other methods also. In most cases in the Early Church, “wanting to be perfect”, meant some form of monasticism. There are many aspects to this also, and they are overlapping and interconnected. In the following pages, we will try to separate them a little to examine what this subject meant from the perspective of the Early Church.

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

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

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

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

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

“Affliction is a great good. ‘Narrow is the way’ (Matthew 7:14), so that affliction shoves us into the narrow way. He who is not pressed by affliction has difficulty entering. Notice how Paul enters into this narrow way. He ‘disciplines his body and brings it into subjection’ (1 Corinthians 9:27), so as to be able to enter. Therefore, in all his afflictions, he continued giving thanks to God. Have

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, X.

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

you lost your property? This has lightened you of the most of your wideness. Have you fallen from glory? This is another sort of wideness. Have you been falsely accused? Have the things said against you, of which you are not aware, been believed? ‘Rejoice and leap for joy’. For ‘blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven’” (Matthew 5:11, 12).

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

The Problem with Wealth

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

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

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

Clement of Alexandria noted⁸ that the rich young ruler was confident about the things of the Law, but he realized he lacked something. Jesus did not charge him with violating the Law, since the Law was meant to lead one to Christ (Galatians 3:24). As a free man, Jesus gave him a choice, in order that he might take ownership of his own salvation. The choice Jesus offered was similar to that illustrated in the example of Mary and Martha⁹.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Similarly Jesus asked the rich young ruler to leave his busy life, cling to Him and adhere to the grace of Him who offered everlasting life.”

John Chrysostom stated¹¹ that Christ advised the rich young ruler to “strip himself of his money, not that he would lose what he had, but that he would add to his possessions. Christ would give him more than He required him to give up; and not only more, but as much greater as Heaven is greater than earth. He called it a treasure, showing the plenteousness of the recompense, its permanency, its security, so far as was possible by human examples to convey to the hearer.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² John Cassian, Conferences, VI, xi.

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Does It Mean to Become Perfect?

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

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

“You will see the difference between precept and advice. The Law commanded us not to murder, commit adultery or bear false witness; that is a Commandment, which has a penalty for its transgression. But when the young man said that he had fulfilled all the Commandments of the Law, he is given advice that he should sell all that he had and follow the Lord, for these things are not imposed as commands, but are offered as advice. There are two ways of

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

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

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

commanding things, one by way of precept, the other by way of advice. And so the Lord in one way says, 'You shall not kill', where He gives a Commandment; in the other He says, 'If you want to be perfect, sell all that you have' (Matthew 19:21). He is, then, not bound by a Commandment to whom the choice¹⁸ is left."

"Those who have fulfilled the Commandments are able to say, 'We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do' (Luke 17:10). The virgin does not say this, nor does he who sold all his goods. Instead they await the stored-up rewards like the holy Apostle who says, 'See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?' (Matthew 19:27) He doesn't say, like the unprofitable servant, that he has done that which was his duty to do, but he has been profitable to his Master. He has multiplied the talents entrusted to him by the increase he has gained, having a good conscience; without anxiety as to his merits, he expects the reward of his faith and virtue. And so it is said to him and the others, 'In the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matthew 19:28). And to those who had faithfully preserved their talents, He promises rewards indeed, though smaller saying, 'Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Good faith, then, is due, but mercy is in the rewards. He who has kept good faith has deserved that good faith should be kept with him. He who has made good profit, because he has not sought his own benefit, has gained a claim to a heavenly reward."

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

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

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

¹⁹ Cyprian, *Treatises*, III, 11-12.

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

“How can they follow Christ, who are held back by the chain of their wealth? Or how can they seek heaven, and climb to lofty heights, who are weighed down by earthly desires? They think that they possess, when they are rather possessed; they are slaves of their profit, and not lord of their own money. Paul indicts these men, when he says, ‘But those that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and in perdition. For the root of all evil is the love of money, which, while some have coveted, they have wandered from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows’ (1 Timothy 6:10). With what rewards does the Lord invite us to contempt of worldly wealth? ‘There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life’ (Luke 18:29-30). If we know these things, from the truth of the Lord who promises, not only is this loss not to be feared, but even to be desired. The Lord Himself announces to us, ‘Blessed are you when men shall persecute you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall cast you out, and shall speak of your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven’” (Matthew 5:11-12 loosely).

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

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

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

²¹ Jerome, Letter to Heliodorus, XIV, 6.

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

“I think it is unnecessary to warn you against covetousness, since it is the way of your family both to have riches and to despise them. Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5), and there was one who asked the Lord, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ He thus replied, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Such is the climax of complete apostolic virtue — to sell all that one has and to distribute to the poor (Luke 18:22) and thus freed from all earthly burdens to fly up to the heavenly realms with Christ. To us, or I should rather say to you, a careful stewardship is entrusted, although in such matters full freedom of choice is left to every individual, whether old or young. Christ’s words are ‘if you want to be perfect’. I do not compel you, He seems to say, I do not command you, but I set the palm before you, I show you the prize; it is for you to choose whether you will enter the arena and win the crown. Let us consider how wisely Wisdom has spoken. ‘Sell what you have’! To whom is the command given? Why, to him to whom it was said, ‘if you want to be perfect’. Don’t sell just a part of your goods but ‘all that you have’. And when you have sold them, what then? ‘Give to the poor’. Not to the rich, not to your kinsfolk, not to minister to self-indulgence; but to relieve need. It does not matter whether a man is a priest, a relative or an acquaintance; you must think of nothing but his poverty. Let your praises come from the stomachs of the hungry and not from the rich banquets of the overfed. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how, while the blood of the Lord was still warm and believers were in the fervor of their first faith, they all sold their possessions and laid the price of them at the Apostles’ feet (to show that money ought to be trampled underfoot) and ‘distribution was made to every man according as he had need’ (Acts 4:34-35). But Ananias and Sapphira proved timid stewards, and deceitful ones; therefore they brought on themselves condemnation. For having made a vow, they offered their money to God as if it was their own and not His to whom they had vowed it. Keeping back for their own use a part of that which belonged to another, through fear of famine, which true faith never fears, they drew down on themselves suddenly the avenging stroke, which was meant not in cruelty towards them but as a warning to others. In fact the Apostle Peter by no means called down death upon them, but he merely announced God’s judgment by the spirit of prophecy, that the doom of two persons might be a lesson to many (Acts 5:1-10).

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

“‘If you want to be perfect’, the Lord says, ‘go and sell what you have and give to the poor and come and follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Great enterprises are

²² Jerome, Letter to Demetrias, CXXX, 14.

²³ Jerome, Letter to Pammachius, LXVI, 8.

always left to the free choice of those who hear them. Paul refrains from making virginity a positive duty, because the Lord in speaking of celibates, who had made themselves such for the kingdom of heaven's sake, finally said, 'He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*' (Matthew 19:12). 'It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy' (Romans 9:16). If you want to be perfect! There is no compulsion laid upon you; if you are to win the prize, it must be by the exercise of your own free will. If therefore you want to be perfect and desire to be as the Prophets, as the Apostles, as Christ Himself, don't sell a part of your wealth, but all that you have, lest the fear of want become an occasion of unfaithfulness, and you perish with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). And when you have sold everything, give the proceeds not to the wealthy or to the haughty but to the poor. Give each man enough for his immediate need, but do not give money to swell what a man has already. 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain' (1 Corinthians 9:9), and 'the laborer is worthy of his wages' (1 Timothy 5:18). Again 'those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of the altar*'" (1 Corinthians 9:13).

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

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

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

Following Christ

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

Our Free Will to Follow Christ

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

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

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

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

children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! Therefore your house shall be left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:37-38).

Following Christ out of Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“For what reason was Christ maintained by women (Luke 8:2-3), since women followed Him and served Him (Mark 15:40-41)? This was to teach us from the first that He is concerned for those who do good. Could not Paul, who supported others by his own hands, have maintained himself without assistance from others? But you see him receiving and requesting aid. Hear the reason for it: ‘Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account’ (Philippians 4:17). At the beginning too, when men sold all their possessions and laid them at the Apostles’ feet, the Apostles were more concerned for the givers than for those who received their alms. For if their concern had only been that the poor might be relieved by any means, they would not have judged so severely the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, when they kept back their money. Paul would not have charged men to give ‘not grudgingly or of necessity’ (2 Corinthians 9:7) either if he was discouraging giving to the poor. No, but he considers the good of those who give. When Daniel gave that excellent advice to Nebuchadnezzar, he did not merely consider the poor. He did not just say, ‘Give to the poor’; but ‘Break off your sins by almsgiving, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor’ (Daniel 4:27). Part with your wealth, not that others may be fed, but that you may escape punishment. Christ again says, ‘Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). The commandment was given to the rich young ruler that he might be induced to follow Christ. Riches are an impediment; therefore he commands them to be given to the poor, instructing the soul to be pitiful and merciful, to despise wealth, and to flee from covetousness. Doing this makes men like God. Yet celibacy, fasting, and sleeping on the ground²⁸, are more difficult than this, but nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. It is greater than all other virtues. It places its adherents by the side of the King Himself, and justly so. The effect of celibacy, fasting, and sleeping on the ground, is confined to those who practice them, and no one besides the celibate is saved thereby. But almsgiving extends to everyone, and embraces the members of Christ; actions that extend their effects to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.”

“Almsgiving is the mother of love, which is the characteristic of Christianity, which is greater than all miracles, and by which the disciples of Christ are recognized. It is the medicine of our sins, the cleansing of the filth of our souls, the ladder fixed to heaven; it binds together the body of Christ. In the time of the Apostles, men sold their possessions and brought them to the Apostles, and they were distributed. ‘Distribution was made to every man according to his need’ (Acts 4:35). Setting aside the future, let us see who in the present life gains: those who received, or those who gave. The ones who received murmured and quarreled with each other. The ones who gave had one soul. ‘They were of one heart, and of one soul, and grace was upon them all’ (Acts

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

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

4:32). And they lived in great simplicity! Do you see that they were the ones who gained, even by thus giving? With whom would you wish to be numbered, with those who gave away their possessions, and had nothing, or with those who murmured and received the goods of others?"

Following Christ as a Bishop in the Church

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

"The preaching committed to Paul included the Gospel, things present, things future, life, godliness, and faith. As a herald proclaims in the theater in the presence of all, so also Paul preached, adding nothing, but declaring the things that he had heard. The excellence of a herald consists in proclaiming to all what has really happened, not in adding or taking away anything. If therefore it is necessary to preach, it is necessary to do it with boldness of speech; otherwise, it is not preaching. On this account Christ did not say, tell it 'on the housetops', but 'preach on the housetops' (Matthew 10:27); showing both by the place and by the manner what was to be done."

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

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

Difficulties in Following Christ

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

“Sometimes Christ’s yoke seems neither light nor easy, when it is supposed to be easy (Matthew 11:30); this must be ascribed to our perverseness, as we are downcast by unbelief and lack of faith. We fight with foolish obstinacy against His advice, ‘If you want to be perfect, go sell (or get rid of) all that you have, and come follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21), for we keep the substance of our worldly goods. The devil holds our soul tight in these worldly labors. When he wants to sever us from spiritual delight, he bothers us by diminishing these and depriving us of them, using his crafty wiles. When the lightness of Christ’s burden become grievous to us through the evil of a corrupt desire, when we are caught in the chains of that property and substance, which we kept for our comfort, he torments us with the scourges of worldly cares, and we end up torturing ourselves. ‘Each one is caught in the cords of his own sins’ (Proverbs 5:22), and again, ‘You all kindle a fire, and feed a flame; walk in the light of your fire, and in the flame which you have kindled’ (Isaiah 50:11 LXX). Solomon witnesses, ‘Each man shall be punished, according to how he has sinned’ (Wisdom 11:16 LXX). The pleasures, which we enjoy, become a torment to us, and the delights and enjoyments of this flesh, turn like executioners upon their originator. One who is supported by his former wealth and property is sure not to admit perfect humility of heart. We endure all the trials of this present life, and whatever losses the enemy can contrive, not only with the utmost patience, but with real pleasure, because all these implements of goodness help us. When they are lacking, a pride springs up that we are actually wounded by the deadly strokes of impatience at the slightest reproach. It may be said to us by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘why take the road to Egypt, to drink the troubled water? And why take the road to Assyria, to drink the water of the River? Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasy shall rebuke you. Know and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and that the fear of Me *is* not in you, says the Lord’ (Jeremiah 2:18-19). We feel the wondrous sweetness of the Lord’s yoke to be bitter, because the bitterness of our repugnance injures it. The exceeding lightness of the Divine burden becomes heavy, because in our obstinate presumption we despise Him. ‘Had they gone in good paths, they would have found the paths of righteousness easy’ (Proverbs 2:20 LXX). It is plain that we make rough the right and smooth paths of the Lord with the nasty and hard stones of our desires. With our wedding garment torn, we seek trackless and thorny places; blinded by the enticements of present delights, we tear our way with torn legs through dark paths. We are overrun with the briars of sins, so as not only to be pierced by the sharp thorns of the brambles but actually struck down by the bites of deadly serpents and scorpions lurking there. Solomon said,

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

‘Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them’ (Proverbs 22:5). Jeremiah added, ‘My people have forgotten me; they have offered incense in vain, stumbling in their ways, *leaving* the ancient paths, to enter upon impassable paths’ (Jeremiah 18:15 LXX). ‘The ways of those, who do not work, are strewn with thorns, but those of the diligent are made smooth’ (Proverbs 15:19 LXX). And thus wandering from the king’s highway, they can never arrive at that metropolis, where our course should always be directed without swerving. Solomon also said this, ‘The labor of fools wearies those who don’t even know how to go to the city’ (Ecclesiastes 10:15); that is, that ‘heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all’ (Galatians 4:26). But whoever truly gives up this world and takes up Christ’s yoke, learns from Him, and is trained in the daily practice of suffering wrong, for He is ‘gentle and lowly of heart’ (Matthew 11:29). He will always remain undisturbed by all temptations, and ‘all things will work together for good to him’ (Romans 8:28). The words of God are ‘good to him that walks uprightly’ (Micah 2:7); and again, ‘The ways of the Lord are straight, and the righteous shall walk in them; but the ungodly shall fall in them’” (Hosea 14:9).

