

PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL
JEW AND GENTILE: FELLOW CITIZENS

November 22, 2020
9th Sunday of Luke
Revision E

Gospel: Luke 12:16-21

Epistle: Ephesians 2:11-22

Today’s Gospel lesson is commonly used in the West also, either for the 1st or 13th Sunday after Trinity.

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Background for the Parable of the Rich Fool

The Parable of the Rich Fool is part of a series of teachings that is recorded almost entirely in Luke. This series begins in Luke 10:1 with the sending out of the Seventy (of which Luke himself was a member), and continues to Luke 18. The time frame for these events is late 29 AD and early 30 AD.

As the Gospel lesson begins, someone in the crowd asked Jesus to mediate a dispute over an inheritance (Luke 12:13). It was a tradition for respected rabbis to arbitrate personal disputes over property or money¹. Jesus however refused to take this role (Luke 12:14). Instead, he said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). This incident led Jesus to tell the parable of the Rich Fool.

Jesus had begun teaching people over a year earlier to beware of getting trapped into having their life and happiness depend on their possessions. For example, in mid 28 AD, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of not worrying about one’s life in terms of food, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:25). The analogy Jesus made then was the birds and the flowers: they don’t sow, reap or gather into storehouses, nor do they spin thread or sew clothing. Yet they are well provided for by their Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:25-33). Following the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus repeated the same message for the people here in Judea (Luke 12:22-31) that He gave to the people just outside Capernaum at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34).

Under the Old Covenant, there was a relationship between the fruitfulness of the land and the peoples’ obedience to God (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). As the people were faithful to honor the Lord and love their neighbor, “the Lord will command the blessing upon you in your storehouses and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the Land which the Lord your God

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¹ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 119-120.

gives you” (Deuteronomy 28:8). As they were generous with their bounty (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12-15; 15:7-11), “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12; 15:6). Thus they were to be a holy people, chosen to be a people of His own possession out of all the people on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:19, 28:1).

In the 1st Century grain was stored in large structures similar to crude grain elevators today. There was an opening at the top for putting grain in and an opening at the bottom for removing it. The walls of these “barns” or silos were thick, made of brick, and the inside walls were plastered. Thus, the grain could be kept dry and away from pests for storage for many years². In ancient civilizations, entire cities were sometimes devoted to the storage of grain, wine and oil (1 Kings 9:19, 2 Chronicles 8:4-6, 16:4, 17:12, 32:28, Exodus 1:11). When the rich man said to himself, “You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19), this was a realistic expectation for him. And it put him in a commanding position economically just as it was for Joseph in Egypt when Joseph was in charge of the Egyptian storehouses (Genesis 41:28-57). When he died suddenly, however, the question is whether the new silos were built yet, and whether the old silos had already been torn down. If the old silos were torn down, there was no one to supervise construction of the new ones, or pay the workers for building them. If the old silos were still there, but the new ones had not been finished yet, there was no place to store the excess grain. In order that the grain might not be wasted, it would probably just be distributed to the poor – which is what the rich man should have done anyway.

The Burden of Wealth

The parable began with a rich man’s land yielding plentifully (Luke 12:16). But this rich man did not respond according to the Mosaic Law to the bounty of his land. According to the Mosaic Law, the more he obtained, the more generous he was to be. Instead, he decided to keep it all for himself; since he couldn’t even store it all; he decided to build bigger storehouses (Luke 12:18).

Cyril of Alexandria commented³ to say that the rich man was speaking like someone in poverty due to the poverty of his spiritual awareness.

“What, therefore, does the rich man do, surrounded by a profusion of so many blessings beyond all numbering? In distress and anxiety, he utters the words of poverty. ‘For what’, he says, ‘shall I do?’ The man who is in want of necessaries constantly emits this miserable language; but here one of boundless wealth uses similar expressions. He determined then to build more spacious storehouses; he purposed to enjoy for himself alone those revenues that were sufficient for a populous city. He doesn’t look to the future; he doesn’t raise his eyes to God; he doesn’t count it worth his while to gain those treasures, which are above in heaven. He doesn’t cherish love for the poor, nor desire the estimation to be gained thereby; he doesn’t sympathize with suffering; it gives him no pain, nor awakens his pity. And what is still more irrational, he settles for himself the duration of his life, as if he would reap this too from the ground; for he says, ‘I will say to myself, Self, you have goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, enjoy yourself.’”

² Ralph Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 101.

³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 12, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 361..

However, God referred to him as a fool. “This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20). This connects right back to the dispute over an inheritance that started the Parable (Luke 12:13). Now someone else has an inheritance to fight over, which goes right back to the question that started the Parable.

The Definition of “Fool”

The term “fool” in an Old Testament culture carried more connotations than it does in English today. Consider Matthew 5:22; Jesus said that whoever calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell-fire. In our English culture, calling someone a fool is no big deal; stand up comedians make big money doing just that. To understand the connotations involved, we need to go primarily to the writings of Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Riches and fools are an often-recurring theme in the writings of Solomon. Solomon himself was very rich; and as king, met his share of fools. Table 1 is a compilation of the writings of Solomon regarding the characteristics of fools as compared to the wise. Two Hebrew words are used to convey these characteristics: “*kesil*” meaning a fool in the sense of a stupid person and “*evil*” meaning generally a fool.

Some trends apparent from Table 1 are that a fool does not fear God and even denies He exists. He thinks himself to be wise and is always right in his own eyes, but he does not seek wisdom or knowledge. He is quarrelsome, temperamental and arrogant; one can’t tell him anything or make him change his behavior. He’s perverse, deceitful and spreads slander; he mocks the idea that he might be sinning. This reads like an indictment of our generation. Solomon contrasts the wise man as having opposite characteristics.

Psalm 49 might also be titled, “The Parable of the Rich Fool” and is a more detailed version of the same theme as the Gospel lesson. Jesus may even have drawn the Parable of the Rich Fool from Psalm 49. The Psalm was written as a riddle and a proverb (Psalm 49:3, 4), and set to a string accompaniment (Psalm 49:4). A number of themes are included:

- One need not fear even though surrounded by wealthy men working iniquity. All their wealth can’t even redeem their brother never mind buy eternal life (Psalm 49:5-9).
- Everyone will die, rich and fool alike, and leave their wealth to others. They may think their houses are forever and even name their land after themselves; but it won’t endure. This is the way of the foolish (Psalm 49:10-13).
- They are sheep appointed for Sheol with death as their shepherd. God will redeem the righteous from Sheol and the righteous shall rule over them in the morning (Psalm 49:14-15).
- Do not be afraid of a rich man when the glory of his house increases. When he dies, he will carry nothing away and his glory does not descend after him. He will never see the Light; he is without understanding; and he is like an animal that perishes (Psalm 49:16-20).

Table 1
Characteristics of Fools Versus the Wise

The Fool	The Wise	Reference
Toward God		
Denies existence of God	Seeks God	Psalm 14:1,2; 55:1,2
Speaks error against Lord	Fears Lord	Isaiah 32:6, Proverbs 1:7
Sacrifice of Fools	Guards steps	Ecclesiastes 5:1, 4
On Understanding		
Thinks self wise, but hates knowledge, wisdom	Has wisdom	Proverbs 1:22, 14:33, 1:7, 17:16 Romans 1:22
Right in his own eyes	Listens to counsel	Proverbs 10:8, 12:15, 18:2, 26:5, 12, 28:26, Ecclesiastes 10:6
Feeds on folly	Seeks knowledge	Proverbs 15:14, 16:22
Walks in darkness	Eyes in head	Ecclesiastes 2:14
Behavior		
Arrogant & careless	Turns from evil	Proverbs 14:16, Ecclesiastes 7:7
Rejects father's discipline	Regards reproof	Proverbs 15:5, 17:21, 25
Even blows won't correct	Rebuke goes deep	Proverbs 17:10, 19:29, 26:3, 27:22
Quarrelsome	Avoids strife	Proverbs 20:3, 27:3
Sport = wickedness	Sport = wisdom	Proverbs 7:22, 10:23, Isaiah 32:6, 7
Always loses temper	Holds his anger	Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:9
Companions suffer harm	Companions wise	Proverbs 13:20, Psalm 107:17
Control of Tongue		
Speaks slander, deceit	Restrains lips	Proverbs 10:18, Ecclesiastes 10:12, Isaiah 32:7
Mocks sin	Has goodwill	Proverbs 14:9
Perverse, hasty in speech	Feeds many with lips	Proverbs 10:21, 17:7, 19:1, 29:20
Spouts folly	Builds bridges	Proverbs 15:2, Ecclesiastes 10:13

These are very strong words; but they fit the context of our Gospel lesson quite well (compare Luke 12:19-20).

Becoming Rich toward God

In contrast to the behavior of the rich fool, the Lord encourages us to be “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). There are two parts to this: (1) discovering what are the riches of God, and (2) determining how one obtains such.

The key to both is faith: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). If we could see what it is we’re hoping for, it wouldn’t be hope and we wouldn’t need faith (Romans 8:24).

Concerning the riches of God, we are told of the riches of His kindness (Romans 2:4, Ephesians 2:7), the riches of His glory (Romans 9:23, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 1:27) and the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7, 2:7). These riches are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8) and have incredible depth in wisdom and knowledge and judgment (Romans 11:33). Yet the riches of God are also a mystery (Colossians 1:27). He bestows His riches equally to Jews and Gentiles who call upon Him (Romans 11:12, Colossians 1:27). But it takes the eyes of faith to see

it. Moses saw it (through faith) and regarded the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:26).

