

# ***THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY***

September 5, 2010  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**GOSPEL: Matthew 22:35-46**

**EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15**

Today's Gospel lesson is used frequently in the West in September and October.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 22:35-46 (Mark 12:28-34)**

The Greatest Commandment as stated is the Gospel lesson is:

- You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.
- You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus called these two parts “the first” and “the second”, where the second is like the first. These words did not just fall out of the sky; they had been an integral part of the Mosaic Law from the beginning (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 30:6, Leviticus 19:18). Israel was instructed to teach this to their children diligently (Deuteronomy 6:7). They were instructed to bind them into phylacteries on their foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8) and write them on the doorposts of their houses (Deuteronomy 6:9).

The Mosaic Law defined keeping the Greatest Commandment as being “circumcised in heart” (Deuteronomy 30:6, 10:16). If they obeyed the Lord and kept this commandment (and its corollaries), the Lord promised to bless them above all the nations of the earth. He would open for them His good storehouse to bless them so that they could lend to and evangelize the nations (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 12). The Greatest Commandment was even used as a Creed in the Synagogue worship, and it was one of the first things children learned in school<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in questions with the Jewish leaders, there was no argument about what is the Greatest Commandment. This was so fundamental to the Mosaic Law that it was obvious.

The subject of the Greatest Commandment came up about six months earlier also. On the earlier occasion, a lawyer (that is, one skilled in interpreting the Mosaic Law) asked Jesus “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Jesus asked him what the Law said; the lawyer replied with the Greatest Commandment. Jesus answered, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Wishing to justify himself, the lawyer replied, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus then proceeded with the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the second part of the Greatest Commandment.

In Mark's account, Jesus prefaced His response with the introduction to the Creed used in the Synagogue worship, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). After reciting the Greatest Commandment, Jesus concluded, “There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 245, 101-104.

The Ten Commandments can be summarized in terms of the Greatest Commandment as follows:

Commandment	Exodus 20	Deuteronomy 5
<b>Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength</b> (Deuteronomy 6:5)		
1. Have no gods before Me	v. 3	v. 7
2. Do not make or serve idols	vv.4-6	vv.8-10
3. Do not take the Name in vain	v.7	v.11
<b>Love your neighbor as yourself</b> (Leviticus 19:18)		
4. Keep the Sabbath Day holy	vv.8-10	vv.12-15
5. Honor your parents	v.12	v.16
6. Do not murder	v.13	v.17
7. Do not commit adultery	v.14	v.18
8. Do not steal	v.15	v.19
9. Do not lie	v.16	v.20
10. Do not covet	v.17	v.21

In Matthew's account, Jesus summarized the Greatest Commandment by saying, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

Some people today feel that the Ten Commandments aren't applicable anymore: they say we're under Grace not Law because of the New Covenant (Romans 6:14). Yet does this mean that we don't need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and our neighbor as our self?

The Lord Himself stated that, "Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one point (small part of a Hebrew letter) will by no means pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19). The Lord went on to describe how we need to take the precepts of the Law to heart and apply them to our thoughts and intentions as well as to our deeds (Matthew 5:21-48).

John Chrysostom mentioned<sup>2</sup> three ways in which Christ fulfilled the Law.

1. He transgressed none of the precepts of the Law, and thus "fulfilled" the Law by keeping it perfectly. There are a number of occasions where the Scripture states<sup>3</sup> this.
2. He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3-4). "Since the law<sup>4</sup> was laboring to make man righteous, but had not power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the law desired; and what the law could not by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He said, 'I am not come to destroy the law'".

<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVI, 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> For example Matthew 3:15, John 8:46, John 14:30, Isaiah 53:9.

<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVI, 3-4.

3. He upgraded the Law to what was the original intent, and Chrysostom called this the “future code of laws”. “Do not murder” became “Do not even be angry” (Matthew 5:21-22); “Do not commit adultery” became “Do not even lust in your heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Early Christian teaching included a greater emphasis on the Law than is present today. “For He nowhere has dissolved the law, but fulfilled it. For He says, ‘One iota, or one tittle, shall not pass from the law until all be fulfilled’ (Matthew 5:18). For says He, ‘I come not to dissolve the law, but to fulfill it’ (Matthew 5:17). For Moses himself, who was at once the lawgiver, and the high priest, and the prophet, and the king, and Elijah, the zealous follower of the prophets, were present at our Lord’s transfiguration in the mountain. They were witnesses of His incarnation and of His sufferings, as the intimate friends of Christ, but not as enemies and strangers. Whence it is demonstrated that the law is good and holy, as also the prophets.”