John Chrysostom pointed out³¹ that the poor have the advantage over the rich regarding entry into the Kingdom of God. Poor men have far fewer impediments than rich men, and thus are much more likely to enter. This is apparent in the story of Lazarus and the rich man, and the Lord calls us to become poor in order to become perfect. Some common notions are that the rich and poor will enter the Kingdom equally, and that the poor man is subjected to many evils because of his poverty. Chrysostom refutes these notions and shows that the rich have a much more difficult time in this life.

“The poor have the advantage over the rich in the things of this life; and not in the things of this life only, but also in those that are higher. What leads us to the kingdom of God: riches or poverty? Let us hear the Lord Himself saying that ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 19:24). But of the poor the contrary, ‘If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow Me; and you shall have treasure in heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). But if you will, let us see what is said on either side. ‘Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it’ (Matthew 7:14). Who then enters by the narrow way, he that is in luxury, or he that is in poverty; he that is independent, or he that carries ten thousand burdens; the lax and debauched, or the thoughtful and anxious? Consider the example of the beggar Lazarus! Lazarus was very poor; and he that passed him by as he lay at his gate was rich. Which then entered into the kingdom, and was in delight in Abraham’s bosom? Which of them was scorched, with not even a drop of water at his command? But, said one, ‘many poor will be lost, and many rich will enjoy those unspeakable goods’. Rather, one may see the contrary; few rich will be saved, but of the poor there will be far more. Consider making accurate measurements of the hindrances of riches and the defects of poverty. ‘The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil’ (1 Timothy 6:10). Who stands close to this root of all kinds of

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

evils, the rich man, or the poor man? Is it not very plainly the rich? For the more things anyone surrounds himself with, the more he desires more. Vainglory also damages many good deeds, and close to this again the rich man has his dwelling. 'But', said one, 'you don't mention the evils of the poor man, his affliction, his difficulty'. This is both common to the rich and the poor, and is more a problem for the rich man than the poor man. Those, that appear to be evils from poverty, are common to either; while those that appear to be evils from riches are problems for rich men only. 'But', said one, 'for lack of necessities the poor man commits many horrible things'. No poor man commits as many horrible things from lack, as do the rich for the sake of surrounding themselves with more, and of not losing what belongings they have. The poor man does not so eagerly desire necessities as the rich does luxuries; nor has the poor man as much strength to put wickedness in practice as the rich man has. If then the rich man is both more willing and able, it is quite plain that he will rather commit such, and more of them. Nor is the poor man so much afraid with respect to hunger, as the rich man is anxious with respect to the loss of what he has. Since the rich man is close to vainglory, arrogance and the love of money, the root of all evils, what hope of salvation does he have except he display much wisdom? And how shall he walk the narrow way? Let us not carry about vague notions of the multitude, but examine the facts. Here is something absurd! Respecting money, we do not trust others, but refer to figures and calculations. But in calculating about facts, we are easily drawn away by the opinions of others; even though we possess an exact balance for all things; that is, the divine Laws. I exhort you all, disregard what the multitude thinks about these things, and inquire from the Scriptures; and having learned what true riches are, let us pursue them that we may obtain also the eternal good things."

Following Christ Means Giving Up Something

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

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

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

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

Selling Everything to Obtain Treasure in Heaven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who was more shameful and iniquitous than Nebuchadnezzar? The man was impious; after signs without number he refused to come to his senses, but cast the servants of God into a furnace; yet after doing these things, he worshipped God. What did Daniel say afterward? ‘O king, let my counsel please you, and atone for your sins by alms, and *your* iniquities by compassion on the poor; it may be God will be long-suffering to your transgressions’ (Daniel 4:27 LXX). In so speaking, Daniel didn’t doubt, but wished to put him in greater fear, and to make a stronger case for doing these things. If Daniel had spoken as if forgiveness was free and easy, the king would have been more apathetic. By leaving it doubtful, Nebuchadnezzar’s fear was made greater, and Daniel urged him on. This is the reason why Daniel did not make forgiveness certain to him. Shall there be pardon for so great impieties? Yes. There is no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, none, which alms cannot quench. All sin is beneath this; it is a medicine adapted for every wound. What is worse than a publican? His occupation is complete injustice; and yet Zacchaeus washed away all these sins. Note how Christ shows this³⁵ by the care taken for almsgiving (Luke 19:8-10). Paul also says, ‘only that we remember the poor’ (Galatians 2:10); everywhere the Scripture has much to say concerning this matter. ‘The ransom of a man’s soul is his own wealth’ (Proverbs 13:8). With reason Christ said, ‘if you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). This may

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV.

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

well be part of perfection. But alms may be done not only by money, but by deeds. For example, one may kindly stand by a person to aid and defend him; one may reach to him a helping hand; the service rendered by deeds has often done more good than money.”

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

“We who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, should only ask for ourselves food and support. The Lord instructs us, ‘Whoever doesn’t forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:33). But he who has begun to be Christ’s disciple, renouncing all things according to the word of his Master, ought to ask for his daily food, and not to extend the desires of his petition to a long period. The Lord again says, ‘Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow itself shall take thought for itself. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble’ (Matthew 6:34). With reason, then, does Christ’s disciple ask food for himself for the day, since he is prohibited from thinking of tomorrow; because it becomes a contradiction and a repugnant thing for us to seek to live long in this world, since we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly. Paul admonishes us, giving substance to the steadfastness of our hope and faith, ‘We brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Let no man regard poverty a cause of disgrace. If virtue is there, all the wealth of the world is not even a speck in comparison. Let us follow after this, if we want to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, ‘Sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven’ (Matthew 19:21). And again, ‘It is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 19:23). Do you see that even if we don’t have poverty, we ought to

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

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

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

draw it to us? So great a good is Poverty; for it guides us by the hand on the path which leads to Heaven; it is an anointing for combat, an admirable exercise, a peaceful haven.”

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

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

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

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

“Some try to make out a case for their avarice, by quoting the authority of Scripture, which they interpret with vile ingenuity, in their desire to pervert for their own purposes a saying of the Lord Himself. Instead of adapting their own life to the meaning of the Scripture, they make the meaning of Scripture bend to the desires of their own lust. Jesus had said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). By an entirely wrong interpretation of this they think that they can weaken the force of the Lord in which he says, ‘If you want to be perfect, go sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). They think that under cover of this they need not deprive themselves of their riches. They declare that they are more blessed if, supported by their belongings, they give to others out of their superabundance. While they don’t embrace with the Apostle that glorious state of denial for Christ’s sake, they are not content either with manual labor or the sparse diet of fasting. These must know that they are deceiving themselves, and have not really renounced the world, while they are clinging to their riches.”

Wealth is Not Evil by Itself

Since some of the early heretics taught that wealth, and all material things are evil, the Church Fathers sometimes went out of their way to correct this mistaken idea. Cyril of

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

Jerusalem pointed out⁴¹ that money and riches are not evil by themselves, but it is the bad use of money that causes problems. Money can become a door to the Kingdom. The devil may claim to control wealth, but we don't have to believe him.

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

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

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

“We should inquire into the reason that Paul does NOT say, ‘Command those who are rich in the present world, not to be rich; charge them to become poor; charge them to get rid of what they have’; but instead Paul says, ‘Command them not to be haughty’ (1 Timothy 6:17). He knew that the root and foundation of riches is pride; and that if any man understood how to be unassuming, he would not make a big deal about the matter. Tell me, why do you lead around so many servants, parasites, and flatterers? Not for necessity, but only for pride; that you may seem more dignified than other men! Paul knew that wealth is not forbidden if it is used for what is necessary. Wine is not a bad thing, but drunkenness is so. A covetous man is one thing, and a rich man is another thing. The covetous man is not rich; he is lacking many things, and while he needs many

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

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

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

things, he can never be rich. The covetous man is a keeper, not a master, of wealth; a slave, not a lord. He would rather give anyone a portion of his flesh, than his buried gold, which he watches and keeps with all his effort. How does he hold possession of those things, of which he has neither the free use, nor the enjoyment? Besides this, Paul is not accustomed to command everything for every man, but accommodates himself to the weakness of his hearers, just as Christ did. When that rich man came to Him, and asked Him concerning Life, He did not say at once, 'Go, sell what you have', but He spoke to him of other Commandments. Afterwards, when he challenged Him and said, 'What do I still lack?', He didn't simply say, 'Sell what you have'; but, 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have' (Matthew 19:21). 'I lay it down for your determination. I give you full power to choose. I do not lay upon you any necessity'. For this reason, Paul didn't speak to the rich concerning poverty, but concerning humility. He did this as well because of the weakness of his hearers, because he perfectly knew, that if he could bring them to be free from pride, he could also free them from eagerness about being rich."

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

Cyprian of Carthage noted⁴⁴ that Christ prescribes nothing more frequently than almsgiving. This He calls perfection and the pearl of great price. He who gives alms according to God's precept believes in God like Abraham. Unfruitful men are cut off and cast into the fire, but the merciful are called into the Kingdom.

"The Lord, the Teacher of our life and Master of eternal salvation, prescribes nothing more frequently than devotion to almsgiving, and laying up heavenly treasures. 'Sell your goods, and give alms' (Luke 12:33). And again, 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:19-21). When He wished to set forth a man perfect and complete by the observation of the Law, He said, 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me' (Matthew

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

19:21). Moreover, in another place He says that a merchant of the heavenly grace, and a gainer of eternal salvation, ought to purchase the precious pearl — that is, eternal life — at the price of the blood of Christ, from the amount of his inheritance, parting with all his wealth for it. He says, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking good pearls. And when he found a precious pearl, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it’” (Matthew 13:45-46).

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

Impossible with Men, But Possible with God

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

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

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

“If anyone imagines it impossible that men should survive for such a length of time as the Patriarchs, and that Elijah was not caught up in the flesh, but that his flesh was consumed in the fiery chariot, let him consider that Jonah, after being swallowed by the sea monster, was by the command of God again thrown out safe upon the land (Jonah 2:10). Again, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the furnace of fire heated sevenfold, they sustained no harm whatever, neither was the smell of fire perceived on them. The hand of God was present with them, working out marvelous things in their case, things

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

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

impossible to be accomplished by man's nature. Also in the case of those who were translated (Enoch and Elijah), the hand of God performed something wonderful. The Son of God appeared, as Nebuchadnezzar the king said, 'Did not we throw three men bound into the furnace? I see four walking in the middle of the fire, and the fourth is like the Son of God' (Daniel 3:19-25). Neither the nature of any created thing, nor the weakness of the flesh, can prevail against the will of God. For God is not subject to created things, but created things are subject to God; and all things yield in obedience to His will. Therefore the Lord declares, 'The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God' (Luke 18:27). It might seem to people today, who are ignorant of God's appointment, that it is incredible and impossible that any man could live for over 900 years, yet those who were before us did live to such an age. Those who were translated live as a down payment of the future length of days. It might also appear impossible that a man came out unhurt from the sea monster's belly and from the fiery furnace, yet they nevertheless did so, led out by the hand of God, for the purpose of declaring His power. Some, not knowing the power and promise of God, may oppose their own salvation, thinking it is impossible for God, who raises up the dead; yet the skepticism of such men shall not render the faithfulness of God powerless to confer eternal life on them."

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

"Let us consider what is harder, for a man, after having been buried, to rise again from the earth, or for a man in the belly of a sea monster, having come into the great heat of a living creature, to escape corruption. Most people don't know that the heat of the belly is so great, that even bones, which have been swallowed, decay and crumble away. How then did Jonah, who was three days and three nights in the sea monster's belly, escape corruption? Seeing that the nature of all men is such that we cannot live without breathing in air, how did Jonah live without a breath of fresh air for three days? The Jews answer and say, 'The power of God descended with Jonah when he was tossed about in hell'. Does then the Lord grant life to His own servant (Jonah), by sending His power with him, and can He not grant it to Himself as well? If Jonah is believable, Jesus is believable also; if Jesus is unbelievable, Jonah also is unbelievable. To me both are alike worthy of credence. I believe that Jonah was preserved, 'for all things are possible with God' (Matthew 19:26); I believe that Christ also was raised from the dead. I have many testimonies of this, both from the Scriptures, and from the operative power today of Him who arose. He descended into hell alone, but ascended with a great company; for He went down to death, 'and many bodies of the saints, who had fallen asleep were raised' (Matthew 27:52) through Him."

Clement of Alexandria summarized⁴⁸ the dilemma facing the rich young ruler. It was not just the material wealth that he possessed, but the problem with his soul in loving his wealth

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

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

more than God. Someone who is rich in virtue can make a faithful use of any fortune and not turn life into outward possession. Someone who is not rich toward God can obtain treasure in heaven by selling his possessions. The rich young ruler made the difficult for himself to be the impossible.

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

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

“The wealthy and legally correct man in the Gospel, not understanding these things figuratively, nor how the same man can be both poor and rich, went away sad and downcast, abandoning the state of life, which he desired but couldn’t attain, and made the difficult for himself to be impossible. For it was difficult for the soul to avoid being seduced and ruined by the luxuries of wealth. It was not impossible, even surrounded with wealth, for one to lay hold of salvation, provided he withdraws himself from material wealth, in favor of that which is taught by God, and learned to use things rightly and properly, and so as to strive after eternal life.”