Concerning one's obtaining the riches of God; earthly riches can get in the way. In cases of fixation on earthly riches, Jesus advised people to sell everything and give to the poor in order that they might have treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33, Matthew 19:21). The Rich Young Ruler was so fixated on earthly riches that he couldn't do this (Matthew 19:22, Luke 18:23). Treasure in heaven is described as wealth that doesn't grow old, that doesn't fail, that can't be stolen and that can't deteriorate (Luke 12:33).

Leo the Great stated⁴ that we should be thankful no matter what we have received from God, much or little. To do otherwise is to blame Him and murmur against Him. All things are in His hand, and whatever pleases Him should please us also.

“God wishes us to be good, because He is good; none of His judgments ought to displease us. If we don't give Him thanks in all things, what else is it but we blame Him in some degree. Man's folly too often dares to murmur against his Creator, not only in time of lack, but also in time of plenty, so that, when something is not supplied, we complain, and when certain things are in abundance we are ungrateful. The man who had rich harvests scorned his well-filled silos, and groaned over his abundant grape-gathering; he did not give thanks for the size of the crop, but complained of no place to store it. If the ground has been less prolific than usual, and the vines and the olives have failed in their supply of fruit, the year is accused, the elements are blamed, and curses fill the air and the sky. On the other hand, nothing better fits the faithful disciples of Truth than the persistent lifting of praise to God. As Paul says, ‘Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; in all things give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus in all things for you’ (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). But how shall we be partakers of this devotion, unless changes of fortune train our minds in steadfastness, so that the love directed towards God may not be puffed up in prosperity nor faint in adversity. Let that, which pleases God, please us too. Let us rejoice in whatever measure of gifts He gives. Let him who has used great possessions well use small ones well also! Plenty and scarcity may be equally for our good, and even in spiritual progress we shall not be downcast at small results, if our minds have not become dry and barren. Let this spring from the soil of our heart. He that continues to be generous will always be supplied with means to give. Therefore, let us use all the works of godliness that each year gives us, and let not seasons of difficulty hinder our Christian benevolence. The Lord knows how to replenish the widow's vessels, which her pious deed of hospitality has emptied (1 Kings 17:8-16). He knows how to turn water into wine (John 2:1-10); He knows how to satisfy 5,000 hungry persons with a few loaves (Matthew 14:15-21).”

Paul advised Timothy concerning those in his area who were wealthy that they trust in God rather than their earthly riches. Especially, Paul said, “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). By our deeds, our good works, we treasure up for ourselves glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:8-10 loosely). These deeds or good works are written (and treasured) in books in heaven (Revelation 20:12). On the basis of these books plus the Book of Life, everyone is judged (Revelation 20:12-15).

⁴ Leo the Great, Sermons, XII, 3.

John Cassian stated⁵ that covetousness could only be overcome by stripping oneself of everything. Examples he used are the Apostle Judas, Ananias and Sapphira and Elisha's servant, Gehazi. Jesus allowed Judas to steal from the moneybag to curb his covetousness, but it didn't satisfy him. Ananias and Sapphira lied to escape poverty because of covetousness. Like Gehazi⁶, they were all lepers in spirit and heart. We need to consider our weak and shifty nature in order that we don't get carried away like the rich fool.

"The tyranny of avarice, once the mind is taken prisoner by it, allows it to keep to no rules of honesty, nor to be satisfied with any additions to its gains. We must seek to put an end to this madness, not by riches, but by stripping ourselves of them. Judas had received the bag set apart for the distribution to the poor, which was entrusted to his care, that he might at least satisfy himself with plenty of money, and set a limit to his avarice. Yet his plentiful supply only broke out into a still greedier incitement of desire, so that he was ready no longer secretly to rob the bag, but actually to sell the Lord Himself. For the madness of this avarice is not satisfied with any amount of riches."

"Peter, taught by these instances, and knowing that someone who has avarice cannot bridle it, and that it cannot be ended by a large or small sum of money, but only by the renunciation of everything, punished with death Ananias and Sapphira, who had kept back something out of their property. The death, which Judas had voluntarily met with for the sin of betraying the Lord, they might also undergo for their lying avarice (Acts 5:1-11). How closely do the sin and punishment correspond in each case! In the one case treachery, in the other falsehood, was the result of covetousness. For though the issues of their deeds may appear different, yet they coincide in having one and the same aim. Judas, in order to escape poverty, desired to take back what he had forsaken⁷. The others, for fear lest they might become poor, tried to keep back something out of their property, which they should have either offered to the Apostle in good faith, or have given entirely to the brethren. In each case the judgment of death follows, because each sin sprang from the root of covetousness. If there resulted so severe a sentence against those, who did not covet other persons' goods, but tried to be sparing of their own, what should we think of those who desire to amass wealth, without ever having had any of their own. That is, if we make a show of poverty before men, but before God we are convicted of being rich through the passion of avarice, how will we fare?"

"Such are seen to be lepers in spirit and heart, after the likeness of Gehazi, who desired the uncertain riches of this world, and was covered with the taint of foul leprosy (2 Kings 5:20-27). He left us a clear example that every soul which is defiled with the stain of avarice is covered with the spiritual leprosy of sin, and is counted as unclean before God with a perpetual curse."

"Keeping then in mind the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, let us dread keeping back any of those things which we gave up and vowed to forsake. Let us also fear the example of Gehazi, who for the sin of covetousness was chastised with the punishment of perpetual leprosy. From this let us beware of acquiring that wealth which we never formerly possessed. Moreover, dreading both the fault and the death of Judas, let us with all the power that we have, avoid taking

⁵ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 24-26, 30.

⁶ Elisha had just healed Naaman of leprosy. Naaman offered Elisha a present of a great deal of gold, silver and clothing, but like all the Unmercenary Healers, Elisha would not accept payment for what he had been freely given. Gehazi, however, ran after Naaman and asked for a small portion of the gift Naaman offered. Naaman was happy to give it to Gehazi. When Gehazi returned to Elisha, Elisha informed him that he had also inherited Naaman's leprosy because of his covetousness.

⁷ Judas, along with the rest of the Twelve, had left everything in following Jesus (Matthew 19:27-29). Yet Judas was in charge of the money box containing alms for the poor, and he pilfered what was in it (John 12:6).

back any of that wealth, which we once cast away from us. Above all, considering the state of our weak and shifty nature, let us beware lest the day of the Lord come upon us as a thief in the night, and find our conscience defiled even by a single penny. This would void all the fruits of our renunciation of the world, and cause that which was said to the rich man to be directed towards us also. ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then who’s shall those things be which you have prepared? (Luke 12:20) And taking no thought for tomorrow, let us never allow ourselves to be enticed away.’”

Cyprian of Carthage exhorted⁸ his people very strongly to demonstrate their faith by their works (James 2:18-26), where offerings to the Church and to the poor are the best investment one can make. The righteous man will never lack for resources, and he who feeds Christ will be himself fed by Christ. We sometimes bring forward vain excuses regarding why we can’t do this, and the Parable of the Rich Fool is a warning to us. Those who think themselves rich in this world are deceived and cannot properly labor in the Church or celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Their eyes are covered with the gloom of blackness, and they cannot see their brothers, the poor and needy, with whom they share the Christian life.

“Are you afraid that your inheritance may fall short, if you begin to give liberally from it? Yet when has it ever happened that resources have failed the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not slay the righteous soul with famine’ (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). Ravens fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kings 17:1-6); and a meal from heaven was made ready for Daniel in the lions’ den⁹. And you are afraid that food should be lacking to you, laboring and deserving well of the Lord? He Himself bears witness, for the rebuke of those whose mind is doubtful and whose faith is small, ‘Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?’ (Matthew 6:26) God feeds the birds, and daily food is available to the sparrows; to creatures, which have no sense of divine things, there is no lack of food or drink. Do you think that to a Christian, to a servant of the Lord, to one given to good works, to one that is dear to his Lord, anything will be lacking?”

“Do you imagine that he who feeds Christ is not himself fed by Christ, or that earthly things will be lacking to those to whom heavenly and divine things are given? Where does this unbelieving thought, this impious and sacrilegious consideration come from? What does a faithless heart do in the home of faith? Why is he, who does not trust in Christ, called a Christian? The name of Pharisee is more fitting for you. When the Lord was speaking about almsgiving, He warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly lucre by provident good works, which might afterwards receive us into eternal dwellings. The Scripture added after this, ‘But the Pharisees heard all these things, who were very covetous, and they derided Him’ (Luke 16:14). Some people like this we see now in the Church, whose closed ears and darkened hearts admit no light from spiritual and saving warnings. We need not wonder that they criticize the servants of God, when we see the Lord Himself was despised by such.”

“Why do you applaud yourself in those vain and silly conceits, as if you were withheld from good works by fear for the future? Why do you lay out before yourself certain shadows and omens of a vain excuse? Confess what is the truth; and since you cannot deceive those who know, utter the secret and hidden things of your mind. The gloom of barrenness has besieged your mind; and while the light of truth has departed, the deep and profound darkness of avarice has blinded

⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, VIII, 11-15.