“Now the Law is the Decalogue, which the Lord promulgated to them with an audible voice (Exodus 20:1, Deuteronomy 4:15), before the people made that calf (Exodus 32:1-4) which represented the Egyptian Apis. And the Law is righteous, and therefore is it called the Law, because judgments are thence made according to the law of nature. This Law is good, holy, and such as lays no compulsion in things positive. For He says, ‘If you will make me an altar, you shall make it of earth’ (Exodus 20:24). It does not say, ‘Make one’, but, ‘If thou will make’. It does not impose a necessity, but gives leave to their own free liberty. For God does not stand in need of sacrifices, being by nature above all want. But knowing that, as of old, Abel, beloved of God, and Noah and Abraham, and those that succeeded, without being required, but only moved of themselves by the law of nature, did offer sacrifice to God out of a grateful mind. So He did now permit the Hebrews, not commanding, but, if they had a mind, permitting them. And if they offered from a right intention, He showed Himself pleased with their sacrifices. Therefore He says, ‘If you desire to offer, do not offer to me as to one that stands in need of it, for I stand in need of nothing; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof’ (Psalm 50:12). But later this people became forgetful of that, and called upon a calf as God, instead of the true God. To him they did ascribe the cause of their coming out of Egypt, saying, ‘These are thy gods, O Israel, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt’ (Exodus 32:4). When these men had committed wickedness with the ‘similitude of a calf that eats hay’ and denied God who had visited them by Moses (Exodus 4) in their afflictions, and had done signs with his hand and rod, then was God angry, as being ungratefully treated by them. He bound them with bonds which could not be loosed, with a mortifying burden and a hard collar, and no longer said, ‘If thou make’, but, ‘Make an altar’, and sacrifice perpetually. For you are forgetful and ungrateful. Offer burnt-offerings therefore continually, that thou may be mindful of Me. For since you have wickedly abused your power, I lay a necessity upon you for the time to come, and I command you to abstain from certain meats. And I ordain to you the distinction of clean and unclean creatures, although every creature is good, as being made by Me; and I appoint to you several separations, purgations, frequent washings and sprinklings, several purifications, and several times of rest. And if you neglect any of them, I determine that punishment which is proper to the disobedient; that being pressed and galled by your collar, you may depart from the error of polytheism. And laying aside that, ‘These are thy gods, O Israel’ (Exodus 32:4), may be mindful of that, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord’ (Deuteronomy 6:4); and may run back again to that Law which is inserted by me in the nature of all men, ‘that there is only one God in heaven and on earth, and to love Him with all thy heart, and all thy might, and all thy mind’ (Deuteronomy 6:5), and to fear none but Him, nor to admit the names of other gods into your mind, nor to let your tongue utter them out of your mouth. He bound them for the hardness of their hearts, that by sacrificing, and resting, and purifying themselves, and by similar

observances, they might come to the knowledge of God, who ordained these things for them. (Constitutions VI, iv, 19-20).

Sometimes overlooked in Paul's famous argument of Law vs. Grace are Paul's statements: "Therefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). "For we know that the Law is spiritual" (Romans 7:14). "I agree with the Law that it is good" (Romans 7:16).

On the other hand, Paul argues, "I am fleshly, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14). "For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:22, 23).

Paul continued, "Therefore the Law has become our pedagogue<sup>5</sup> until Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). For the Law, by itself, cannot legislate conditions of the heart. "For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). "Yet we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, etc." (1 Timothy 1:8-9). Abraham is an excellent example of this!

Old Testament and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called "The friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). By faith Abraham obeyed and he had the vision to wait for the city which has foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham believed God and the belief (i.e. faith) was reckoned to him as righteousness. He is called the father of all who believe, and the heir of the world (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:11ff). Thus Abraham exemplifies the Grace of God. Abraham received faith according to grace (Romans 4:16), just as all who since him have received faith.

Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote<sup>6</sup>, "The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves". The Early Church taught<sup>7</sup> that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law but the bonds and the collar.