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

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

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

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

“Things which are impossible with men are possible with God; God is able whenever He wills to forgive us our sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. It is possible for God to give us that which it seems to us impossible. It seemed impossible that water should wash away sin, and Naaman the Syrian thought that his leprosy could not be cleansed by water. But that which was impossible God made to be possible; He gave us so great grace. In like manner it seemed impossible that sins should be forgiven through repentance, but Christ gave this power to His Apostles, which has been transmitted to the priestly office. That, then, has become possible which was impossible. By a true reasoning, he convinces us that the re-Baptism by anyone using the Sacrament of Baptism is not permitted.”

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

THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

November 27, 2016
23rd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: Ephesians 2:4-10

Today's Epistle lesson is used in the West on either the 6th Sunday after Pentecost or the 4th Sunday of Lent. The lesson teaches us that God's love leads to salvation by grace. Earlier Paul describes the high, heavenly calling we have in Christ, brought about by divine power through His Resurrection and Ascension (Ephesians 1). Here he goes into this further, pointing out our own ascent from being children of wrath, deserving of hell (Ephesians 2:3) to the heights of heaven in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). There are many aspects of this that the Church Fathers spoke about, and there is a great depth to it.

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What Are the Heavenly Places?

Paul speaks of "us sitting together in the heavenly places⁵¹ in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). When do we do that? Is that just some vague spiritualizing or does that really happen? The context of Paul's reference to "the Heavenly Places" is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23, 2:15); thus the heavenly places must have some connection to the Body of Christ also. As the Body of Christ meets to worship her Lord, we meet around the Throne of God in the heavens and are joined by the holy angels and other members of the Body who have already fallen asleep. Thus, for a short while, we step "out of time" and join the communion of saints in eternity – all in a mystery.

In this process of salvation by Grace, we rise not just to some intermediate state, but all the way to Heaven (Ephesians 2:6). We actually are seated there right now, awaiting future eternal delight in radiant joy, fulfillment and beauty. [This makes misuse of our body⁵² a more serious thing!] We begin to experience some of this even now in this life, especially as we meet the Lord in the Liturgy and partake of the Lord's Supper. Our Lord as a man, crucified,

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⁵¹ The Greek word "*epiraniou*", literally on or upon heaven, is translated "in the heavenlies" or "in the heavenly places".

⁵² If our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we are seated in the heavenlies with Christ, for us to willfully join Christ to a harlot or engage in other willful sin is a serious thing.

ascended and reigning, took our human nature into Heaven; the Father put all things under His feet for our sake (Hebrews 2:8, Matthew 28:18). We in the Church are joined to Him⁵³ as His Body! (Ephesians 1:20-23).

This heavenly state is eternal, not just a passing spiritual high (Ephesians 2:7). As we meet to worship the Lord, we step into eternity while still in time. The “Kindness” of God, Who loves us, gives us this salvation not from our works, but from His mercy and grace (Titus 3:4-5). Yet what we can experience now is rather small compared to the exceeding riches He will show us for eternity.

There are other references to the goings-on in the heavenly places. The “heavenlies” seems to be a fairly broad term that includes both physical objects (planets, humans, Christ, Throne of God, demons, etc.) and spiritual things (future Kingdom, Eucharist, Tabernacle prototype, wickedness of demons, etc.)

Physical Objects:

- There are bodies (planets, stars, etc.) of the heavenlies and also earthly bodies (1 Corinthians 15:40).
- Christ is seated at the Right Hand of God in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:20).
- The Levitical priests served a copy and shadow of the heavenlies (Hebrews 8:5, 9:23).
- Abraham and Sarah sought a homeland, but they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. The better homeland that they sought is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 11:16).
- At the Name of Jesus, every knee will bow, those of the heavenlies, those of the earth and those under the earth (Philippians 2:10).

Spiritual Things:

- Nicodemus couldn't understand the earthly things Jesus spoke of, never mind what He said of the heavenlies (John 3:12).
- Christ is a man of the heavenlies. As we bear the image of His humanity in humility, we will also bear the image of the heavenlies (1 Corinthians 15:48-49).
- The Kingdom that we seek is of the heavenlies (2 Timothy 4:18), for our calling is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 3:1).
- The Eucharist is referred to a gift of the heavenlies (Hebrews 6:4).
- We have come to a Jerusalem that is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 12:22).
- The wisdom of God is made known by the Church to the principalities and powers of the heavenlies (Ephesians 3:10).
- We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against demons, the rulers of darkness and wickedness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12).
- Our reward is every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:3), and we are seated together with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6).

⁵³ This will be covered more in the Epistle lesson for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost under the subject heading “Union with Christ” (Ephesians 4:1-16).

The Magnitude of What Christ Has Done for Us

God's love is the basis of our transit from hell to heaven (Ephesians 2:4-5). God's love is expressed by His pity and mercy toward us sinners (Psalm 103:8-11), who were faced with certain death (Ephesians 2:1-2). God is rich in this mercy to all who seek Him, regardless of religious or ethnic background (Romans 10:12).

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁴ that we sometimes don't appreciate what Christ has done for us. The body He gave us is beautifully formed, and He challenges us to make our soul beautiful also of our own free will.

“God has given us a body of earth, that we might carry it with us up to heaven, not that we should draw our soul down with it to earth. Earthy it is, but if we please, it may be heavenly. But we often concentrate all our focus on the things of this life, building large houses. How long are we to be nailed to these things? How long are we to be fastened to the earth, and grovel, like worms, in the dirt?”

“God has highly honored us, in committing to us so excellent a body. ‘I made heaven and earth’, He says, ‘and to you I give the power of creation’. Make your earth heaven! For it is in your power. ‘I am He that makes and transforms all things’ (Amos 5:8, LXX), said God of Himself. And He has given to men a similar power; just as a painter, being an affectionate father, teaches his own art to his son. ‘I formed your body beautiful’, he says, ‘but I give you the power of forming something better. Make your soul beautiful!’ I said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, and every fruitful tree’ (Genesis 1:11 paraphrase). You can also say, ‘Let this earth bring forth its proper fruit’, and what you want to produce will be produced. ‘I make the summer and the spring. I create the lightning and the wind’ (Amos 4:13 LXX; Psalm 74:17 LXX). I formed the dragon, that is, the devil, to play with him (Psalm 104:26). I have given you similar power. If you wish, you can play with him also, and bind him as you would a sparrow. I make the sun to rise upon the evil and the good; imitate Me by giving that which is yours to the good and to the evil. When mocked I bear with it, and do good to those who mock Me; imitate Me, as you are able. I do good, with no expectation to be repaid; imitate Me in this also. I have illuminated bodies in the heavens. You can light others brighter than these, by enlightening those that are in error. For to know Me is a greater benefit than to look at the sun. You cannot create a man, but you can make him just and acceptable to God. I formed his substance; you can beautify his will. See how I love you, and have given you the power in the greater things.”

We sit⁵⁵ together with Christ in the heavens, where angels adore us in Him. He had emptied Himself of His glory in the Incarnation to become man and pursue us. He joins Himself to us in the Eucharist, and we become interwoven with Him as we partake. He asks that we imitate Him in all that He does.

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XV, v. 20.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XV, v. 20.

“See how we are honored! Yet some are so unreasonable and so ungrateful as to say, ‘Why are we endowed with free will?’ If there had been no free will, we could not have imitated God. I rule Angels, God says, and so do you, through Him who is the First fruits (1 Corinthians 15:23). I sit on a royal throne, and you are seated with Me in Him who is the First fruits. As it is said, ‘He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6). Through Him who is the First fruits, Cherubim and Seraphim adore you, with the entire heavenly host, including principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Don’t slight your body, to which such high honors pertain; even the Bodiless Powers tremble at this.”

“Christ says to us, ‘It is not in this way only that I have shown My love to you, but also by what I have suffered. For you I was spit on and scourged. I emptied Myself of glory; I left My Father and came to you, who hate Me, turn from Me, and are loath to hear My Name. I pursued you; I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I joined you to Myself in the Eucharist, where you eat and drink Me. In heaven I hold you, and on earth I embrace you. Is it not enough for you that I have your First fruits above? Does this not satisfy your affection? I descended below; I am not only mingled with you, I am entwined in you. I am chewed (in the Eucharist), broken into minute particles, that the interspersion and union may be more complete. I am interwoven with you and I want there to be no more division between us. I will that we both be one”’.

Ambrose of Milan clarified⁵⁶ some terms that are sometimes used very freely. Christ was in subjection when He bore our curses, but only in His humanity. He was never in subjection in His deity. When we sit in the heavenly places, we only do so in the person of Christ as partakers of the Divine Nature. Because of Christ’s humanity, He is said to be in us in subjection to the Father. Through His works and the virtues, as others begin to cling to God, then God becomes all and in all.

“Christ was made sin and a curse not on His own account but on ours. But He was not in subjection in His eternal Nature, nor accursed in His eternal Nature. ‘For cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23). He was cursed, for He bore our curses; He was in subjection to the curse, but only in His humanity, not in the glory of God, for He took upon Him our subjection. While he makes Himself a partaker of our weakness in the flesh, He makes us partakers of the Divine Nature in His power. But neither in the one nor the other do we have any natural fellowship with the heavenly Generation of Christ, nor is there any subjection of the Godhead in Christ. But as Paul has said that on Him, through that flesh which is the pledge of our salvation, we sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), though certainly not sitting there ourselves. So also He is said to be subject in us through the assumption of our nature.”

“A seat of honor, a seat of a heavenly and equal power, is not due to us at the right hand of God the Father. The Father only grants that to Christ according to the flesh. The angels worship Him there; if we think that we sit there also, it is with impious presumption that we attempt to overthrow the throne of God.”

⁵⁶ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, Prologue, xiv, 178-181.

“It is written, you say, that ‘when we were dead in sins, He made us alive in Christ, by Whose grace you are saved, and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:5-6). I acknowledge that it is so written; but it is not written that God allows men to sit on His right hand, but only to sit there in the Person of Christ. He is the foundation of all, and is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), in Whom our common nature according to the flesh has merited the right to the heavenly throne. Our flesh is honored as having a share in Christ, Who is God, and the nature of the whole human race is honored as having a share in the flesh.”

“As we sit in Him by fellowship in our fleshly nature, so also He through the obedience of all will become in us subject to the Father. Through the assumption of our flesh, He was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13); but a curse could not fall upon the Son of God in His deity. When (1) the Gentile has believed, and the Jew has acknowledged Him, Whom he crucified; (2) the Manichaeon has worshipped Him, Whom he has not believed to have come in the flesh; (3) the Arian has confessed Him to be Almighty, Whom he has denied; and (4) the wisdom of God, His justice, peace, love, and resurrection is in all, then Christ will be in us in subjection to the Father. This occurs through His own works and through the many forms of the virtues. When one spirit in the heart of all peoples has begun to cleave to God in all things, with vice renounced and crime at an end, then will God be all and in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁷ that Paul spoke of the Father as the One who brought many sons to glory through Christ, and that suffering of various kinds is a means to that end.

“‘The Captain of our salvation’ is the Cause of our salvation. There is a great space between Him and us. He is both a Son, and we are sons; but He saves, we are saved. He both brings us together (bringing many sons to glory) and then separates us (to make perfect through sufferings). Then sufferings are a perfecting, and a cause of salvation. Do you see that to suffer affliction is not the portion of those who are utterly forsaken? It was by this that God first honored His Son, by leading Him through suffering. His taking flesh to suffer is a far greater thing than making the world, and bringing it out of nothing. Making the world is a token of His loving-kindness, but suffering is far more. Paul himself pointed out this same thing, ‘That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, He both raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’” (Ephesians 2:6-7).

“‘It was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings’ (Hebrews 2:10). Paul means that it was becoming of Him, who takes tender care, and brought all things into being, to give up the Son for the salvation of the rest, the One for the many. However he did not express himself like this, but said, ‘to make perfect through sufferings’, showing that suffering for anyone, profits not only ‘him’, but he becomes more glorious and more perfect.”

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 4-5.

John Chrysostom also stated⁵⁸ that we should consider what Christ has done for us, and be willing even to endure persecution on His behalf.

“Truly this is surpassing riches, truly surpassing is the greatness of His power, to make us sit down with Christ. If you had to enter the flames (i.e. persecution), shouldn’t you be ready to endure it? If you had to be cut to pieces every day, shouldn’t you be ready to embrace it cheerfully for the sake of these promises? Think where He sits! Above all principality and power! And with Whom it is that you sit! With Him! And who are you? One dead, by nature a child of wrath! And what good have you done? Nothing! Truly now it is high time to exclaim, ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!’” (Romans 11:33).

We Are Christ’s Workmanship

Paul stated in the Epistle Reading, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Tertullian stated⁵⁹ that this workmanship is twofold. First it refers to Creation and the nature of the flesh. Second, when Paul follows by saying, “created in Christ Jesus for good works”, he is referring to the work of grace. His workmanship includes bringing in the Gentiles to a oneness with the commonwealth of Israel. It also includes fulfilling and upgrading the Law such that the old statements of the Law are superfluous. For example, adultery has been upgraded to include lust in order to conform to the original intent of the Law.

“Paul says, ‘We were by nature the children of wrath’. The Jews were not the Creator’s children by nature, but by the election of their fathers. Paul referred their being children of wrath to nature, and not to the Creator, adding, ‘even as others’ (Ephesians 2:3), who were not children of God. It is clear that sins, lusts of the flesh, unbelief and anger are part of the common nature of all mankind. The devil however has led that nature astray, which he has already infected with the germ of sin. But ‘we are His workmanship, created in Christ’ (Ephesians 2:10). He who made man at first, also created him in Christ. It is one thing to make as a workman; it is another thing to create. But Paul assigns both to One Person: Christ; regarding the substance of nature, He ‘made’ him; regarding the work of grace, He ‘created’ him.”