⁹ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

your carnal heart. You are the captive and slave of your money; you are bound with the chains and bonds of covetousness; and you whom Christ had once loosed, are once more in chains. You keep your money, which, when kept, does not keep you. You heap up an inheritance, which burdens you with its weight; and you do not remember what God answered to the rich man, who boasted with a foolish exultation of the abundance of his exuberant harvest. ‘You fool’, He said, ‘this night your soul is required of you; then who’s shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) Why do you watch in loneliness over your riches? Why, for your own punishment, do you heap up the burden of your inheritance, that in proportion as you are rich in this world, you may become poor to God? Divide your returns with the Lord your God; share your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom.”

“Those are mistaken, and are deceived, that think themselves rich in this world. Listen to the voice of your Lord rebuking men like you with righteous reproaches. ‘You say I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and you don’t know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear in you; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see’ (Revelation 3:17-18). You therefore, who are rich, buy for yourself from Christ gold tried by fire; that you may be pure gold, with your filth burned out as if by fire, if you are purged by almsgiving and righteous works. Buy for yourself white clothing, that you who had been naked according to Adam, may be clothed with the white garment of Christ. And you who are a wealthy and rich matron in Christ’s Church, anoint your eyes, not with the eye wash of the devil, but with Christ’s eye wash, that you may be able to attain to see God, by deserving well of God, both by good works and character.”

“You who are such as this cannot labor in the Church. For your eyes, overcast with the gloom of blackness, and shadowed in night, do not see the needy and poor. You are wealthy, and do you think that you celebrate the Lord’s Supper, not at all considering the offering, who come to the Lord’s Supper without a sacrifice, and yet take part of the sacrifice, which the poor man has offered? Consider the widow that remembered the heavenly precepts, doing good even amid the difficulties and straits of poverty, casting two mites, which were all that she had, into the treasury. The Lord observed and saw, regarding her work not for its abundance, but for its intention, and considering not how much, but from how much, she had given. He answered, ‘Truly I say unto you, that widow has cast in more than anyone into the offerings of God. For everyone else has cast in to the offerings of God of that which they had in abundance; but she out of her poverty has cast in all that she had’ (Luke 21:3-4). Greatly blessed and glorious woman, who even before the Day of Judgment has merited to be praised by the voice of the Judge! Let the rich be ashamed of their barrenness and unbelief. The widow, needy in means, is found rich in works. And although everything that is given is conferred upon widows and orphans, she gives, who ought to receive, that we may know from this what punishment awaits the barren rich man, when by this instance even the poor ought to labor in good works. And in order that we may understand that their labors are given to God, and that whoever performs them deserves well of the Lord, Christ calls this ‘the offerings of God’. He intimates that the widow has cast in two mites into the offerings of God, that it may be more abundantly evident that he who has pity on the poor lends to God.”

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁰ that the issue in choosing between God and mammon involves neither fear of punishment nor the promise of earthly gifts, since both produce mere

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 6.

hirelings. We should want to do this, and not have to be driven by punishment or lured by earthly gifts into it. We should desire to seek the good and live according to the likeness of Christ and not according to the love of money, which He calls “mammon”. Honor, marriage and even voluntary poverty can produce the same effects and “choke” the word of God for us if it’s not something we freely choose to do. Our true treasure is in what produces righteousness in our lives.

“We must pursue the word of salvation neither from fear of punishment nor from promise of a gift, but on account of the good itself. Those who do so stand on the right hand of the sanctuary (Matthew 25:32-40, Hebrews 8:1, 1:3). But those who think that by the gift of what is perishable they shall receive immortality in exchange are, in the parable of the two brothers, called ‘hirelings’ (Matthew 21:28-31). This sheds some light on the expression ‘in the likeness and image’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Some live according to the likeness of Christ, while those who stand on the left hand live according to their own image. To choose by imitation differs from him who chooses according to knowledge, as that which is set on fire differs from that which is illuminated”.

“What does the parable of Lazarus mean, by showing the image of the rich and poor? (Luke 16:19-26) And what does the saying mean, ‘No man can serve two masters, God and mammon?’ (Matthew 6:24), the Lord so terming the love of money. For instance, the covetous, who were invited, did not respond to the invitation to the supper (Luke 14:15-23), not because of their possessing property, but because of their inordinate affection to what they possessed”.

For not riches only, but also honor, marriage and poverty, have ten thousand cares for him who is unfit for them. And those cares He indicated in the Parable of the Sower, when He said that ‘the seed of the word which fell among the thorns’ (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23) was choked by them, and could not bring forth fruit. It is therefore necessary to learn how to make use of every occurrence, so as by a good life, to be trained for eternal life. For it said, ‘I saw the wicked exalted and towering as the cedars of Lebanon; and I passed’, says the Scripture, ‘and he was not. And I sought him, and his place was not found. Keep innocence, and look on uprightness; for there is a remnant to the man of peace’ (Psalm 37:35-37 LXX, Isaiah 2:12-14). Such will he be who believes unpretentiously with his whole heart, and is tranquil in his whole soul. ‘For different people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from the Lord’ (Isaiah 29:13).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break through and steal’ (Matthew 6:19), says the Lord, in reproach to the covetous, to those who are full of cares, and to those who indulge their bodies. For amours, diseases, and evil thoughts ‘*break through*’ the mind. But our true ‘treasure’ is where what is allied to our mind is, since it produces righteousness, showing that we must reform our old conversation by asking for mercy. ‘For I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy’ (Romans 9:15, Exodus 33:19), said the Lord. For so He says, ‘Fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; and who’s shall those things be which you have prepared?’ (Luke 12:20)

Therefore, our Gospel lesson is a call to consider where our treasure is; for where our treasure is, there is where our heart will be also (Luke 12:34). And as we realize that our real treasure is in heaven, good works are a natural, joyful result.

The Transient Nature of This Life

One of the Psalms attributed to Moses states, “The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). Thus, it is with all of humanity; we have a transient existence in this life, and what matters is what we store up for eternity.

Cyprian of Carthage addressed¹¹ the transient nature of this life using the words of the Lord's Prayer. There is both a spiritual and a literal understanding to the words, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). The spiritual understanding relates to the Eucharist, which is our true food, where we have no life without it (John 6:51-58). The literal understanding relates to those who have renounced the world with its riches and pomp, and who ask for themselves merely food and support. Both understandings stand in utter contrast to the "rich fool", where Jesus spoke of a man becoming perfect and complete by selling all his goods, not by hoarding them. On the other hand, the Scriptures promise that daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man.

"We ask in the Lord's Prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. And this may be understood both spiritually and literally, because either way of understanding it is rich in divine usefulness to our salvation. For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. Accordingly, we say, 'Our Father', because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also, we call it 'our bread', because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. We ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by injecting some heinous sin, be prevented from partaking of the heavenly bread, and be separated from Christ's body. He Himself warns, 'I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eats of my bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world' (John 6:51-58). When He says that whoever shall eat of His bread shall live forever, it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living. On the other hand, we must fear and pray lest anyone who, being withheld from communion, is separate from Christ's body should remain at a distance from salvation. He Himself threatens, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you' (John 6:53). And therefore, we ask that our bread — that is, Christ — may be given to us daily, that we who live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body."

"Another understanding of, 'Give us this day our daily bread', refers to those who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, and who ask simply for food and support. The Lord instructs us, 'Whoever does not 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 his petition to a long period. The Lord prescribes, 'Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow itself shall take thought for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof' (Matthew 6:34). With reason, then, does Christ's disciple ask food for himself for today, since he is prohibited from thinking of tomorrow. It becomes a contradiction 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 and perdition. 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 scorned, but that they are also dangerous; that in them is the root of seducing evils, that deceive the blindness of the human mind by a hidden

¹¹ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IV, 18-21.

deception. God rebukes the rich fool, who thinks of his earthly wealth, and boasts himself in the abundance of his overflowing harvests, saying, ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then who’s shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) The fool who was to die that night was rejoicing in his stores, 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. Free from hindrance, he is involved in no worldly entanglements, but he accompanies his possessions, which earlier have been sent to God. Every one of us may be able to thus prepare himself, let him thus learn to pray and know, from the character of the prayer, what he ought to be.”

“For daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not slay the soul of the righteous by hunger’ (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). And again ‘I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging their bread’ (Psalm 37:25). The Lord moreover promises, ‘Do not worry saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or how shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the nations seek. And your Father knows that you have need of all these things. 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 (John 6:27, Matthew 6:8). 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 in the lions’ den. In the midst of wild beasts that were hungry, and yet spared him, the man of God was fed¹². Thus, Elijah in his flight was nourished by ravens serving him in his solitude” (1 Kings 17:1-6).

Also using the words of the Lord’s Prayer, Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, encouraged¹³ his people to enter into the life of the Church, which included the fasts on Wednesday and Friday, and the vigil at Great Vespers on Saturday. Part of the life of the Church includes almsgiving with cheerfulness and showing love for our neighbor in order that death doesn’t come upon us unawares and we end up as the rich fool.

“In the Lord’s Prayer we say, ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven, so also on earth’ (Matthew 6:10). For what else do we ask for in these words but that God may subdue those whom He has not yet subdued; and as in heaven He makes the angels servants of His will, so also on earth He may make men? And in seeking this we love God; we love also our neighbor. The love within us has but one Object, since we desire the bond-servant to serve and the Lord to have rule.”

“The habit of well-doing strengthens this state of mind, because the conscience needs to be delighted at good deeds, and do willingly what it rejoices to have done. Thus, fasts are kept, alms freely given, justice maintained, frequent prayer resorted to, and the desires of individuals become the common wish of all. Labor fosters patience; gentleness extinguishes anger; loving-kindness treads down hatred; unclean desires are slain by holy aspirations; avarice is cast out by liberality; and burdensome wealth becomes the means of virtuous acts. But because the snares of the devil are not at rest even in such a state of things, most rightly at certain seasons of the year the renewal

¹² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

¹³ Leo the Great, Sermons, XC, 3-4.

of our vigor is provided for. Now in particular, one who is greedy of present good might boast due to the clemency of the weather and the fertility of the land, and having stored his crops in great barns, might say to his soul, 'you have much goods, eat and drink'. Let him pay attention to the rebuke of the Divine voice, 'You fool, this night they require your soul of you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?' (Luke 12:19-20) This should be the wise man's most anxious consideration, in order that, as the days of this life are short and its span uncertain, death may never come upon him unawares, and that knowing himself mortal he may meet his end fully prepared. And so, that this may be available both for the sanctification of our bodies and the renewal of our souls, on Wednesday and Friday let us fast, and on Saturday let us keep vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter, whose prayers will help us to obtain fulfillment of our holy desires through Christ our Lord."

John Chrysostom compared¹⁴ this life to a temporary stay in an inn. When staying in an inn or a hotel, we don't stick around and remodel it; we don't move all our belongings in; we just stay there briefly and leave. Many people get very involved fighting for the things of this life and neglecting heavenly things. When they are called to depart, they are totally unprepared, because they do not have an accurate judgment of all things.

"Do you not know that the present life is a brief stay in a far country? You are not a citizen, but you are a traveler, where no one has a city; the city is above. Present life is but a journey every day, while nature is running its course. Some store up goods on the way; some bury jewelry on the road. Now when you enter an inn do you remodel the inn? No, you eat, drink and hurry to leave. The present life is an inn; we have entered it, and we bring present life to a close. Let us be eager to leave with a good hope; let us leave nothing here, that we may not lose it there.

When you enter the inn, what do you say to the clerk? 'Take care where you put our things', that you do not leave anything behind, that nothing may be lost, not even what is small and trifling, in order that we may carry everything back to our home. The traveler has an advantage over us. The traveler knows when he is going to the inn, and when he is leaving; for the departure as well as the arrival is in his own power. But when I enter the inn, that is to say, this present life, I don't know when I will depart. It may be that I am busy providing myself with supplies to last for a long time, when the Master suddenly summons me saying, 'You fool, for whom shall those things be which you have prepared? This night your soul is being taken from you' (Luke 12:20 loosely). The time of your departure is uncertain; the tenure of your possessions is insecure; there are many steep cliffs and roaring waves on every side of you. We ought not to desert the reality and run after shadows?"

"I say these things, and shall not cease saying them, causing continual pain, and dressing the wounds; and I say this not for the sake of the fallen, but for those who are still standing. The fallen have departed, and their career has ended, but those who are yet standing have gained a more secure position through the calamities of others. What then shall we do? Do one thing only, hate riches, and love your life; throw away your goods; not all of them, but cut off the excess. Do not be covetous of other men's goods, don't plunder the widow and orphan or seize their house. I do not address myself to persons but to facts. But if anyone's conscience attacks him, he himself is responsible for it, not my words. Why are you grasping where you bring anger upon yourself? Grasp where there is a crown to be gained. Fight to lay hold of heaven not earth! 'The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force' (Matthew 11:12). Why do you lay hold of the poor man who criticizes you? Lay hold of Christ who praises you for it. Do you see

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 5-6.

your senselessness and madness? Do you foreclose on the poor man who has little? Christ says, 'lay hold of Me; I thank you for it; lay hold of My Kingdom and take it by violence'. If you try to lay hold of an earthly kingdom, you are punished; but in the case of the heavenly kingdom, you are punished if you do not lay hold of it. Where worldly things are concerned there are hard feelings, but where spiritual things are concerned, there is love. Meditate daily on these things, and if two days from now you see another riding in a chariot, arrayed in silk clothing and elated with pride, do not be dismayed and troubled. Do not praise a rich man, but only him who lives in righteousness. Do not revile a poor man, but learn to have an upright and accurate judgment in all things."

TABLE I
CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOLS VS. THE WISE

THE FOOL	THE WISE	REFERENCE
Toward God		
Denies existence of God	Seeks God	Psalms 14:1,2; 55:1,2
Speaks error against Lord	Fears Lord	Isaiah 32:6, Proverbs 1:7
Sacrifice of Fools	Guards steps	Ecc. 5:1, 4
On Understanding		
Thinks self wise, but hates knowledge, wisdom	Has wisdom	Pr. 1:22, 14:33, 1:7, 17:16 Rom. 1:22
Right in his own eyes	Listens to counsel	Pr. 10:8, 12:15, 18:2, 26:5, 12, 28:26, Ecc. 10:6
Feeds on folly	Seeks knowledge	Pr. 15:14, 16:22
Walks in darkness	Eyes in head	Ecc. 2:14
Behavior		
Arrogant & careless	Turns from evil	Pr. 14:16, Ecc. 7:7
Rejects father's discipline	Regards reproof	Pr 15:5, 17:21, 25
Even blows won't correct	Rebuke goes deep	Pr. 17:10, 19:29, 26:3, 27:22
Quarrelsome	Avoids strife	Pr. 20:3, 27:3
Sport = wickedness	Sport = wisdom	Pr. 7:22, 10:23, Is. 32:6, 7
Always loses temper	Holds his anger	Pr. 29:11, Ecc. 7:9
Companions suffer harm	Companions wise	Pr. 13:20, Ps. 107:17
Control of Tongue		
Speaks slander, deceit	Restrains lips	Pr. 10:18, Ecc. 10:12, Is. 32:7
Mocks sin	Has goodwill	Pr. 14:9
Perverse, hasty in speech	Feeds many with lips	Pr. 10:21, 17:7, 19:1, 29:20
Spouts folly	Builds bridges	Pr. 15:2, Ecc. 10:13

JEW AND GENTILE: FELLOW CITIZENS

November 22, 2020
24th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: Ephesians 2:11-22

Background to Ephesians

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

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

After the death of the Virgin Mary in the mid 50's AD, the Apostle John returned to Ephesus and worked with a number of churches in that area: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3). John may have been in the area when Paul wrote his Epistle from Rome. Prochorus, of the Seventy and one of the first seven deacons, accompanied John as did Mary Magdalene for a while. Mary was called “equal to the apostles” in the early Church.

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The Epistle to the Ephesians was meant to be circulated to all the churches in the area and has a general theme of the riches of Christ in the church. It is possible that this Epistle was what was called the “Epistle from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16) that was being circulated.

Jews and Gentiles: Fellow Citizens

The context of the Epistle lesson speaks about how we were made alive together with Christ, and how He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-6). All this was done in order that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His Grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). Therefore, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Once Gentiles in the Flesh

Paul said, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- that at that time 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).

While we were once Gentiles in the flesh (Ephesians 2:11), now we who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). In another place, Paul refers to the Gentile Christians as the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). This was spoken at a time when the Church-synagogue distinction was somewhat blurred¹⁵. This was spoken even in the Old Testament: Isaiah predicted that Egypt and Assyria will return to the Lord and be blessed (Isaiah 19:21-25).

Justin Martyr commented¹⁶ that this verse (Isaiah 19:24) saying that Israel will be blessed along with Egypt and Assyria. On the other hand, the Lord had told the Jewish leaders that they were *not* children of Abraham because they didn’t do what Abraham did or what God said (John 8:37-44).

“By Isaiah God speaks thus concerning another Israel: ‘In that day shall there be a third Israel among the Assyrians and the Egyptians, blessed in the land which the Lord of Sabaoth has blessed, saying, blessed shall my people in Egypt and in Assyria be, and Israel mine inheritance.’ Since then God blesses this people, and calls them Israel, and declares them to be His inheritance, how is it that you don’t repent of the deception you practice on yourselves, as if you alone were Israel?”

Tertullian of Carthage, in addressing Marcion, stated¹⁷ that Christ was not an adversary of the Law but one who completely promoted it. The same person who made man and gave the Law also created one new man, even though both Jew and Gentile had offended Him.

¹⁵ Until about the middle of the 2nd century AD, Christians were considered to be a sect of Judaism. The distinction became much clearer with the Bar Kochba revolt in Jerusalem (132-136 AD); Christians had nothing to do with that.

¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 123.

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

“Christ has made the Law obsolete by His own precepts, even by Himself fulfilling the Law. For superfluous is, ‘You shall not commit adultery’, when He says, ‘He who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’ (Matthew 5:27-28). Superfluous also is, ‘You shall not murder’, when He says, ‘Whoever shall be angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment’ (Matthew 5:21-22). It is impossible to make an adversary of the Law out of one who so completely promotes it. Paul said, ‘He created in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace’ (Ephesians 2:15), for He who had made is also the same who creates. ‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works’ (Ephesians 2:10). ‘One new man, making peace’; really new, and really man — no phantom — but new, and newly born of a virgin by the Spirit of God. ‘That He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity’ (Ephesians 2:16), even the God whom both races had offended. Thus, we find from Paul, that there was in Christ a fleshly body, such as was able to endure the cross. ‘He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near’, we both obtained ‘access by one Spirit to the Father’. We are ‘no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God’, even of Him from whom we were aliens, and placed far off. We have been ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’” (Ephesians 2:17-20).