“Look also at what follows in connection with these words. ‘Remember, that you were in time past Gentiles in the flesh, you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world’ (Ephesians 2:11-12). Now they were without Him to whom belonged the commonwealth of Israel, the covenants and the promise. ‘But now in Christ, you who were sometimes far off are made near by His blood’ (Ephesians 2:13). Since this is the case, the Gentiles are consequently now in Christ made near to these blessings, from which they were once far off.”

“Paul noted that it had been predicted concerning the call of the Gentiles from their distant alienation in words like these, ‘They who were far off from Me

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v.

⁵⁹ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 5, 17.

have come to My righteousness' (Isaiah 46:12-13 paraphrase). The Creator's righteousness no less than His peace was announced in Christ. Therefore he says, 'He is our peace, who has made both one' (Ephesians 2:14); that is, the Jewish nation and the Gentile world. What is near, and what was far off now that 'the middle wall has been broken down of their enmity', are made one 'in His flesh'" (Ephesians 2:15).

"He has made the Law obsolete by His own precepts, by Himself fulfilling the Law. For superfluous is, 'You shall not commit adultery', when He says, 'You shall not look on a woman to lust after her' (Matthew 5:27-28). It is impossible to make an adversary of the Law out of one who so completely promotes it. 'He created in Himself of two, one new man, making peace' (Ephesians 2:15), one really new, and one really man — no phantom — but new, and newly born of a virgin by the Spirit of God. He who had made is also the same who created, 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:10). 'He reconciled both to God', the God whom both races, both Jew and Gentile, had offended, 'in one body having in it slain the enmity by the cross'" (Ephesians 2:16).

John Chrysostom commented⁶⁰ on Paul's words, "Are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18), emphasizing the aspect of Christ's workmanship that created us in Christ Jesus. First he noted that the Holy Spirit is also God, just as the Father and the Son.

"Notice how he places the Spirit in the rank of God, and raises the Corinthians up to the rank of the Apostles. He said, 'You are the Epistle of Christ' (2 Corinthians 3:3); and here, 'But we all with open face' (2 Corinthians 3:18). Just as we needed no veil, so neither do you, who received it. This glory is far greater than Moses' glowing face (Exodus 34:29-35), for this is not of our face, but of the Spirit. Nevertheless you are able as well as we to look steadily upon it. They could not look even by a mediator, but you, without a mediator, can look steadily on a greater. They were not able to look upon that of Moses, you can look upon that of the Spirit. Now had the Spirit been inferior, He would not have set down these things for us as greater than those for Moses."

"But what does it mean, 'we reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image' (2 Corinthians 3:18)? This was shown more clearly when the gifts of miracles were in operation; however it is not difficult to see it for one who has believing eyes. As soon as we are baptized, the soul beams more than the sun, being cleansed by the Spirit; and not only do we behold the glory of God, but from it also receive a sort of splendor. Just as if pure silver were turned towards the sun's rays, it will itself also shoot forth rays, not from its own natural property, but from the solar luster. So does the soul after it is cleansed and made brighter than silver, receive a ray from the glory of the Spirit, and sends it back. He also said, 'Reflecting as a mirror we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18), that is, from that of the Spirit, to our own glory, which is generated in us. This is the sort of thing that one might expect from the Lord the Spirit."

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VII, 5-6.

“Notice how he called the Spirit, Lord. And in other places too one may see that lordship of His. ‘As they ministered and fasted to the Lord, the Spirit said, Separate for me Paul and Barnabas’ (Acts 13:2). This was done in order to show the Spirit’s equality in honor. Christ said, ‘The servant doesn’t know what his Lord is doing’ (John 15:15), but even as a man knows his own things, so does the Spirit know the things of God; not by being taught them. The working as He wills shows His authority and lordship. This transforms us and cannot be conformed to this world; for such is the creation of which this is the Author. For as he said, ‘Created in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:10), so said he, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in my inward parts’” (Psalm 51:10, LXX).

We can “see” the Holy Spirit⁶¹ just as Moses “saw” God; and we glow, reflecting the glory of God, after we have done so like a piece of polished silver. The gifts of the Spirit are the result, and we carry the King’s image in us throughout our life.

“Do you want me to show you this also from the Apostles more obviously to the sense? Consider Paul, whose garments healed; Peter, whose shadows were mighty (Acts 19:12; 5:15-16). If they had not borne a King’s image and if their radiance had not been unapproachable, their garments and shadows would not work so mightily. For the garments of a king inspire fear even to robbers. Do you want to see this beaming even through the body? ‘Looking steadfastly on the face of Stephen, they saw it as if it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). But this was nothing compared to the glory flashing within. For what Moses had upon his face, these carried about with them on their souls. That of Moses was more obvious to the senses, but this was incorporeal. Like molten metal streaming down from metal in a furnace upon those things, which are close by, impart to them also somewhat of their own splendor; so truly does it also happen with the faithful. Those who are like this are set free from earth, and have their dreams of the things in the heavens.”

The Riches of His Grace

Sometimes we tend to focus our attention on earthly riches to the exclusion of everything else. An illustration might put this in a better perspective. Suppose you were walking along the sidewalk in an unfamiliar neighborhood, and you saw a gold bar lying next to the sidewalk. This one was about 8 by 3 by 2 inches, weighed 400 Troy ounces, and was worth about \$¼ million according to 2006 gold prices. Would you pick it up and take it home, or would you leave it there? Most people could use an extra \$¼ million, and would probably take it home⁶².

Suppose that the gold bar was last owned by a man who just passed away leaving no heirs and no will. Plus he left as note that whoever found his gold bar can have it. You now own the gold bar. The next week you were walking along the same sidewalk and noticed a dog pile in exactly the same spot that the gold bar was located earlier. Would you pick it up and take it home, or would you leave it there? Most people would express some kind of disgust, and may

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, VII, 5-6.

⁶² It might be wise to inquire who lost it, in case some mafia don wants it back!

complain against those who don't pick up after their pets; but few people would pick it up and take it home.

In perspective, the riches of Christ's grace that we will see at His return make the gold bar seem like the dog pile. In the next age, even the streets are paved with gold⁶³, to indicate how common it is. If we can get an understanding of the implications of this, we will have a much different approach to life.

Paul spoke often of the riches of Christ, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways are past finding out!" (Romans 11:33) Paul was humbled by the grace that was given to him to proclaim the riches of Christ.

"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, and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*" (Ephesians 3:8-10).

Paul stated that Christ "raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6-7). What do these riches entail? In the Apostle John's vision of the Throne of God, he heard millions of angels around the Throne saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12) Thus the "riches" of Christ includes power, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing.

There is a mystery to this. It begins with forgiveness and it results in us knowing the mystery of His will, and being strengthened in the inner man.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Ephesians 1:7-10).

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19).

⁶³ There is a figurative meaning also to streets paved with gold; but the use of gold in the New Jerusalem indicates that gold as a high value medium of exchange is no longer there.

This riches of the glory of this mystery was hidden from ages and generations, but has been revealed to His saints, which includes the Gentiles.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 1:24-2:3).

Paul makes a big deal of the riches of Christ, where all things are now under His feet, and we are Christ’s inheritance!

“After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. That you may know what the hope of His calling is, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. According to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:15-23).

Athanasius of Alexandria spoke⁶⁴ of the incomprehensible riches of Christ in terms of its strength and power. Because He is rich, He is able to work in diverse manners and varieties to each individual, some to provide milk, for others to provide vegetables and for others to provide meat. His richness produces different effects in different people, and many mansions are prepared with the Father to reward us in proportion to our advance in moral attainment. While all His people will be within the walls of His city, some will be rewarded more than others for their work in this life, for through virtue a man enters in to God.

“God multiplied His loving-kindness towards us, not only when He granted us our common salvation through His Word, but now also, when enemies

⁶⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Paschal Letters, X, 4.

have persecuted us, and have sought to seize us. Paul said, when describing the incomprehensible riches of Christ, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ' (Ephesians 2:4-5). For the strength of man and of all creatures is weak; but the Strength which is above man and uncreated is rich, incomprehensible and eternal, and has no beginning. He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in diverse manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us. Since He is rich, He varies Himself according to the individual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word, the Power and the Wisdom of God, as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that 'being one, it can do all things; and remaining in itself, it can make all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, makes them friends of God and prophets'" (Wisdom 7:27).

"To those who have not yet attained to the perfect way He becomes like a sheep giving milk. Paul administered this; 'I have fed you with milk, not with meat' (1 Corinthians 3:2). To those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak regarding perfection, He is their food, according to their capacity, again administered by Paul, 'Let him that is weak eat vegetables' (Romans 14:2). But as soon as a man begins to walk in the perfect way, he is no longer fed with milk or vegetables, but he has the Word for bread, and meat for food. 'Solid food is for those who are of full age, that is, those who, by reason of their capacity, have their senses exercised'" (Hebrews 5:14).

"And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it produces for some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13:8), as that Sower of grace teaches. And this is no doubtful matter, but it is in our power to behold the field, which He sows; for in the Church the word is clear and the produce rich. Such a field is adorned with virgins and monks and also with honorable matrimony and each one's chastity. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond its power. Mercy is not confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also to any rank, so that He might rescue all men to salvation."

"To this intent He has prepared many mansions with the Father (John 14:2), so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to our advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out and expelled. For apart from light there is darkness; apart from blessing there is a curse; the devil also is apart from the saints, and sin far from virtue. Therefore the Gospel rebukes Satan, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan' (Matthew 4:10). But us it calls to itself, saying, 'Enter by the narrow gate' (Matthew 7:13). And again, 'Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom which is prepared for you' (Matthew 25:34). So also the Spirit cried, saying, 'Enter into His gates with thanksgiving'" (Psalm 100:4).

"For through virtue a man enters in to God, as Moses did into the thick cloud where God was (Exodus 19:9). Through vice, a man goes out from the presence of the Lord; as Cain did when he had slain his brother (Genesis 4:16). Cain went out, as far as his will was concerned, from before the face of God. The Psalmist says, 'I will go in to the altar of God, even to the God that gladdens my

youth' (Psalm 43:4 LXX). But the devil went out from before God, and smote Job with boils (Job 2:7). This is the characteristic of those who go out from before God — to beat and injure the men of God. And this is the characteristic of those who fall away from the faith — to injure and persecute the faithful. The saints on the other hand, take in others and look upon them as friends; as David says, 'My eyes are on the faithful of the earth, that they may dwell with me' (Psalm 101:6). But those that are weak in the faith, Paul urges that we should especially take in (Romans 14:1). For virtue is philanthropic, just as in men of an opposite character, sin is misanthropic. So Saul, being a sinner, persecuted David, whereas David, though he had a good opportunity, did not kill Saul⁶⁵. Similarly Esau persecuted Jacob, while Jacob overcame Esau's wickedness by meekness⁶⁶. Again the eleven brothers sold Joseph, but Joseph, in his loving-kindness⁶⁷, had pity on them".

John Chrysostom mused⁶⁸ on the notion that Christ would bother to let us in on the mystery of His will, and on His wisdom in doing so.

"Strange! What friendship! He tells us His secrets; the mysteries of His will, as if one should say, He has made known to us the things that are in His heart. Here is the mystery, which is full of all wisdom and prudence. What will you say is equal to this wisdom? These people that were worth nothing, His wisdom has discovered a way of raising them to wealth and abundance. What can equal this wise contrivance? He that was an enemy, he that was hated, he is in a moment lifted up on high. And not this only, but yet more, that it should be done at this particular time, this again was the work of wisdom; and that it should be done by means of the Cross. It would take a long discourse here to point out how all this was the work of wisdom, and how He had made us wise. Therefore he repeated again the words, 'According to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself' (Ephesians 1:9). That is to say, this He desired, this He worked for, that He might be able to reveal to us the mystery. What mystery? That He would have man seated up on high; and this has come to pass."

Chrysostom noted⁶⁹ that Paul prayed constantly for all the Churches that he founded as though he himself had received the greatest blessing. Why? Because of what is to come, because of the good things that are laid up in store for them who rightly believe and live. And it is fitting to give thanks to God, both for all the things which mankind has received at His hands, both past and future; and it is fitting to give Him thanks also for the faith of those that believe.

"Paul's prayer is 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation' (Ephesians 1:17). Two things he requires them to understand, as it is their duty to understand them; to what blessings they are called, and how they have been released from their former state. We can understand regarding the things to come; for from the good things

⁶⁵ See 1 Samuel 24:1-19.

⁶⁶ See Genesis 27, Genesis 32-33.

⁶⁷ See Genesis 37:12-36,

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, I, vv. 8-9.

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 15-20.

laid up for us, we shall know His ineffable and surpassing riches, and from understanding who we were, and how we believed, we shall know His power and sovereignty. ‘The weakness of God is stronger than men’ (1 Corinthians 1:25). It is by the same power by which He raised Christ from the dead, that He has also drawn us to Himself. That power is not limited to the resurrection, but far exceeds it.”

Chrysostom also spoke⁷⁰ of some parts of the mysteries of the glory of God that have been revealed and others that have not been revealed yet. The Church has an insight into these mysteries that the world does not, where persuading people to believe is more difficult than raising the dead. The key to understanding these mysteries is in comprehending the exaltation of Christ from the tomb to the Right Hand of the Father – where we accompany Him.

“Paul prayed that the Ephesians may be given ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ (Ephesians 1:17). He was about to mention some things, which had already come to pass, and others, which had not happened yet; he makes those which have been brought to pass, a pledge for those which haven’t. ‘That you may know what is the hope of His calling’ is as yet hidden, but not so to the faithful. Again, ‘what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints’ (Ephesians 1:18); this too is still hidden.”