Gentiles Once Were Far Off

Paul said, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13).

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁸ that the Mosaic Law prohibited Israel from following the idolatry of Egypt and Canaan. This also applies to us in our training in godliness, since we are brought near by the blood of Christ. It gently admonishes us to seek God and endeavor to know Him as far as possible.

“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I *am* the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the Lord’ (Leviticus 18:1-5). Egypt and the land of Canaan may be the symbol of the world and of deceit, or of sufferings and afflictions. But the oracle shows us what must be abstained from, and what, being divine and not worldly, must be observed. When it is said, ‘The man who does them shall live by them’ (Galatians 3:12), it declares both the correction of the Hebrews themselves, and the training and advancement of us who have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13); it declares at once their life and ours. For ‘we who were dead in trespasses have been made us alive together with Christ’ (Ephesians 2:5), by our covenant. For Scripture, by the frequent reiteration of the expression, ‘I am the Lord your God’, shames in such a way as most powerfully to dissuade, by teaching us to follow God who gave the commandments. It gently admonishes us to seek God and endeavor to know Him

¹⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II, 10.

as far as possible; which is the highest meditation. It is that which scans the greatest mysteries, the real knowledge, that which cannot be refuted by reason.”

John Chrysostom illustrated¹⁹ where the Gentiles had come by contrasting the response to Paul and Barnabas in Lystra with that of the Jews: The Gentiles honored them as gods; the Jews treated them as pests. The Apostles ascribed everything to God, however. Similarly, we should ascribe everything to God; even our Faith itself, which is more God’s than ours. Humility is the foundation of all good things. There is nothing worse than an arrogant Christian. It is much better to be humble and to teach by example.

“By their actions the Gentiles in Lystra showed that they were worthy to hear; they so honored Paul and Barnabas from the miracles only. The Gentiles honored them as gods, the Jews persecuted them as pestilent fellows. The Gentiles not only took no offense at the preaching, but said, ‘The gods, in the likeness of men, are 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 also. Here was a new sort of trial, from immoderate zeal, and no small one: but hence also is shown the virtue of the Apostles, and how on all occasions they ascribe all to God. Let us imitate them: let us think nothing our own, seeing even faith itself is not our own, but more God’s than ours. ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God’ (Ephesians 2:8). Let us not think great things of ourselves, nor be puffed up, being as we are, men, dust and ashes, smoke and shadow. Why do we think great things of ourselves? Have we given alms, and lavished our substance? What of that? Think, what if God had chosen not to make us rich? Think of those who are impoverished, or rather, think how many have given not their substance only, but their bodies, and after their numberless sacrifices, have a felt still that they were miserable creatures! You gave for yourself, Christ gave for you; you only paid a debt, Christ didn’t owe you. See the uncertainty of the future, and ‘Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either’ (Romans 11:20-21); do not lessen your virtue by boastfulness. Would you consider doing something truly great? Never let a summary of your attainments as being great enter your mind. Are you a virgin? So were those in the Gospel virgins, but they got no benefit from their virginity, because of their cruelty and inhumanity. (Matthew 25:12). Nothing is like humility; this is mother, root, nurse, foundation, and bond of all good things; without this we are abominable, execrable, and polluted. Suppose there was some man raising the dead, healing the lame, and cleansing the lepers, but with proud self-complacency; there can be nothing more execrable, nothing more impious, nothing more detestable than this. Account nothing to be of yourself. Do you have utterance and grace of teaching? Do not for this account yourself to have anything more than other men. For this cause especially, you ought to be humbled, because you have been granted more abundant gifts. For he to whom more was forgiven, will love more (Luke 7:47); if so, then you ought to be humbled also, for God has passed by others, and taken notice of you. Fear also because of this; for often this is a cause of destruction to you if you are not watchful. Why do you think great things of yourself? Because you teach by words? But this is easy, to philosophize in words; teach by the example of your life: that is the best teaching. Do you say that it is right to be moderate, and then make a long speech about this thing, play the orator, pouring forth your eloquence without measure? But one will say to you, ‘better than you is he who teaches me this by his deeds’. Those lessons don’t get fixed in the mind which consist in words, as those which

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXX, v. 6.

teach by things. If you don't have deeds, you not only have not profited him by your words but have even hurt him the more; better if you were silent. Why? 'Because the thing you propose to me is impossible: for I consider, that if you who have so much to say about it, don't succeed in this in your own life, much more am I excusable'. For this cause the Prophet says, 'But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth"'? (Psalm 50:16). For this is a worse mischief, when one who teaches well in words, makes a mockery of the teaching by his deeds. This has been the cause of many evils in the Churches."

Chrysostom also pointed out²⁰ that the main benefit to the Gentiles was in becoming fellow-citizens of the household of God. The Jews had put themselves outside the Commonwealth of Israel because they were unworthy. The expressions that Paul used were most emphatic.

"The benefit bestowed upon the Gentiles consisted in having fellowship with Israel. In essential points Paul enhances it. Further on he says, 'You are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19). Never think that because you happen not to be circumcised, and are now in uncircumcision, that there is any difference. The real trouble was being 'without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel' (Ephesians 2:12), where this circumcision (Jews in the 1st century) is not the commonwealth. The being strangers from the covenants of promise, the having no hope to come, the being without God in this world, all these were parts of their condition. He was speaking of heavenly things; he speaks also of those which are on earth; since the Jews had a great opinion of these. In comforting His disciples, Christ said, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Then He added the lesser point of consolation, 'for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Matthew 5:10-12). Compared with the greatness of the commonwealth of Israel, this is far less, yet in regard to the being near, and believing, it is great and sufficient, and has much force. This was the sharing in the commonwealth. His word is not, 'separated', but 'alienated from the commonwealth' (Ephesians 2:12). His word is not, 'you took no interest in', but, 'you had not so much as any part in, and were strangers'. The expressions are most emphatic, and indicate the separation to be very wide. The Israelites themselves were outside this commonwealth, not as aliens, but as indifferent to it; they fell from the covenants, not as strangers, but as unworthy."

John Chrysostom states²¹ that this does not mean that God has raised the Gentiles to the high heritage of the Jews, which includes the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom Christ came (Romans 9:4-5). Nor does it mean that the Gentiles have replaced the Jews. Rather, it means that He has raised both us and them to a heritage yet higher.

"What is this, 'both one?' He does not mean that He hath raised us to that high heritage of the Jews, but that he has raised both us and them to one yet higher. Only that the blessing to us is greater, because to these it had been promised, and they were nearer than we; to us it had not been promised, and we were farther off than they. Therefore, it is that he says, 'And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy' (Romans 15:9). The promise indeed He gave to Israel, but they were unworthy; to us He gave no promise, we were even strangers, we had nothing in common with them. Yet He has made us one, not by knitting us to them, but by knitting both them and us together into one. I will give you an illustration. Let us suppose there are two statues, the one of

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, v. 11-12

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15.

silver, the other of lead, and then that both shall be melted down, and that the two shall come out gold. Behold, thus hath He made the two one. Or put the case again in another way. Let the two be, one a slave, the other an adopted son. Let both offend Him, the one as a disinherited child, the other as a fugitive, and one who never knew a father. Then let both be made heirs, both trueborn sons. Behold, they are exalted to one and the same dignity, the two have become one, the one coming from a longer, the other from a nearer distance, and the slave becoming more noble than he was before he offended.

Christ Has Broken Down the Middle Wall

Paul said, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances” (Ephesians 2:14-15)

The middle wall of separation (Ephesians 2:14) could possibly refer to the tearing at Jesus’ crucifixion of the thick embroidered veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. In the context of this discussion – Jew vs. Gentile – more probably it refers to the Court of the Gentiles as compared to the Inner Court which only Jews could enter. Herod’s Temple (construction began in 19 BC) was more elaborate than the First Temple and had several courts. The outermost was called “the Court of the Gentiles” and was the closest unclean individuals could come. Just inside that was “the Court of the Women”, and inside that was “the Court of the Israelites.” Regarding walls, there was the outer wall (of the Court of the Gentiles), the middle wall (separating the Outer Court from the Inner Court), and the inner wall of the Temple itself.

There are two aspects to the “middle wall of separation.” One is the separation of Gentile from Jew. This separation was necessary because the Gentiles did not keep the Mosaic Law; approaching a Holy God in uncleanness would prove fatal to them.

John Chrysostom wrote²² of the middle wall as being a hedge that turned into enmity because of our disobedience. The Law was given as a hedge of security and an enclosure. “I made a hedge around it, and dug a trench, and planted a choice vine (Isaiah 5:2 LXX). “Why have you broken its hedges, so that all who pass that way may pick its fruit?” (Psalm 80:2). “I will take away its hedge and it will be for spoil. I will pull down its walls and it will be left to be trampled down” (Isaiah 5:5 LXX). The Law became a middle wall, no longer establishing them in security, but cutting them off from God.

With the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, He replaced the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law with all its details) with the New Covenant that is written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Thus (Ephesians 2:15) He abolished the enmity; that is the commandments in ordinances restricting both Jews and Gentiles to certain places, certain rituals and limited access to God. Instead He created in Himself one new man from the two.

While the words used here speak just of the wall between Jew and Gentile, the same applies to barriers between races, between people of various social positions, and between sexes (Galatians 3:28). Paul says: “for you are all one in Christ.” The Lord clarified this by a question put to Him

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15.

by the Sadducees, who didn't believe in a resurrection of the body. According to the Mosaic Law, if a man died childless, the man's brother was obliged to marry his brother's widow and raise up children for his brother. The Sadducees asked Jesus whose wife would the widow be in the resurrection if seven brothers all had married the oldest brother's widow in succession. Jesus' answer was that "in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:23-30). In this life, we all have roles to play based on what we've been given; but that will change in the resurrection.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated²³ that a key aspect of Christ's reconciliation is that He had the same flesh as ours. If this was not the case, the reconciliation would not have been possible. In every Epistle, Paul plainly testifies that we have been saved through Christ's flesh and blood.

"If anyone alleges that the flesh of the Lord was different from ours, because it did not commit sin, while we, on the other hand, are sinners, he says what is the fact. But if he pretends that the Lord possessed another substance of flesh, the sayings respecting reconciliation will not agree. For that thing is reconciled which had formerly been in enmity. Now, if the Lord had taken flesh from another substance, He would not, by so doing, have reconciled that one to God which had become enemies through transgression. But now, by means of communion with Himself, the Lord has reconciled man to God the Father, in reconciling us to Himself by the body of His own flesh, and redeeming us by His own blood. 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace' (Ephesians 1:7). Again, he says, 'You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ' (Ephesians 2:13). And again, 'Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the Law of commandments contained in ordinances' (Ephesians 2:15). In every Epistle Paul plainly testifies, that through the flesh of our Lord, and through His blood, we have been saved."

John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that peace with God means sinning no more and no longer going back to our former way of life. Some said, "How is it possible to sin no more?" If we were freed from all our sins by Christ on the Cross, much more shall we be able through Him to remain sinless. If He reconciled us when we were in open war with Him, it is reasonable that we should remain in a state of reconciliation. In all this, there is His part versus our part.

"What does 'we have peace with God' (Romans 5:1) mean? Some say, 'Let us not be in dissension, through a peevish obstinacy for bringing in the Law'. But to me he seems to be speaking about grace. For after having said much on the subject of faith, Paul had set faith before righteousness which is by works, to prevent anyone from supposing what he said was a ground for listlessness. He says, 'we have peace with God'; that is, let us sin no more, nor go back to our former way of life. For this is making war with God. One might say, 'how is it possible to sin no more?' For if when liable for so many sins we were freed from all by Christ, much more shall we be able through Him to remain sinless. For it is not the same thing to receive peace when there had been none, and to keep it when it has been given, since to acquire surely is harder than to keep. Yet nevertheless the more difficult has been made easy, and carried into effect. That which is the easier thing then will be what we shall easily succeed in, if we cling to Him who has wrought even the other for us. But here it is not the easiness only which he seems to me to hint at, but the reasonableness. For if He reconciled us when we were in open war with Him, it is reasonable that

²³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, xiv, 3.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, IX, v. 5:1

we should remain in a state of reconciliation. This means that we will give Him this reward that He may not seem to have reconciled unfeeling creatures to the Father.”

“Paul continued, ‘through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ (Romans 5:2). If then He has brought us near to Himself, when we were far off, much more will He keep us now that we are near. And let me beg you to consider how everywhere Paul sets down these two points: His part, and our part. On His part, however, there are things varied, numerous and diverse. For He died for us, further reconciled us, brought us to Himself, and gave us grace unspeakable. But we brought faith only as our contribution. And so, he says, ‘by faith, into this grace’. What grace is this? It is the being counted worthy of the knowledge of God, the being forced from error, the coming to a knowledge of the Truth, the obtaining of all the blessings that come through Baptism. For the object of His bringing us near was that we might receive these gifts.”

Christ Created One New Man

Paul said, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace” (Ephesians 2:14-15)

John Chrysostom stated²⁵ that Christ did not just turn Gentiles into Jews, but He created a whole new thing. This is no less a creation than was done at the beginning.

“Paul said that Christ ‘abolished in His flesh the enmity, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace’ (Ephesians 2:15). Notice that it is not that the Gentile becomes a Jew, but that both the Jew and the Gentile are entered into another condition. It was not with a view of merely making the Gentile other than he was, but rather, in order to create the two anew. And well does he on all occasions employ the word ‘create’, and does not say ‘change’, in order to point out the power of what was done. Even though the creation is invisible, yet it is no less a creation than He did in the beginning; we ought not abandon this, as from natural things.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated²⁶ that when the Scripture says that God created one new man, He does not mean that He created the essence of a creature. It means that He is referring to the renewal of salvation among men.

“To be called creatures and to be created, belongs to things which have by nature a created essence. Scripture is full of places that are sufficient to remind us. On the other hand, the single word ‘He created’ does not only denote the essence and mode of generation. David shows this, ‘Let this be written for another generation; and the people that shall be created shall praise the Lord’ (Psalm 102:18 LXX). Again, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in my inward parts’ (Psalm 51:10 LXX). Paul says, ‘Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace’ (Ephesians 2:15). Again, ‘Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24). David spoke of

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xix, 46.

no other people created in essence, nor prayed to have another heart than what he had; he meant renovation according to God and renewal. Paul did not signify two persons created in essence in the Lord, nor did he counsel us to put on any other man. He called the life according to virtue the ‘man after God,’ and by the ‘created’ in Christ he meant the two people who are renewed in Him. Such too is the language of Jeremiah; ‘The Lord created safety for a new planting, men will travel about in security’ (Jeremiah 31:22 LXX). In thus speaking, he does not mean any essence of a creature, but prophesies the renewal of salvation among men, which has taken place in Christ for us. Such is the difference between ‘the creatures’ and the single word ‘He created’”.

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁷ that there were two events associated with creation out of nothing. The first was the Creation described in Genesis; the second was the result of Christ’s Resurrection, where He created in Himself one new man.

“Paul mentioned what is the greatest token of divinity; ‘of Whom are all things’ (1 Corinthians 8:6). For this implies that those others are not gods. For it is said, ‘The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens’ (Jeremiah 10:11). Then he adds what is not less than this, ‘and we for Him’ (1 Corinthians 8:6). For when Paul said, ‘of Whom are all things’, he means the creation and the bringing of things out of nothing into existence. But when he said, ‘and we for Him’, he speaks of the word of faith and mutual appropriation. Paul said this before, ‘But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God’ (1 Corinthians 1:30). In two ways we are of Him, (1) by being made when we were not, and (2) by being made believers. For this also is a creation: a thing which Paul also declares elsewhere; ‘so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace” (Ephesians 2:15).

““And one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*’ (1 Corinthians 8:6). With regard to Christ again, we must conceive of this in like manner. For through Him the race of men was both produced out of nothing into existence, and returned from error to truth. So that the phrase ‘of Whom’, is not to be understood apart from Christ. For of Him, through Christ, we were created.”

Gregory of Nyssa stated²⁸ that our nature no longer preserved the impress of the Father’s image, but was transformed into the foul likeness of sin. We had been outlawed by our own depravity and were shepherded by the father of sin. Christ, Who knew no sin, was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Having become what we were, He, through Himself again, united humanity to God. He, Who for our sakes was partaker of flesh and blood, has recovered us, and brought us back to the place from which we strayed.

“Human nature did not enter into creation from any other source, nor grow spontaneously in the parents of the race, but it too had for the author of its own constitution none other than the Father of all. The name of Godhead itself, whether it indicates the authority of oversight or of foresight, imports a certain relation to humanity. For He Who bestowed on all things that are, the power of being, is the God and overseer of what He has Himself produced. However, by the wiles of him that sowed in us the tares of disobedience, our nature no longer preserved in itself the impress of the Father’s image. Instead it was transformed into the foul likeness of sin; for this cause, it was engrafted by virtue of similarity of will into the evil family of the father of sin. The good and true God and Father was no longer the God and Father of him who had been thus

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XX, 5.

²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, XII, 1.

outlawed by his own depravity. Instead of Him Who was by Nature God, those were honored which, as Paul says, ‘by nature are not gods’ (Galatians 4:8), and in the place of the Father, he was deemed father who is falsely so called. As Jeremiah says in his dark saying, ‘The partridge utters her voice, she gathers *eggs* which she did not lay; *so is a man* gaining his wealth unjustly; in the midst of his days *his riches* shall leave him, and at his latter end he will be a fool’ (Jeremiah 17:11 LXX). The sum of our calamity was that humanity was exiled from the good Father, and was banished from the Divine oversight and care. For this cause, He Who is the Shepherd of the whole rational creation, left in the heights of heaven His sinless flock, and, moved by love, went after the sheep which had gone astray, even our human nature. For human nature, which alone through vice roamed away from the hundred rational beings, is, if it be compared with the whole, but an insignificant and infinitesimal part. Since then it was impossible that our life, which had been estranged from God, should of itself return to the high and heavenly place, He Who knew no sin is made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21), and frees us from the curse by taking on Him our curse as His own (Galatians 3:13). He took up, and, in the language of Paul, ‘slayed’ in Himself ‘the enmity’ which by means of sin had come between us and God. In fact, sin was ‘the enmity’ (Ephesians 2:16); and having become what we were, He, through Himself again, united humanity to God. By purity He brought into closest relationship with the Father of our nature that new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24), in Whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). He drew with Him into the same grace all the nature that partakes of His body and is akin to Him. And these glad tidings He proclaims through the woman, not to those disciples only, but also to all who up to the present day become disciples of the Word. Man is no longer outlawed, nor cast out of the kingdom of God, but is once more a son, once more in the station assigned to him by his God. For if the first fruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches (Romans 11:16). ‘For behold, here am I and the children whom God has given Me’ (Hebrews 2:13, Isaiah 8:18). He Who for our sakes was partaker of flesh and blood has recovered us, and brought us back to the place from which we strayed, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). He from Whom we were formerly alienated by our revolt has become our Father and our God.”