“What is clear is that through His power, we have believed that He has raised Christ. To persuade souls, is a thing far more miraculous than to raise a dead body. To make this clear, Christ said to the dead, ‘Lazarus, come out’ (John 11:43), and immediately he obeyed. Peter said, ‘Tabitha, arise’ (Acts 9:40), and she got up. He Himself shall speak the word at the last day, and all shall rise so quickly, that ‘those who are alive, shall by no means precede those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Thessalonians 4:15) and all shall come to pass, ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye’ (1 Corinthians 15:52). But in the matter of believing, it is different; He said, ‘How often would I have gathered your children together, but you were not willing’ (Matthew 23:37). You perceive that this last is the more difficult. He builds up the whole argument that it is far more difficult to influence the choice, than to work on nature. He wants us to become good of our own will. Thus with good reason he says, ‘The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe’” (Ephesians 1:19).

“‘The riches of the glory’ refers to the unutterable glory; for what language shall be adequate to express that glory of which the saints shall be partakers? Truly there is a need of grace in order that the understanding may perceive it, and admit at least one little ray of light. Some things the Ephesians knew before; now he was desirous that they should learn more, and know it more clearly. He has raised up Christ, which is not a small thing, and He has set Him at His right hand. Shall any language then be able to represent this? Him that is of the earth, who made a sport of demons, He has in a moment raised up on high. Truly this is the ‘exceeding greatness of His power’”.

“Notice where He has raised Him: ‘In the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 1:20, 2:6). He has made Him far above all created nature, far above all rule and authority. There is definitely a need for the Spirit for an understanding of this.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 21-22.

We need to be wise in the knowledge of Him and be open to receive revelation. Reflect, how vast is the distance between the nature of man and the nature of God. Yet from this vile estate of man, He has exalted Him to that high dignity. Christ doesn't mount up by degrees, and He doesn't ascend, 'above', but, 'far above'; for God is above those powers. And there He has raised Him, Who is one of us, brought Him from the lowest parts of the earth (i.e. Hades) to the most supreme sovereignty, to that beyond which there is no other honor."

"And gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church' (Ephesians 1:22). Amazing again, where He has raised the Church, as though he were lifting it up by some engine, he has raised it up to a vast height, and set it on the throne of God. For where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval of separation between the Head and the body; for if there were a separation, then it would no longer be a body, and it would no longer be a head."

"What is meant by 'over all things?' He has allowed neither Angel nor Archangel nor any other being to be above Him. But not only in this way has He honored us, in exalting that which is of our human nature, but also He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His procession."

"When you hear of the Head you may not conceive the notion of supremacy only, but also of consolidation, and that you may behold Him not as supreme Ruler only, but as Head of a body. As though this were not sufficient to show the close connection and relationship, Paul adds, 'The fullness of Christ is the Church' (Ephesians 1:22-23). And rightly so, for the complement of the head is the body, and the complement of the body is the head. Note what great arrangement Paul observes, how he spares not a single word in representing the glory of God. The complement of the head is the body, because the body is composed and made up of all its several parts, and he introduced Him as having need of each single one, all in common and together. Unless we are many, and one is the hand, and another the foot, and another some other member, the whole body is not filled up. It is by all then that His body is filled up. Then is the head filled up, then is the body made perfect, when we are all knit together and united. Do you perceive the 'riches of the glory of His inheritance, the exceeding greatness of His power towards them that believe, the hope of your calling?'" (Ephesians 1:18-19)

Together with Christ

Paul stated, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together** with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up together**, and **made us sit together** in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7). What does the "together with Christ" imply?

Paul had been speaking of the things, which concerned Christ (Ephesians 2:4-6), and these might not seem applicable to us, such as His resurrection; but Paul shows that they do

extend to us, since He is made one with us. John Chrysostom pointed⁷¹ out some of the places where Christ said that we will sit with Him, and how this is honor above anything we can imagine.

“Paul states ‘We, who were dead through our trespasses He raised up with Him, and made us sit with Him’ (Ephesians 2:5-6). Don’t be unbelieving; take the demonstration he offers both from former things, from His Headship, and from His desire to show His goodness. How will He show it, unless we do this? He will show it in the ages to come, that the blessings are both great, and more certain than anything else. Right now the things, which we talk about, may seem to be foolishness to unbelievers; but then everyone will know them.”

“How has He made us sit together with Him? Christ Himself said to the disciples, ‘You shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28). And again, ‘But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for them for whom it has been prepared by My Father’ (Matthew 20:23). So that it has been prepared! And well did he say, ‘in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:7), for to sit on His right hand is honor above all honor; it is that beyond which there is none other. This he said, that even we shall sit there! Truly this is surpassing riches; truly surpassing is the greatness of His power, to make us sit down with Christ. If you had ten thousand souls, would you not lose them for His sake? If you had to enter the flames, shouldn’t you readily endure it? He Himself said again, ‘Where I am, there shall My servant be also’ (John 12:26). If you had to be cut to pieces every day, surely you ought, for the sake of these promises cheerfully embrace it? Think where He sits! Above all principality and power!”

“And with whom is it that you sit? With Him! And who you are? Someone who was dead, by nature a child of wrath! And what good have you done? Nothing! Truly now it is high time to exclaim, ‘Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!’” (Romans 11:33)

Chrysostom also noted⁷² that Satan had sunk Adam’s soul in the Garden of Eden just as criminals sink ships by boring a hole in the hull. But God made our gain greater than our loss by raising us up to sit with Him. This is hard to imagine, and grasping even small parts of it becomes very slippery. The riches of His grace will be much clearer when we see it face to face.

“Criminals who sail the sea often bore through ships with a small iron tool, and let in the whole sea to the ship from below. So accordingly then, when the Devil saw the ship of Adam, that is his soul, full of many good things, he came and bored it through with his mere voice, as with some small iron tool, and emptied him of all his wealth and sank the ship. But God made the gain greater than the loss, and brought our nature to the royal throne. Therefore Paul says, ‘He raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him, on his right hand in the heavenly places, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us’ (Ephesians 2:7). This He has already shown, but not to all men; He has showed it to me, who am faithful, but the unbelieving has not yet seen the wonder. But in that day the whole nature of man will come

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v. 7.

⁷² John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say That Demons Govern Human Affairs, I, 2-3.

forward, and will wonder at that which has been done, but especially will it be clearer to us. For we believe even now, but hearing and sight do not put a wonder before us in the same way. Just as in the case of kings, when we hear of the purple robe, the crown, the golden clothing and the royal throne, we wonder at it; but we experience this in greater degree when the curtains are drawn aside and we see him seated on the lofty judgment seat. So also in the case of the Only Begotten, when we see the curtains of heaven drawn aside, and the King of angels descending, and with his bodyguard of the heavenly hosts, then we perceive the wonder to be greater from our sight of it. For consider what it is to see human nature borne upon the Cherubim, and the whole angelic force surrounding it.”

“Look at how many expressions Paul seeks for, so as to present to us the loving-kindness of God. He did not speak merely the word grace, nor riches, but ‘The exceeding riches of his grace in kindness’ (Ephesians 2:7). Just as slippery bodies escape our hold and slip through easily, even when grasped by countless hands; so also are we unable to get hold of the loving-kindness of God in whatever expressions we may try to grasp it. The sheer magnitude of it baffles the feebleness of our utterances. Paul experienced this, and seeing the force of words defeated by its magnitude, desists after saying one word: ‘Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift’ (2 Corinthians 9:15). For neither speech, nor any mind is able to set forth the tender care of God. He then says that it is beyond finding out, and elsewhere, ‘The peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts’” (Philippians 4:7).

Chrysostom, in speaking on how to get there, encouraged⁷³ his people to avoid being suspicious of the poor man begging food. If we are together with Christ along with the poor man, we need to treat our brother accordingly. Christ will judge us by the same standards that we use to judge our fellow man.

“Now if it was gold and silver that the poor man asked of you, then there would be some reason for your suspicions. But if it is necessary food that he comes to you for, why take such an exact account of him, accusing him of idleness and sloth? If we must talk in this way, we ought to address ourselves, not others. When you go to God to ask forgiveness for your sins, call these words to mind, and you will know that you deserve to have these things said to you by God, much more than the poor man needs to hear these said by you. And yet God has never said such words to you such as you might say to a poor man: ‘Back off, you impostor, always coming to Church and hearing My Laws; when you are outside the Church, you set gold, pleasure, friendship, and in fact anything above My commandments. Now you make yourself humble, but when your prayers are over you are bold, cruel, and inhuman. Get out of My sight, and never come to Me any more’. This, and more than this, we deserve to have said to us. But still He never criticizes us in any such way, but He is long-suffering and fulfills everything on His part, and gives us more than we ask for.”

“Calling this to mind then, let us relieve the poverty of those that beg of us; and if they impose on us, let us not be overly exact about it. For such a salvation is it that we ourselves require, one with pardon, with kindness, with

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIV, v. 27.

much mercy along with it. For it is not possible, if our life were searched into strictly, that we should ever be saved, but we would need to be punished. Let us not be bitter judges of others lest we also get a strict account demanded of us. For we have sins that are too great to plead any excuse. Let us show more mercy towards those who have committed inexcusable sins, that we also may lay up for ourselves similar mercy beforehand. Even if we were as large-hearted as we could be, we shall never be able to contribute such love toward man as we stand in need of at the hand of God.”

“It is monstrous, when we are in need of so many things ourselves, for us to be too exacting with our fellow servants. We do not in this way prove him unworthy of our liberality; we prove ourselves unworthy of God’s love toward man. He that deals too exactly with his fellow servant, will be the more sure to find like treatment at the hand of God. Even if the poor come to us from idleness or willfulness, let us help them. We also do many sins through willfulness, or rather we do them all through willfulness, and yet God does not presently call us to punishment, but gives us a set time for penance, nurturing us day by day, disciplining us, teaching us, supplying us with all other things, that we too may emulate this mercy of His. Let us then quell this cruelty, let us cast out this brutal spirit. To these we may give money, bread, and clothing, but for ourselves we are storing up beforehand very great glory, and such as there is no putting into words.”

Instead we should be thinking of the incredible blessings together with Christ in the Kingdom of God, which are beyond our senses to describe. These are our rewards for being generous with the poor as God is generous with us.

“We will receive our bodies again incorruptible, and are glorified together and reign together with Christ. How great this is we shall see later; there is no means of making us see it clearly now. But to start from our present blessings, and to get from them at least some kind of hint of our future blessings, I will endeavor to put before you what I have been speaking of. If when you were grown old, and were living in poverty, and anyone were to promise suddenly to make you young, to bring you to the prime of life, to render you very strong and preeminently beautiful, and were to give you the kingdom of the whole earth for a thousand years, a kingdom in the state of the deepest peace, what is there that you would not choose to do, and to suffer to gain this promise? Christ promises not this, but much more than this. The distance between old age and youth is not comparable with the difference of corruption and incorruption. An earthly kingdom and poverty is not comparable to that of the present glory and future glory; the difference is like dreams versus reality. There is no language capable of setting before you the greatness of the difference between things to come and things present. And as for time, there is no basis for the idea of difference. For what mode is there for a man to compare with our present state a life that has no limit? And as for the peace of the Kingdom of God, it is as far removed from any present peace, as peace is different from war; as for the incorruption of the Kingdom of God, it is as much better as a clear pearl is than a clod of clay. Or rather, say as great a thing as one may, nothing can describe the difference. If I

were to compare the beauty of our bodies then to the light of the sunbeam, or the brightest lightning, I still shall not yet be saying anything that is worthy of that brilliancy. Now for such things as these, what money is so much that it was not worth the while to give it up? What bodies, or rather what souls is it not worth one's while to give up? At present if anyone were to lead you into the palace, and in the presence of all were to give you an opportunity of conversing with the king, and make you sit at his table, and join in his dining, you would call yourself the happiest of men. But when you go up to Heaven, and stand by the King of the universe Himself, and to speak with angels in brightness, and to enjoy that unutterable glory, do you hesitate whether you ought to give up a little money to help the poor?"

Dealing with Our Common Enemy

Just prior to the Epistle Reading, Paul said, "And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

How does the prince of the power of the air operate, and what are his methods and limitations? John Cassian went into some detail⁷⁴ about the fall of Satan and his angelic followers.

They all had been in Eden, the Paradise of God, covered with all kinds⁷⁵ of precious stones (Ezekiel 28:12-15), but unrighteousness was found in them and they were thrown out. Satan had been highly honored, but in a burst of pride, he tried to exalt his throne to be like the Throne of God (Isaiah 14:12-14). One third of the angels of heaven fell with him (Revelation 12:4), but they have kept their ranks and their powers.

The demons had already fallen when they deceived Adam and Eve. He was called "serpent" before he deceived Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1), and he excelled all the other creatures in wickedness. The title of "serpent" and the comparison to beasts suggests that he was already an apostate.

The occasion of the envy and seduction, which led him to deceive man, arose from his previous fall, in that he saw that man, who had but recently been formed out of the dust of the ground, was called to that glory, from which he himself had fallen. His first fall, which was due to pride, earned him the name of the serpent. His second fall from envying came at the time of Adam and Eve. He was still in the possession of something upright, so that he could enjoy some interchange of conference and counsel with man. By the Lord's sentence

⁷⁴ Paraphrase of John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, viii, 8-14.

⁷⁵ Precious stones allude to holiness and the fruits of holiness. For example, the breastpiece that the High Priest was required to wear when he entered the Holy of Holies was covered with 12 gemstones (Exodus 28:15-30). Similarly, the good work that we build on the foundation of Christ is represented as gold, silver and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Prior to their fall, the demons had this; but their pride caused them to disregard it.