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out²⁹ that Christ was not flesh in the beginning, and was not so until He was born of Mary. In the flesh, He reconciled the enmity which was against us. Yet that which the Father has, also belongs to the Son.

“We understand all things to have been delivered to the Savior, and, if it is necessary to follow up understanding by explanation, that has been delivered to Him which He did not previously possess. For He was not man previously, but became man for the sake of saving man. The Word was not in the beginning flesh, but has been made flesh subsequently (John 1:1-14). In which Flesh, as Paul says, He reconciled the enmity which was against us (Colossians 1:20, 2:14, Ephesians 2:15, 16). He destroyed the Law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might make the two into one new man, making peace, and reconcile both in one body to the Father. That, however, which the Father has, belongs also to the Son, as also He says in John, ‘All things that the Father has are Mine’ (John 16:15), expressions which could not be improved. For when He became that which He was not, ‘all things were delivered’ to Him. But when He desires to declare

²⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, On Luke 10:22, 3.

His unity with the Father, He teaches it without any reserve, saying: ‘All things whatever the Father has are Mine.’”

Just creating one new man wasn’t enough, however. A second aspect of “the middle wall of separation” is that His death and resurrection was also necessary in order to reconcile both Jew and Gentile in one body to God the Father (Ephesians 2:16). Chrysostom stated³⁰ that Christ became a Jew by circumcision (Luke 2:21); but by becoming accursed (Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23), He became a Gentile outside the Law. And the word “reconcile” (Ephesians 2:16) implies a reconciling thoroughly; that is, it is a strengthened reconciliation that hints at a restoration to a primal unity.

Christ Reconciled Both to God

Paul said, “He created in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out³¹ some of Paul’s words that may not be immediately apparent. In addressing the Arians, who say that Christ is not God, He became sin for us and a curse, though not having sinned Himself, but because He Himself bore our sins and our curse, so, He created us in Him. The point is that if Christ were a creature, as the Arians claimed, then He was not created for us, and we are not created in Him; and, if not created in Him, we have Him not in ourselves but externally, like receiving instruction from a teacher. If this is the case, then sin has not lost its reign over the flesh, being inherent in it and not cast out of it.

“John says, ‘For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved’ (John 3:17). And again, the Savior has spoken in His own person, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind’ (John 9:39). Not for Himself then, but for our salvation, and to abolish death, and to condemn sin, and to give sight to the blind, and to raise up all from the dead, has He come; but if not for Himself, but for us, by consequence not for Himself but for us is He created. But if not for Himself is He created, but for us, then He is not Himself a creature, but, as having put on our flesh, He uses such language. And that this is the sense of the Scriptures, we may learn from Paul, who says in Ephesians, ‘Having broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace’ (Ephesians 2:14-15). But if in Him the two are created, and these are in His body, reasonably then, bearing the two in Himself, He is as if Himself created; for those who were created in Himself He made one, and He was in them, as they. And thus, the two being created in Him, He may say suitably, ‘The Lord created me.’ For as by receiving our infirmities, He is said to be infirm Himself, though not Himself infirm, for He is the Power of God, and He became sin for us and a curse, though not having sinned Himself, but because He Himself bore our sins and our curse, so, by creating us in Him, let Him say, He created me for the works,’ though not Himself a creature.”

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15.

³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xx, 55-56.

“For if, as they hold, the Essence of the Word being of created nature, therefore He says, ‘The Lord created me,’ being a creature, He was not created for us; but if He was not created for us, we are not created in Him; and, if not created in Him, we have Him not in ourselves but externally; as, for instance, as receiving instruction from Him as from a teacher. And it being so with us, sin has not lost its reign over the flesh, being inherent and not cast out of it. But Paul opposes such a doctrine a little before, when he says, ‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works’ (Ephesians 2:10); and if in Christ we are created, then it is not He who is created, but we in Him; and thus the words ‘He created’ are for our sake. For because of our need, the Word, though being Creator, endured words which are used of creatures; which are not proper to Him, as being the Word, but are ours who are created in Him.”

What happens, then, asks Chrysostom³², when God tries to reconcile us, but we fall back into enmity? Only hell awaits this! This is the “mind of the flesh” (Ephesians 2:3). Since Christ had abolished the enmity in His flesh, where the enmity is “the Law of the commandments in decrees” (Ephesians 2:15), to return to the “enmity” is to deny the benefit of the death of Christ.

“Think then, how vast an evil is it, when God has employed so many methods to reconcile us, and has affected it, that we should again fall back into enmity! This enmity no fresh Baptism, but hell itself awaits; no fresh remission, but searching trial. The mind of the flesh is luxury and indolence, covetousness and all kinds of sin. Why is it said the mind of the flesh, while the flesh could do nothing without the soul? Paul does not say this to the disparagement of the flesh, any more than when he says the ‘natural man’ (1 Corinthians 2:14); he doesn’t use that expression to the disparagement of the soul. Neither body nor soul in itself, if it doesn’t receive the impulse which is from above, is able to achieve anything great or noble.”

In this context there is the fleshly man, the natural man (referring to the soul, 1 Corinthians 2:14) and the spiritual man. “The virtue of the flesh is her subjection to the soul. It is her vice to govern the soul. The horse may be good and nimble, but when the horse gets the mastery over the charioteer, she produces ten thousand mischiefs.” The same is true about the Spirit governing the soul. “The soul, while dwelling in the body, makes it beautiful; but when she leaves it destitute of her own native energy and departs, the greatest loathsomeness ensues (i.e. death). So also, it is when the Spirit forsakes the soul (and the body); the loathsomeness which results is worse and greater.”

Chrysostom also stated³³ that the flesh of itself is neither good nor evil. As soon as the body has deprived itself of reason and of the supremacy of the soul, then it goes wrong; similarly, the soul without the Spirit. This is why it is the Lord’s intent that the Spirit should direct both body and soul in the Body of Christ.

“Luxury is not due to the necessity of the body, but rather of the inattentiveness of the soul; for food, not feasting, is the object of the necessity of the body. If I have a mind to put on a strong curb, I stop the horse; but the body is unable to check the soul in her evil courses. Why does Paul call it the carnal mind? Because it comes to be wholly of the flesh, for when the flesh has the mastery, then she goes wrong, as soon as she has deprived herself of reason, and of the supremacy of the soul. The virtue therefore of the body consists in this, in its submission to the soul, since of itself the flesh is neither good nor evil. For what could the body ever do of itself? It is then by its

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, Moral.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, Moral.

connection to the soul that the body is good, good because of its subjection, with capacity, both for one and for the other, and having an equal tendency either way. The body has a natural desire, not of fornication, nor of adultery, but of pleasure; the body has a desire not of feasting, but of food; not of drunkenness, but of drink. For in proof that it is not drunkenness that is the natural desire of the body, notice how, whenever you exceed the measure, when you go beyond the boundary-lines, it cannot hold out any longer. Up to this point it is of the body, but all the rest of the excesses; e.g., when the body is hurried away into sensualities, when she becomes stupefied, these are of the soul. For though the body is good, still it is vastly inferior to the soul, as lead is of less value than gold; yet gold needs lead to solder it, and just so the soul needs the body. In the same way a noble child requires a conductor; so does the soul need the body.”

Peace to All and Access to the Father

Paul said, “And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:17-18).

John Chrysostom stated³⁴ that Christ has made peace between all people. Not the Gentiles less, and the Jews more, but all by one and the same grace. The wrath He appeased by His death and has made us fit for the Father’s love through the Spirit. No longer are we strangers from the saints, or foreigners. For they who shall not attain to heavenly blessings, are foreigners.

“Paul said, ‘And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father’ (Ephesians 2:17-18). He has reconciled us! For the Lord Himself also said, ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you’ (John 14:27). And again, ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). And again, ‘If you ask anything in My name, I will do it’ (John 14:14). And again, ‘For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me’ (John 16:27). These are so many evidences of peace. But how towards the Gentiles? ‘For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father’, not the Gentiles less, and the Jews more, but all by one and the same grace. The wrath He appeased by His death and has made us fit for the Father’s love through the Spirit. Notice again, the ‘in one Spirit’ means ‘by’ or ‘through’. By Himself and the Spirit that is, He has brought us to the Father. ‘Therefore, we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints’” (Ephesians 2:19).

“Do you perceive that it is not with the Jews simply, but with those saintly and great men, such as Abraham, Moses and Elijah? It is for the same city with these that we are enrolled, for that, we declare ourselves. ‘For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland’ (Hebrews 11:14). No longer are we strangers from the saints, or foreigners. For they who shall not attain to heavenly blessings, are foreigners. ‘For a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever’” (John 8:35).

“‘We are members of the household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19). The very thing which they at the first had, by means of so many toils and troubles, has been for you accomplished by the grace of God. Behold the hope of your calling.”

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 17

Chrysostom also stated³⁵ that the one body and one Spirit of Christians doesn't apply if one is friends with heretics. This may result in one body but not one spirit. We are all equal before God in the Body of Christ, so there is no point in being high-minded.