(Genesis 3:14-15), he was properly thrown down further, that he might no longer walk erect as before, but should cling to the ground, creep along on his belly, and feed on the earthly food and works of sins. His secret hostility and enmity with man was exposed to our advantage, so that men are on their guard against him as a dangerous enemy, and he can no longer injure them by a deceptive show of friendship.

The atmosphere between heaven and earth is always filled with a thick crowd of spirits⁷⁶, which do not fly about in it quietly or idly; fortunately God has withdrawn them from human sight. If this were not the case, fear of their attacks, or horror at the forms into which they transform themselves at will, might drive men out of their wits by an intolerable dread, from inability to look on such things with bodily eyes. Or else men might grow worse and worse, and be corrupted by their constant example. There would arise a dangerous familiarity between men and the unclean powers of the air. Those crimes, which are now committed among men, are concealed either by walls, enclosures, distance, space, or by some shame and confusion. But if they could always look on the demons directly, men would be stimulated to a greater pitch of insanity, as there would not be a single moment in which they would see the demons refrain from their wickedness.

These attacks, with which the demons assault men, they aim even against each other, fighting continuously⁷⁷, because of a sort of innate love of wickedness. We read of this when the angel Gabriel visited Daniel. The prince of the Persians resisted Gabriel for 21 days; Michael, one of the chief princes came to help him (Daniel 10:12-14). This prince of the Persians was a hostile power, which favored the Persians, an enemy of God's people. In order to hinder the good which it saw would result from the solution of the question, for which Daniel prayed, in its jealousy it opposed Gabriel to prevent the angel from reaching Daniel too speedily. Gabriel said that even then, because of the fierceness of his assaults, he would not have been able to come to him, had not Michael the archangel come to help him, met the prince of the Persians, and defended him from his attack. The angel also said, "Now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians. When I went out, the prince of the Greeks was coming. I will tell you what is written down in the Scriptures; and no one is my helper in all these things but Michael your prince" (Daniel 10:20-21). And again, "At that time Michael shall rise up, the great prince, who stands for your people" (Daniel 12:1). Thus another demon was called the prince of the Greeks, opposed to the Persians as well as to the people of Israel. From which we clearly see that antagonistic powers rise against each other in quarrels of nations, which they show among themselves. They either exult at their victories or are cast down at their defeats. They thus cannot live in harmony among themselves, while each of

⁷⁶ This is also the view of Antony the Great; Athanasius of Alexandria had a slightly different viewpoint. Athanasius stated that Christ was crucified in the "air" to clear the air of the demons that filled the skies to prepare an opening for us up into heaven. Thus Christ saw Satan fall like lightning (Luke 10:18). See Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word*, XXV, 5-6.

⁷⁷ The Canaanites, prior to the Conquest, seem to have imitated the demons in continuously fighting against each other (Numbers 13:32).

them is always striving with restless jealousy on behalf of those whom he presides over, against the patron of some other nation.

We can see clear reasons why they are called principalities or powers; that is, because they rule over different nations, and over inferior demons, of which the gospels give us evidence by their own confession that there exist legions⁷⁸ of them (Mark 5:8-9). For they could not be called lords unless they had some over whom to exercise the sway of lordship; nor could they be called powers or principalities, unless there were some over whom they could claim power. This we find pointed out very clearly by the Pharisees in their blasphemy, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub the prince of the demons” (Luke 11:15). They are also called “rulers of darkness” (Ephesians 6:12), and one of them is called “the prince of this world” (John 14:30). But Paul declares that when Christ has subdued all things, these orders shall be destroyed, “When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father, when He shall have destroyed all principalities⁷⁹, powers and dominions” (1 Corinthians 15:24). This can only take place if they are removed from the control of those over whom we know that powers, dominions and principalities take charge in this world.

Athanasius of Alexandria documented⁸⁰ some of the things that Antony the Great learned in his wars with the demons. Demons are all around us and there are many different ranks of them, each with different capabilities. They were created good, but rebelled; they are now jealous of us and wish to hinder us from ascending to where they once were. They tempt us, place hindrances to hamper us, give us false visions to frighten us, or give us false prophecy to lead us astray; and they do this shamelessly. They may also imitate pious people, the sound of sacred music, and try to shame us for not being good enough as Christians. We do not need to fear their appearance or listen to their words.

“We have terrible and crafty foes — the evil spirits — and against them we wrestle, as the Apostle said, ‘Not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12). Great is their number in the air around us⁸¹, and they are not far from us. Now there are great distinctions among them. But at this time it is necessary for us only to know their wiles against us.”

“First we must know this: that the demons have not been created evil, for God made nothing evil, but even they have been made good. Having fallen from the heavenly wisdom, they have since then been groveling on earth. On the one hand they deceived the Greeks with their displays, while out of envy of us Christians they move all things in their desire to hinder us from entry into the heavens, in order that we should not ascend up to the place from which they fell. Thus there is need of much prayer and of discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognize

⁷⁸ A Roman legion consisted of 6,000 foot soldiers and included some cavalry also.

⁷⁹ Many English translations use the words “all rule, authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24) and “all principalities, powers and dominions” (Ephesians 6:12). However in Greek, the words are the same for both.

⁸⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, 21-25.

⁸¹ This was the view of Antony and John Cassian; see also Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word*, XXV, 5-6.

their characteristics; that is, which of them are less and which are more evil; of what nature is the special pursuit of each, and how each of them is overthrown and cast out. For their evildoing and the changes in their plots are many. Paul and his followers knew such things when they said, ‘for we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11); and we, from the temptations we have suffered at their hands, ought to correct one another to expose them.”

“The demons, therefore, if they see Christians, and monks especially, laboring cheerfully and advancing, first make an attack by temptation and place hindrances to hamper our way, such as evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting, and faith in the Lord their attack immediately fails. But even when their attack fails, they don’t cease, but dishonestly and by subtlety come back again. For when they cannot deceive the heart openly with immoral pleasures they approach in different manner. Shaping displays, they attempt to strike fear, changing their shapes, taking the forms of women, wild beasts, creeping things, gigantic bodies, and troops of soldiers. But not even then do you need to fear their deceitful displays. They are nothing and quickly disappear, especially if a man fortifies himself beforehand with faith and the sign of the cross⁸². Yet they are bold and shameless, for if thus they are beaten they make an onslaught in another manner, and pretend to prophesy and foretell the future, and to show themselves of a height reaching to the roof and of great width. By such displays they may catch those who could not be deceived by their arguments. If here also they find the soul strengthened by faith and a hopeful mind, then they bring their leader in to help them.”

“They often appear as the Lord revealed the devil to Job. ‘His eyes are as the morning star. From his mouth proceeds burning torches and the smoke of a furnace proceeds from his nostrils. His breath is like live coals and from his mouth issues flames’ (Job 41:9-12 LXX). When the prince of the demons appears in this manner, the crafty one strikes terror by speaking great things, as the Lord convicted him saying to Job, for ‘he counts iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood, he counts the sea as a pot of ointment, and the depth of the abyss as a captive, and the abyss as his range’ (Job 41:18, 22-23 LXX). And by the prophet, ‘the enemy said, I will pursue and overtake’ (Exodus 15:9), and again by another, ‘I will take the whole world in my hand as a nest, and take it up as eggs that have been left’ (Isaiah 10:14 LXX). Such are their boasts and professions that they may deceive the godly. But not even then ought we to fear his appearance or give heed to his words. He is a liar and never speaks a word of truth. And though speaking many words with great boldness, like a dragon he was drawn with a hook by the Savior (Job 41:1), and as a beast of burden he received the halter round his nostrils, and as a runaway his nostrils were bound with a ring (Job 41:2). The Lord bound him as a sparrow, that we should mock him (Job 40:19-24). With him are placed the demons, his cohorts, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians (Luke 10:19-20). And the proof of this is that we now live opposed to him. He who threatened to dry the sea and seize the world, now cannot resist our discipline, or even me speaking against him. Let us not pay attention to his words, for he is a liar; and let us not fear his visions,

⁸² See also Athanasius, Life of Antony, 13.

seeing that they themselves are deceptive. That which appears in them is not true light, but they are rather the preludes and likenesses of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. They may appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive them. It is not fitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the grace of Christ all their practices are in vain.”

“Again they are treacherous, and are ready to change themselves into all forms and assume all appearances. Very often without appearing they imitate the music of harp and voice, and recall the words of Scripture. Sometimes, while we are reading they immediately repeat many times, like an echo, what is read. They arouse the monks from our sleep to prayers; and this constantly, hardly allowing us to sleep at all. At another time they assume the appearance of monks and imitate the speech of holy men, that by their similarity they may deceive and thus drag their victims where they want. But we must not pay attention to them even if they arouse to prayer, even if they counsel us not to eat at all, even though they seem to cast shame upon us for not doing those things. For they do this not for the sake of piety or truth, but that they may carry off the simple to despair. They do this that they may say that the discipline is useless, and make men loathe the solitary life as a trouble and burden, and hinder those who walk in it.”

John Cassian described⁸³ the orthodox method of spiritual combat as the discipline of one’s body by fasting, such that the athlete of Christ, in his struggles, ends up inciting progressively more powerful enemies to rise against him.

“The orthodox method of spiritual combat, that is, how the athlete of Christ gains a victory over the rebellious flesh, is carried out by beating the demons where they dwell. ‘He does not run uncertainly’, because he trusts that he will eventually enter the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem. He ‘fights’, with fasts and humiliation of the flesh, ‘not as one that beats the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26). That is, he strikes with blows of self-restraint, through which he struck not the empty air, but those spirits who inhabit it, by the discipline of his body. When Paul says ‘not as one that beats the air’, this shows that he strikes, not empty air, but certain beings in the air. After a person has overcome in this kind of contest, and has been rewarded, he begins to do battle against still more powerful enemies. Paul, having triumphed over his former demonic rivals, boldly makes proclamation, ‘Now our striving is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places’” (Ephesians 6:12).

“The athlete of Christ, as long as he is in the body, progresses to a more severe kind of struggle to confront him. For when the flesh is subdued and conquered, many swarms of enemies are incited by his triumphs and rise up against the victorious soldier of Christ! In the ease of peace the soldier of Christ might relax his efforts and begin to forget the glorious struggles of his contests, and be cheated of the recompense of his triumphs. When this conflict is ended we may be able to say with him, ‘we wrestle not against flesh and blood’, etc.

⁸³ John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coanobia, V, 18-19.

Otherwise we cannot possibly do battle with them nor deserve to do well in any spiritual combat if we are beaten down in a struggle with the belly. Deservedly it will be said of us in the language of blame, ‘Temptation does not overtake you, except what is common to man’”(1 Corinthians 10:13).

John Cassian also stated⁸⁴ that different demons have different strengths, and that the weaker demons are assigned to weaker Christians. Christ Himself is also involved that we might be able to bear it. The demons also have to struggle in their advances against us; as we are damaged when they overcome, so they are damaged when we overcome. In Appendix A, Cassian gives examples, mostly from the Psalms, of some of these struggles, where many of the Psalms are directed against demons.

“All demons do not have the same fierceness and energy, or the same boldness and malice, and that with beginners and feeble folk only the weaker spirits join battle, and when this spiritual wickedness is beaten, then gradually the assaults of stronger ones are made against the athlete of Christ. For in proportion to a man’s strength and progress, is the difficulty of the struggle made greater. None of the saints could possibly be equal to the endurance of the malice of so great enemies, unless the merciful judge of our contest, Christ Himself, equalized the strength of the combatants, repelled and checked their excessive attacks, and made with the temptation a way of escape as well that we might be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“Our belief is that demons undertake this struggle not without effort on their part. For in their conflict they themselves have some sort of anxiety, especially when they are matched with stronger rivals, like saints and men of perfection. Otherwise there would be no contest or struggle, but only a simple deception of men, and someone free from anxiety on their part would be assigned to us. And how then would Paul’s words stand, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12); and, ‘Thus I fight, not as one that beats the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26); and again, ‘I have fought the good fight?’ (2 Timothy 4:7) For where it is spoken of as a fight, there must be effort on both sides, and equally there must either be in store for them embarrassment for their failure, or delight upon their victory. If one fights with ease against another who struggles with great effort; and in order to overthrow his rival makes use of his will alone as his strength, it ought not to be called a battle, but a sort of unfair and unreasonable assault. But they certainly have to work, and when they attack men, they exert themselves in order to secure the victory, which they want to obtain; and they receive the same confusion, which was awaiting us, had we been beaten by them.”

⁸⁴ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 20-21.

Paul encouraged people to “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Ephesians 6:11-12). John Chrysostom stated⁸⁵ that our enemy does not fight with us openly, but by “wiles”, where he never proposes to us sins in their proper colors. The conflict is not about riches or glory, but about our being enslaved. Vast interests are at stake, for the expression “in the heavenly places” is equivalent to “for the heavenly things”.

“Paul stated that we struggle not, against the fighting and the hostilities of the devil, but against the ‘wiles’. For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, or openly, but by ‘wiles’. To use ‘wiles’ is to deceive by artifice; a thing, which takes place by words, actions, and stratagems, in the case of those who seduce us. The Devil never proposes to us sins in their proper colors; he does not speak of idolatry, but he sets it off in another fashion using ‘wiles’, that is, making his presentation plausible, employing disguises. Paul is rousing the soldiers and making them vigilant, persuading and instructing them, that our conflict is with one skilled in the arts of war, and with one who fights not simply, or directly, but with much wiliness. First Paul arouses the disciples from the consideration of the Devil’s skill; in the second place, from his nature, and the number of his forces. It is not from any desire to undermine the morale of the soldiers that stand under him, but to arouse, and awaken them, that he mentions these stratagems, and prepares them to be vigilant. Had he merely detailed their power, and then stopped, he might have dispirited them. He raises their courage by showing that it is possible to overcome such an enemy; for the more clearly the strength of our adversaries is stated to our own people, the more serious our soldiers will become.”