“This is that love which produces great and glorious fruits. Paul said, ‘There is one body’ (Ephesians 4:4); one, both by sympathy, by not opposing the good of others, and by sharing their joy. He then beautifully adds, ‘and one Spirit’, showing that from the one body there will be one Spirit. It is possible that there may be indeed one body, and yet not one Spirit; for instance, if any member of it should be a friend of heretics. By this expression, he may be shaming them into unanimity, saying, ‘You who have received one Spirit, and have been made to drink at one fountain (John 4:14), ought not to be divided in mind’. Then he adds, ‘Just as you were called in one hope of your calling’ (Ephesians 4:4), that is, God has called you all on the same terms. He has bestowed nothing upon one more than upon another. To all He has freely given immortality, to all eternal life, to all immortal glory, to all brotherhood, to all inheritance. He is the common Head of all; ‘When we were dead in trespasses, He has made us alive together with Christ, and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:5-6). You then who in the spiritual world have so great equality of privileges, why is it that you are high-minded? Is it that one is wealthy and another strong? How ridiculous must this be? Tell me, if the emperor someday were to take ten persons, and to array them all in purple, seat them on the royal throne, and to bestow upon all the same honor, would any one of these venture to reproach another, as being wealthier or more illustrious than he? Never! And the difference is not so great in heaven as we differ here below. There is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4:5). Behold ‘the hope of your calling. One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all’ (Ephesians 4:6). Can it be, that you are called by the name of a greater God and another is called by the name of a lesser God? That you are saved by faith, and another is saved by works? That you have received remission in baptism, while another has not? ‘Who is over all’, that is, the Lord; and above all and ‘through all’, that is, providing for, ordering all; and ‘in you all’, that is, who dwells in you all. Now this is an attribute of the Son.”

A Holy Temple in the Lord

Paul said, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Basil the Great stated³⁶ that we have received the grace of God from the Father and Christ has brought us to the Father through Himself, making us members of the household of God. **Noting His benefits** is a proper argument for glorifying Him. Scripture does not give us just one Name to describe the Lord, however. At various places, He is Shepherd, King, Physician, Bridegroom, the Way, Door, Fountain, Bread, Axe and Rock.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XI, vv. 4-7.

³⁶ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, VIII, 17.

John Chrysostom stated³⁷ that the purpose of the reconciling is that each of us severally is a Temple and all of us together are a Temple. One cannot otherwise have a place in it, unless by living with great exactness. The object of this building is that God may dwell in this temple. He dwells in us as in the body of Christ, and as in a Spiritual temple.

“Notice how Paul knits it all together, and represents Him at one time, holding down the whole body from above, and welding it together. At another time, He supported the building from below, and being a root, or base. Whereas Paul had used the expression, ‘He created in Himself from the two one new man’ (Ephesians 2:15) by this Paul clearly shows us, that by Himself Christ knits together the two. Again, in Him it was created, since ‘He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation’ (Colossians 1:15), that is, He Himself supports all things.”

“In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord’ (Ephesians 2:21-22). Whether you speak of the roof, or of the walls, or of any other part whatever, He supports the whole. Paul elsewhere calls Him a foundation. ‘For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’ (1 Corinthians 3:11). ‘In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord’ (Ephesians 2:21). Here he displays the perfection of it and indicates that one cannot otherwise have a place in it, unless by living with great exactness. ‘It grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Ephesians 2:21-22). He is speaking continuously: ‘Into a holy temple, for a habitation of God in the Spirit’. What then is the object of this building? It is that God may dwell in this temple. For each of you severally is a temple, and all of you together are a temple. And He dwelleth in you as in the body of Christ, and as in a Spiritual temple. Paul does not use the word which means our coming to God, but which implies God’s bringing us to Himself, for we did not come of ourselves, but we were brought by Him. ‘No one comes to the Father except through Me’. And again, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

This was a mystery which had been hidden in God from the beginning of the ages (Ephesians 3:9). And as this mystery unfolds, the manifold wisdom of God is revealed by the Church to the principalities and powers (two ranks of angels) in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10). Paul was extremely appreciative of the gift of the Grace of God given to him that he should be able to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of this mystery (Ephesians 3:7-8). And we can be likewise appreciative that we can participate also.

Athanasius of Alexandria described³⁸ what it was like for Paul to be a fellow-citizen and member of the household of God. He was gifted with every virtue, borne to Paradise and was known to the saints that dwell there. Yet he still knew only in part; however he was perfect regarding those that were entrusted to him. Apostolic grace was committed to him and he had hope for the future through his tribulations.

“Paul, being gifted with every virtue, and called faithful of the Lord cleaved to these virtues more and more, and was carried up even to heavenly places, and was borne to Paradise (2 Corinthians 12:4). Paul knew nothing against himself, yet he was not justified by this; but He who judges him is the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:4), and what was in harmony with love and godliness. As he surpassed the conversation of men, he was exalted above men. When he returned from Paradise

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 17.

³⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XI, 1.

he preached to every man, ‘We know in part, and we prophesy in part. Now I know in part; but then I shall know just as I also am known’ (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). Paul was known to those saints who are in heaven, as their fellow-citizen and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Regarding all that is future and perfect, the things known by him here were in part; but with respect to those things which were committed and entrusted to him by the Lord, he was perfect. As he said, ‘I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let us, as many as are perfect, have this in mind’ (Philippians 3:14-15). The Gospel of Christ is the fulfillment and accomplishment of the ministration which was supplied by the Law of Israel. Future things will be the accomplishment of such as now exist, the Gospel being then fulfilled, and the faithful receiving those things which, not seeing now, they yet hope for. As Paul said, ‘For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance’ (Romans 8:24-25). Paul was of such a character, that Apostolic grace was committed to him; he wrote, wishing ‘that all men were even as I myself’ (1 Corinthians 7:7). For virtue is philanthropic, and great is the company of the kingdom of heaven; for thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads there serve the Lord. Though a man enters it through a straight and narrow way, yet having entered, he beholds immeasurable space, and a place greater than any other, as they declare, who were eye-witnesses and heirs of these things. ‘You brought us into the snare; You laid afflictions on our back’ (Psalm 66:11 LXX). But afterwards, having related their afflictions, they say, ‘You have set my feet in a wide place’ (Psalm 31:8); and again, ‘You have made room for me in tribulation’” (Psalm 4:1 LXX).

Basil the Great stated³⁹ that we have received the grace of God from the Father and Christ has brought us to the Father through Himself, making us members of the household of God. The reciting of His benefits is a proper argument for glorifying Him. Scripture does not give us just one Name to describe the Lord, however. At various places, He is Shepherd, King, Physician, Bridegroom, the Way, Door, Fountain, Bread, Axe and Rock.

“Paul said, ‘I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all’ (Romans 1:8), and again ‘Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name’ (Romans 1:5). Paul continued, ‘through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God,’ (Romans 5:2). Paul sets forth the boons conferred on us by the Son, at one time making the grace of the good gifts pass through from the Father to us, and at another bringing us to the Father through Himself. By saying ‘Through Him we have received grace and apostleship’, Paul declares the supply of the good gifts to proceed from that source. In saying ‘through whom also we have access by faith’, Paul sets forth our acceptance and being made ‘members of the household of God’ through Christ (Ephesians 2:19). Is then the confession of the grace wrought by Him to us a detraction from His glory? Is it not truer to say that the recital of His benefits is a proper argument for glorifying Him? It is on this account that we have not found Scripture describing the Lord to us by one name, nor even by such terms alone as are indicative of His godhead and majesty. At one time it uses terms descriptive of His nature, for it recognizes the ‘Name which is above every name’ (Philippians 2:9) the name of Son, and speaks of true Son (Matthew 14:33; 27:54). It also describes Him as only begotten God (John 1:18), Power of God (Romans 1:16), Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24), and Word (John 1:1, Psalm 107:20, Wisdom 9:1). On account of the diverse manners (Hebrews 1:1)

³⁹ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, VIII, 17.

wherein grace is given to us, which, because of the riches of His goodness (Romans 2:4), according to his manifold wisdom (Ephesians 3:10), he bestows things on us. Scripture designates Him by other titles, calling Him Shepherd (John 10:12), King (Matthew 21:5), Physician (Matthew 9:12), Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15), and Way (John 14:6). Also, Scripture calls Him Door (John 10:9), Fountain (Revelation 21:6), Bread (John 6:35), Axe (Matthew 3:10), and Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). These titles do not set forth His nature, but the variety of the effectual working which, out of His tender-heartedness to His own creation, according to the peculiar necessity of each, He bestows upon them that need. Those that have fled for refuge to His ruling care, and through patient endurance have mended their wayward ways, He calls ‘sheep’ (John 10:3-5). He confesses Himself to be, to them that hear His voice and refuse to give heed to strange teaching, a ‘shepherd’. For ‘My sheep hear my voice’” (John 10:27).

Paul compared the Grace given to the Gentiles to a wild olive branch that was grafted in to the root and richness of a cultivated olive tree, where some of its branches were broken off (Romans 11:16-25). This should cause us to be humble because:

- We do not support the root; the root supports us (Ephesians 2:18).
- If God did not spare the natural branches, He won’t spare us either (Ephesians 2:21).
- When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, the natural branches can and will be grafted back in (Ephesians 2:24-25).