“Having stimulated them by the character of the conflict, he next goes on to arouse them also by the prizes set before them. Having said that the enemies are fierce, he adds that they deprive us of vast blessings. The conflict lies ‘in the heavenlies’; the struggle is not about riches, or about glory, but about our being enslaved. And thus is the enmity irreconcilable. Any fighting gets fiercer when vast interests are at stake; for the expression ‘in the heavenlies’ is equivalent to, ‘for the heavenly things’. It is not that they may gain anything by the conquest, but that they may deprive us of our reward. Observe how the power of the enemy startles us; it makes us hesitant to know that the hazard is on behalf of vast interests, and the victory for the sake of great rewards. He is doing his best to get us cast out of Heaven” (just like he had been cast out).

“Paul speaks of certain ‘principalities, and powers, and world-rulers of this darkness’. The darkness is not that of night, but of wickedness. ‘For you were’, he said, ‘once darkness’ (Ephesians 5:8); so naming that wickedness which is in this present life; for beyond this present life, it will have no place, not in Heaven, nor in the world to come.”

“By ‘the world’, Paul means wicked men, and the evil spirits have special power over them. “He calls them ‘World-rulers’, not as having the mastery over the world, but the Scripture tends to call wicked practices ‘the world’. For

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, vv. 11-12.

example, Christ said, ‘They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world’ (John 17:16), but they are clothed with flesh of the world. And again, ‘The world cannot hate you (Christ’s opponents), but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil’ (John 7:7). Again He calls wicked practices by this name. Thus Paul, by ‘the world’ means wicked men, and the evil spirits have special power over them. There are ‘the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’, just as in the heavenly places there are ‘thrones, dominions, principalities and powers’” (Colossians 1:16).

Heirs with Christ

Paul spoke of the saints as the inheritance of Christ in the age to come, and that we need to be enlightened about this.

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Ephesians 1:16-19).

At that time, He will show us the “exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7). In the meantime,

“He has made known to us the mystery that we may understand Paul’s knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy Apostles and Prophets, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel” (Ephesians 3:3-6).

Paul spoke about “preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). John Chrysostom spoke⁸⁶ about how this was one of the mysteries of God that no one would have ever guessed.

“If His ‘riches are unsearchable’, and this is after his appearing, much more is His Essence unsearchable. If His riches are still a mystery, much more was it before it was made known; for he calls it a mystery on this account, because the angels didn’t know it, nor was it clear to anyone else. Angels knew only this, that ‘The Lord’s portion was His people’ (Deuteronomy 32:9). It is no wonder that they were ignorant of this; for if they were ignorant of the circumstances of the return from the Captivity, much more would they be of these things. For this is the gospel: ‘It is He that shall save His people’ (Matthew 1:21). Not a word about the Gentiles! But what concerns the Gentiles, the Spirit reveals. That they were called, the Angels knew, but that it was to the same privileges as Israel, even to sit upon the throne of God, who would ever have expected this? Who would ever have believed?”

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VII.

At the present time, “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:16-17). “Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3: 7).

The widely quoted John 3:16 does not declare His love only for those in the Church or even just for humanity, but for *all of creation*; even the order of nature has been affected by our fall, and needs to be redeemed. This Apostle, whom the Lord especially loved as a friend, says that God Himself is love (1 John 4:8-10, 16); we only love God in return as an imitator of love. Meeting around the Throne of God and surrounded by the love of the saints, this love takes on tangibility.

Yet it is by God’s grace that we have escaped from death to life (Ephesians 2:5). Again, the theme is that divine love is the origin of our salvation. Thus, while we might just barely find heart to die for a righteous person, Christ did so for us as while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8).

Hippolytus stated⁸⁷ that when we become immortal at the resurrection of all the dead, we also become a god as a joint-heir with Christ, all because of water and the Spirit.

“The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit. He, begetting us again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and arrayed us with an incorruptible armor. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be god. And if he is made god by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver, he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead. Therefore I preach to this effect: Come, all you kindred of the nations, to the immortality of the baptism. I bring good news of life to you who dwell in the darkness of ignorance. Come into liberty from slavery, into a kingdom from tyranny, into incorruption from corruption. And how shall we come? By water and the Holy Spirit! This is the water in conjunction with the Spirit, by which Paradise is watered, by which the earth is enriched, and (to sum up the whole in a single word) by which man is begotten again and given life, in which also Christ was baptized, and in which the Spirit descended in the form of a dove.”

“Come then, be begotten again into the adoption of God. And how? If you practice adultery no more, and don’t commit murder, and don’t serve idols. If you are not mastered by pleasure; if you don’t allow pride to rule you; if you clean off the filthiness of impurity, and put off the burden of sin. Cast off the armor of the devil, and put on the breastplate of faith. ‘Wash, and seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow. And come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are as scarlet, I shall make them white as snow; and though they be like crimson, I shall make them white as wool. And if you are willing, and hear my voice, you shall eat the good of the land’ (Isaiah 1:16-19). Do you see, beloved, how the prophet spoke beforehand of the purifying power of baptism? For he who comes down in faith to the laver

⁸⁷ Hippolytus, “The Discourse on the Holy Theophany”, Extant Works and Fragments, Part II, 8, 10.

of regeneration, and renounces the devil, and joins himself to Christ; who denies the enemy, and makes the confession that Christ is God; who puts off the bondage, and puts on the adoption, he comes up from the baptism brilliant as the sun, flashing forth the beams of righteousness, and, which is indeed the chief thing, he returns a son of God and joint-heir with Christ.”

John Chrysostom spoke⁸⁸ of keeping our goal in sight: that is the Kingdom of Heaven. Compared to our inheritance at the Second Coming, gold in this life is like mud. While this life is a struggle, angels will honor and reverence us when we attain that prize.

“Never attempt slippery things, and you will not fall; walk on firm ground, with your head up and with your eyes up; these commands trainers give to runners. Thus your strength is supported; but if you stoop down, you fall. Look upward, where the prize is; the sight of the prize increases the determination of our will. The hope of taking it doesn’t allow us to notice the work, it makes the distance appear short. And what is this prize? The kingdom of heaven, everlasting rest, glory together with Christ, the inheritance, brotherhood, ten thousand good things, which it is impossible to name. It is impossible to describe the beauty of that prize; he who has it alone knows it, and he who is about to receive it. It is not gold, it is not set with jewels, it is far more precious. Gold is mud compared to that prize, precious stones are just bricks in comparison with its beauty. If you have this, and depart to heaven, you will be able to walk there with great honor; the angels will reverence you, when you bear this prize; with much confidence will you approach them all. It is impossible without an impulse from Him to ascend over so vast a gap between earth and heaven; we have need of much help. He has willed that you should struggle below, on high, He crowns you. The crown is not in this world, where the contest is; it is in that bright place. Notice that the most honored of the wrestlers and charioteers are not crowned in the arena, but the king calls them up to the podium, and crowns them there. Thus too is it here, in heaven you receive the prize.”

Chrysostom also spoke⁸⁹ of the great mystery that is being revealed by the Church. The King of the Universe is treating us with honor and is entrusting a secret to us: the mystery of Christ and His Church. We should be grateful for the honor He has shown us, even if we don’t understand it very well.

“The dispensation on our behalf he calls a “mystery,” and well may it be so called, since it is not clear to all. It was not clear to the Angels, for how could it be, when it was ‘made known by the Church?’ (Ephesians 3:10) Therefore he says, ‘without controversy great is the mystery’. Great indeed it was. God became Man, and Man became God. A Man was seen without sin! A Man was received up, was preached in the world! Together with us the Angels saw Him. This is indeed a mystery! Let us not then expose this mystery, but let us live in a manner worthy of the mystery. They to whom a mystery is entrusted are great persons. We account it a mark of favor, if a king entrusts a secret to us. But God has committed His mystery to us, yet are we ungrateful to our Benefactor, as if we

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XII, vv. 13-14.

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

had not received the greatest benefits? Our insensitivity to such a kindness should strike us with horror.”

“In keeping this mystery, let us be faithful to our trust. So great a mystery has He entrusted to us, and we do not trust Him even with our money, though He has asked us to store our wealth with Him, where none can take it away, neither can moth nor thief waste it. And He promises to pay us a hundred-fold, yet we don’t obey Him. Here if we entrust any with a deposit, we receive nothing back in addition, but are thankful if our deposit is restored. He repays a hundred-fold here, and eternal life is added later, yet we do not lay up our treasure there! ‘But’, you say, ‘He repays so slowly’. Well this too is a proof of the greatness of His gift, that He does not repay here in this mortal life; or rather He does repay here a hundred-fold. For did not Paul leave his tools here, Peter his rod and hook, and Matthew his custom (tax) seat? Was not the whole world opened to them more than to kings? Were not all things laid at their feet? Were they not appointed rulers and lords? Did not men commit their lives into their hands, suspend themselves wholly upon their counsel, and enlist in their service? And do we not see many similar occurrences now? Many men of poor and humble means, whose only livelihood was digging, and had barely enough food, but who had the character of monks, have been celebrated above all men, and honored by kings.”

Jerome stated⁹⁰ that the diverse wisdom of God is made known through the Church to the bodiless powers. Part of this diversity has to do with rewards given out in proportion to our deeds.

‘For we all’, he says, ‘must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad’. And you cannot say that the mode of our appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ is such that the good receive good things, the bad evil things; for he teaches us in the same epistle that he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Surely he who sows more and he who sows less are both on the right side⁹¹. And although they belong to the same class, that of the sower, yet they differ with respect to measure and number. The same Paul says, ‘to the intent that now to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God’ (Ephesians 3:10). You observe that it is a varied and diverse wisdom of God, which is spoken of as existing in the different ranks of the Church. And in the same epistle we read, ‘To each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the grace of Christ’; not that Christ’s measure varies, but that only so much of His grace is poured out as we can receive.

Faith: the Gift of God

Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Thus salvation

⁹⁰ Jerome, “Against Jovinianus”, *Treatises*, II, 23.

⁹¹ That is, at the Lord’s right hand, when He separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32-33).

comes through faith, which itself is a gift we receive from God. Chrysostom commented⁹² that had Christ not come, had He not called us, we would not have been able to believe? The work of faith itself is not our own.

“In order that the greatness of the benefits given to you may not raise you too high, observe how he brings you down: ‘By grace you have been saved, through faith’ Ephesians 2:8). Then on the other hand, that our freewill might not be impaired, he adds also our part in the work and adds, ‘and that not of ourselves’”.

“He means that neither is faith ‘of ourselves’. Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? For ‘how shall they believe, unless they hear?’ (Romans 10:14) So that the work of faith itself is not our own! ‘It is the gift of God’; it is ‘not of works’”.

“Was faith then, you will say, enough to save us? No; but God has required this, lest He should save us, barren and without work at all. His expression is that faith saves, but it is because God so wills, that faith saves. Since how, tell me, does faith save without works? This itself is the gift of God.”

“That he may excite in us proper feeling regarding this gift of grace, he said, ‘That no man should glory’ (Ephesians 2:9). ‘What then?’ said a man, ‘Has He Himself hindered our being justified by works?’ By no means! But no one is justified by works, in order that the grace and loving kindness of God may be shown. He did not reject us as having works, but exclusive of works He has saved us by grace; so that no man from now on may have anything to boast of. And then, lest when you hear that the whole thing is accomplished not by works but by faith, you might become idle, observe how he continues, ‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them’” (Ephesians 2:10).

“Observe the words he uses. He alludes to the regeneration, which is in reality a second creation. We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we have now become, we were not before. Truly then this is a work of creation, and more noble than the first. From that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have, over and above, our wellbeing.”

“‘God prepared this beforehand that we should walk in them’. Not merely that we should begin, but that we should walk in them, for we need a virtue, which shall last throughout our life, and be extended on to our dying day. If we had to travel a road leading to a royal city, and then when we had passed over the greater part of it, we were to get tired and sit down near the very end, it would be of no use to us. This is the hope of our calling; for ‘for good works’ he says. Otherwise it would profit us nothing.”

It is by faith, rather than by observing rituals, so that both Jews and Gentiles can be united in one Body, the Church, as true heirs of Abraham, who himself was accepted because of his ardent faith (Romans 4:16). It involves a new birth into a new race: whoever receives Christ and believes on Him becomes born of God (John 1:12-13). All boasting is excluded, as all people, like Abraham, are justified by faith.

⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v. 8.

So we find that works are still important, and are necessary as the results of our calling by God; the transformation of our lives is the purpose of our salvation (Ephesians 2:10). Each person will receive rewards according to his deeds (Romans 2:6-8). Like the slaves who were given the five talents and the two talents, more of the “exceeding riches” (Ephesians 2:7) are stored up for those whose hearts are bent on doing good works to the utmost. As we participate with the Body of Christ in worshipping our Lord, we are given more insight into the “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) that surround us and we are motivated to imitate them in their works.

Chrysostom also pointed out⁹³ that while Christ has made us partakers of the mysteries of His grace, we couldn’t understand any of this without the Holy Spirit. Once we learn it directly from the Holy Spirit, all questions and arguments cease.

“Vast are the mysteries and secrets of which Christ has made us partakers. It is not possible for us to understand these, other than by being partakers of the Holy Spirit, and by receiving abundant grace. It is for this reason that Paul prays, ‘The Father of glory’ (Ephesians 1:17), that is, He that has given us vast blessings, for he constantly addresses Him according to the subject he is on, for instance, ‘The Father of mercies and God of all comfort’” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

“We need to raise our understanding, for it is not possible otherwise to understand these things. ‘The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him’ (1 Corinthians 2:14). So then, there is need of spiritual ‘wisdom’, that we may perceive spiritual things, that we may see hidden things. That Spirit ‘reveals’ all things, and He is going to set forth the mysteries of God. Now the knowledge of the mysteries of God, the Spirit alone comprehends, who also searches the deep things of Him. Note that it is not said, ‘that Angel, or Archangel, or any other created power’, may confer upon you a spiritual gift. And if this is really revelation, then all arguments are consequently vain, for he that has learned God, and knows God, shall no longer dispute concerning anything. He will not say, ‘This is impossible, and that is possible’, and ‘How did the other thing come to pass?’ If we learn God, as we ought to know Him; if we learn God from Him from whom we ought to learn Him, that is from the Spirit Himself; then shall we no longer dispute concerning anything.”

Chrysostom suggested⁹⁴ that we imitate the Apostles in their humility and don’t think that anything that we do is great. For all we have and are able to do is from the graciousness of God.

“As the Apostles went about into the country and the cities, observe both the simplicity of the Gentiles, and the maliciousness of the Jews. By their actions the Gentiles showed that they were worthy to hear; they honored them from the miracles only. The Gentiles honored them as gods, the Jews persecuted them as pestilent fellows. The Gentiles not only welcomed the preaching, but said, ‘The gods, in the likeness of men, have come down to us’. But the Jews were offended. The Gentiles ‘called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury’ (Acts 14:11, 12). I suppose Barnabas was a man of dignified appearance. Here was a

⁹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 21-22.

⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXX

new sort of trial, from unrestrained zeal of their followers, and no small one. But this also shows the virtue of the Apostles, and how on all occasions they ascribe everything to God. Let us imitate them; let us think nothing our own, seeing even faith itself is not our own, but is more God's than ours. 'For by grace are you saved through faith; and this not of ourselves; it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:8). Let us not think great things of ourselves, or be puffed up, being as we are, men, dust and ashes, smoke and shadow. Why would we think great things of ourselves? If we give alms, even lavishing our substance, think, what if God had chosen not to make you rich? Think of those that are impoverished; think how many have given not their substance only, but their bodies also; and after their numberless sacrifices, have still felt that they were miserable creatures! We give for ourselves; Christ gave not for Himself, but for us. We just paid a debt; Christ owed us nothing. See the uncertainty of the future, and 'do not be haughty but fear' (Romans 11:20); do not lessen your virtue by boastfulness. If we want to do something truly great, never let a conjecture of your attainments as being great enter your mind."

Chrysostom also pointed out that Paul reminded⁹⁵ the Corinthians that their sanctification came not from their deeds but from the grace of God as they answered His call. Our faith is not completely ours since we obeyed a call.

"What is Sanctification? Answer: the Laver, the Purification! Paul reminded them of their own uncleanness, from which he had freed them; and so persuades them to lowliness of mind. They had been sanctified not by their own good deeds, but by the loving-kindness of God."

"We are 'called to be Saints' (1 Corinthians 1:2). Even this, to be saved by faith, is not of ourselves; for we did not first draw near, but were called; so that not even this small matter is ours altogether. However, though you had drawn near, accountable as you are for innumerable wickedness, not even so would the grace be yours, but it is God's. Paul said, 'By grace have you been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves' (Ephesians 2:8). Not even the faith is yours altogether; for you were not first with your belief, but obeyed a call."

Justification by Faith

The term "Justification by Faith" grew up during the Protestant Reformation, and it is regarded as the act whereby God, by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, acquits a man of the punishment due to his sins, and in His mercy treats him as though he were righteous. But the use of the term "Justification by Faith" is a relatively modern phenomenon, and was not used in the same way by the Church Fathers. Martin Luther taught that such "Justification by Faith" was granted to men in response to faith alone, and that with it the sinner was imputed with the merits of Christ. As Fr. John Breck pointed out, however, "This interpretation means that our righteousness is little more than a legal fiction. It means that God treats us *as if* we were just or righteous, although He (like us) knows full well that we are not".

By contrast, in the Orthodox tradition "righteousness," is understood more as an expression of love and mercy than as one of divine justice that must be "satisfied." Through the

⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, I, 1-2.

indwelling Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are capable of receiving that divine righteousness as a gift – one that can actually work a transformation in human life by enabling us to pray, to wage spiritual warfare against the passions, and to love both God and other people.

In the Orthodox perspective, there is no thought that we must accumulate merits in order to justify ourselves before God. Nor, on the other hand, is there a denial of the place and importance of good works in Christian life (Ephesians 2:8-10)! Salvation is accomplished by grace in response to faith. But that faith cannot be passive; it must express itself, not merely by confessing Jesus as “personal Lord and Savior”, but by feeding, clothing, visiting and otherwise caring for the “least” of Jesus' brethren (Matthew 25:31-46).

For some more details of this argument, see Appendix B.

Appendix A: Demons Addressed in the Psalms

Many of the Psalms must be understood as directed against demons. These Psalms may appear to be addressed to men, but there is a very sinister influence behind them. For example:

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

The significance of this is that the Psalmist would be teaching us to hate our enemies, which is blasphemy, if the Psalms are all about men. While we are instructed to love our enemies, we are not instructed to love the demons, since they have already been condemned. John Cassian addressed⁹⁶ this demonic undertone as follows:

“As it is said, ‘His sorrow shall be turned on his own head’ (Psalm 7:16 LXX); and again, ‘Let the snare which he knows not come upon him, and let the net which he has hidden catch him, and into that same snare let him fall’ (Psalm 35:8 LXX); that is, that which he contrived for the deception of men. The demons themselves also come to grief, and as they damage us so are they also in like manner damaged by us, and when they are beaten they depart with confusion. Seeing these defeats of theirs and their struggles, one who had good eyes in his inner man, seeing that they gloated over the downfall of individuals, and fearing lest his own case might furnish them with this kind of delight, prayed to the Lord. ‘Lighten my eyes that I don’t sleep in death, lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him. They that trouble me will rejoice if I am moved’ (Psalm 13:4-5 LXX); and ‘O My God, let them not rejoice over me; let them not say in their hearts, Aha, Aha, our very wish; neither let them say; we have devoured him’ (Psalm 35:24-25 LXX). And ‘they gnashed their teeth on me. Lord, how long will You look on this?’ (Psalm 35:16-17 LXX), for ‘he lies in wait secretly as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to ravish the poor’ (Psalm 10:9 LXX); and, ‘He seeks from God his food’ (Psalm 104:21 LXX). And again when all their efforts are exhausted, and they have failed to secure our deception, they must ‘be confounded and blush’ at the failure of their efforts, ‘who seek our souls to destroy them; and let them be covered with shame and confusion who imagine evil against us’ (Psalm 40:15, 35:26 LXX). Jeremiah also says, ‘Let them be confounded, and let not me be confounded; let them be afraid, and let not me be afraid; bring upon them the fury of Your wrath, and with a double destruction destroy them’” (Jeremiah 17:18 LXX).

“When they are conquered by us they will be destroyed with a double destruction: first, because while men are seeking after holiness, they once possessed it, but lost it, and became the cause of man’s ruin. Second, even though they are spiritual existences, earthly ones have conquered them. Each one then of

⁹⁶ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 20-21.

the saints when he looks on the destruction of his foes and his own triumphs, exclaims with delight, 'I will follow after my enemies and overtake them; I will not turn until they are destroyed. I will break them and they shall not be able to stand; they shall fall under my feet' (Psalm 18:37-38 LXX). In his prayers against them the same prophet says, 'Judge, O Lord, them that wrong me; overthrow them that fight against me. Take hold of arms and shield; and rise up to help me. Bring out the sword and shut up the way against them that persecute me; say to my soul, I am your salvation' (Psalm 35:1-3). And when by subduing and destroying all our passions we have conquered these, we shall then be permitted to hear those words of blessing, 'Your hand shall be exalted over your enemies, and all your enemies shall perish'" (Micah 5:9 LXX).

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

A Roman Catholic friend (and a good theologian) recently asked me whether the Greek Fathers of the Church understand the term "righteousness" in a forensic sense. He was referring to a Protestant doctrine that holds that God does not "make" us righteous; He "declares" or "counts" us righteous. That is, God *imputes* righteousness to us, while we remain in a state of sinfulness; Luther would say, at once justified and sinful. Reading, for example, St Paul's letter to the Romans, my friend asked, do the Eastern Fathers also read the notion of "righteousness" forensically? Well no, I thought. But then I had to formulate something of the reason why. After a lot of stumbling, this is what I passed on to him.

The Protestant notion of "imputation," (as I understand it) grew out of the conviction that we are inherently (by nature) incapable of making ourselves righteous; we cannot become truly just on the basis of our own good deeds or merits. This states that insofar as the qualities of justice and righteousness are attributable to us, we should understand that God *imputes* them to us as an expression of His mercy. This God does so that we can re-enter the realm of His righteousness, His holiness, and thus be saved from the consequences of sin, which is (eternal) death. This interpretation, however, as many people have pointed out, means that our righteousness is little more than a legal fiction. God treats us *as if* we were just or righteous, although He (like us) knows full well that we are not⁹⁸.

The difference between this notion and the Orthodox perspective is well illustrated by our respective interpretations of Romans 5:12. In the West, at least in the popular mind, the debate was long polarized between Catholic emphasis on salvation through "works-righteousness," and Protestant insistence on "justification by faith (alone!)." The presupposition underlying both views is that we inherit Adam's *guilt*, which resulted from his sinful disobedience to the divine commandment⁹⁹.

Augustine seemed convinced that the guilt resulting from Adam's sin is transmitted through the sexual act, from generation to generation, like some deleterious gene. This "original sin" must be removed if we are to be saved from death, to share in eternal life. The question as to how this is accomplished has received many different answers. Medieval Catholic piety held that this occurs through infused grace, which confers upon us the power to perform righteous deeds and thereby actually to become or be made righteous. This enables us to build up a "treasury of merits," the term "merit" being understood as a gift of divine grace rather than our own accomplishment (Council of Trent, 1547). The popular notion that we are saved only if our merits outweigh our sins on the scales of divine justice is usually attributed to Roman Catholics. It is shared, nevertheless, by many Orthodox, who have failed to appreciate the fullness of God's grace, both in enabling us to perform good works and in forgiving us fully when we sincerely repent of our sins¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁷ Very Rev. John Breck, [God's "Righteousness", Life in Christ, September 2006, Article # 1](http://www.oca.org), <http://www.oca.org>.

⁹⁸ D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1981, pp. 498-504) discusses various Protestant approaches to this question, including the distinction between "imparted" and "imputed" righteousness.

⁹⁹ Modern dialog between Catholics and Protestants has gone beyond this focus on inherited guilt and is concerned more with the meaning of "justification."

¹⁰⁰ The common view of merits as a means by which we put God in our debt (never sanctioned as dogma), together with the idea of inherited guilt, has been treated well and in detail in recent Catholic reflection. The

To the Greek Fathers, what we inherit from Adam is not his sin and consequent guilt, but *mortality*¹⁰¹. From Adam (understood, really, as an archetype), we “inherit” the sting of *death*. Death has spread to all of humanity, as an inevitable consequence of our fallen nature; yet each of us, under the threat of death, rebels personally against God, the Author of Life. This means that our guilt is our own; we bring it upon ourselves. (A sign in our local marina declares: “You are responsible for your wake!” How true...)

Greek patristic tradition generally interprets Paul’s words as “righteousness,” rather than as “justice” in the forensic sense. That is, the term refers first to God’s own quality of righteousness, understood more as an expression of love and mercy than as one of divine justice that must be “satisfied.” Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are capable of receiving that divine righteousness as a gift – one that can actually work a transformation in human life by enabling us to pray, to wage spiritual warfare against the passions, and to love both God and other people. Human nature remains “fallen”; but the Spirit leads the human person on a pathway of sanctification.

In the Eastern perspective, there is no thought that we must accumulate merits in order to justify ourselves before God, although our faithful often seem (as evidenced in Confession) to feel that if we are to be saved, our good works must outweigh our sins. Nor, on the other hand, is there a denial of the place and importance of good works in Christian life (Ephesians 2:8-10!). Salvation is accomplished by grace in response to faith. But that faith cannot be passive; it must express itself, not merely by confessing Jesus as “personal Lord and Savior,” but by feeding, clothing, visiting and otherwise caring for the “least” of Jesus’ brethren (Matthew 25:31-46).

What we are saved *from* is the key issue here. Rather than view salvation primarily as a forensic liberation from guilt through imputed or imparted righteousness, we should see it as incorporation, by baptism, into Christ’s death and resurrection, such that we “die and rise” with Him. Thus we are saved *from Death*. We are freed from this ultimate consequence of sin and guilt – but only as a divinely bestowed gift of God’s ineffable love, expressed in the suffering death of His Son, a gift to which we respond with faith that issues in love. That response, through the action of the indwelling Spirit, enables us finally to share in Christ’s own resurrection and glorification, attaining what the Greek Fathers¹⁰² call *theōsis* or “deification” (which means existential participation in God’s life, and not ontological confusion between God and His human creatures).

Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 404-409), for example, makes an important distinction between original sin as a “deprivation of original holiness and justice” – which renders human nature “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin” – and personal faults for which each of us is responsible. In this perspective, “original sin” is close to the Orthodox understanding of “fallen human nature.”

¹⁰¹ E.g., John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, X, v. 19; Maximus the Confessor, *Quaest. Ad Thal.* (PG 90:408). An excellent summary of this issue can be found in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, Fordham University Press, 1974, pp. 143-146.

¹⁰² “Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its ‘natural’ state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt – these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel.” J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 146.

Good works should thus be understood to be a *response* rather than a *means* to salvation. And God's righteousness should be seen as a gift of loving, merciful, saving grace, rather than as a forensic tool, wielded in the service of divine judgment.