John Chrysostom pointed out that the Lord had said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Chrysostom continued, "But His commandments and the sum of them are, 'You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself'. If therefore to love God is to love one's neighbor, 'For if you love Me', He said, 'O Peter, feed My sheep' (John

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<sup>5</sup> A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 20-21

21:16, 17). But to love one's neighbor works a keeping of the commandments; with reason does He then say, "On these hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Homily LXXI on Matthew 22).

The guiding principle of the Mosaic Law was the "Greatest Commandment". The use of the "Greatest Commandment" as a creed in the synagogues in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, was in itself in obedience to one of the commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Taken as a whole, the Law contained all the elements of Grace as described with the advent of Christ as Messiah in the New Testament, and the Law pointed toward the work that Christ accomplished (Galatians 3:24). The intent of the Law was that God might cause His people to know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man shall live by every word coming out of the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4). The expectation of the Law was Christ, and the Prophets understood this. Jeremiah wrote: "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Jeremiah 31:31-33, Hebrews 8:8-12).

The Law aimed at establishing faith and the condition of man's heart, and the command was to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16, Colossians 2:11) as well as their flesh. But the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:16-18). In anticipation of the Lamb of God, He commanded that offerings for sin should be established using the blood of bulls and goats (Compare Hebrews 9:13) for sins done in ignorance (Leviticus 4), and using the blood of a lamb for sins done willfully (Leviticus 5). These offerings had to be performed repeatedly, because sin was repeated (Hebrews 7:26-28). It took a vision to see the end result of Christ's one sacrifice, where He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Following the Law with all one's heart and soul was not supposed to be difficult. "For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. For the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-15). Jesus said the same thing: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). With the coming of the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29-36), the Holy Spirit is now resident within us (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20) and Law is written on our hearts. Our illumination regarding the things of God has greatly increased, and Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) along with the offerings for sin are unnecessary. This doesn't mean that the Mosaic Law is useless now that Grace has taken its place. As John Chrysostom stated<sup>8</sup>, "The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. For if it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. And so does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a *pedagogue* or tutor makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure".

Men under Grace have a greater responsibility than do men under the Law; because more has been given, more is expected (Luke 12:48, Matthew 25:29). John Cassian stated<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>8</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3

<sup>9</sup> John Cassian, Conferences III, 21, 5

“How can those men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard the fulfillment even of the lighter commands of the Law, to the easy character of which the words of the lawgiver bear testimony?”

Irenaeus stated<sup>10</sup> that while the Law had been given for bondage to Israel, its scope has been widened for those under Grace that we might have greater love for our Father.

“He has increased and widened those laws, granting to men, by means of adoption, to know God the Father. We love Him with the whole heart, while we abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But He has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their Father. We shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts. We have truly received the power of liberty, in which condition a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, fear, and love the Lord”.

Mark’s account includes some additional details. After Jesus had responded with the Greatest Commandment, the Scribe responded by saying, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is One God, and there is no other than He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices”. Jesus responded, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mark 12:32-34). The Scribe had understood that the Lord desires mercy not sacrifice (Hosea 6:5, Isaiah 1:11-17).

But the Scribe lacked one thing: the knowledge of Who it was he was talking to. Therefore “Jesus answered and said while He taught in the Temple” (Mark 12:35). ”What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, ‘The son of David’. He said to them, ‘How then does David in the spirit call Him Lord, saying: The Lord said to My Lord, sit at My Right Hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool. If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?’” (Matthew 22:42-45). The answer was the Incarnation, which they were unwilling to accept. By comparing Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, we can see all the drama of this conversation unfold.

The Scribe had responded to Jesus, “There is One God and there is no other than He” (Mark 12:32). This statement was part of the Law (Deuteronomy 4:39) and the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:7, Exodus 20:3). But its context was always associated with the worship of idols.

Therefore, the Lord pointed out that David’s Lord was God and Messiah, but yet He was also David’s Son (meaning David’s descendant). This the Scribes and Pharisees were unwilling to admit, and this was one of the reasons they used to crucify Him (Mark 14:61-64). In this context, however, the Scribes (and Pharisees, Matthew 22:41) were unable to deny the Scriptures and did not dare to question Jesus anymore (Matthew 22:46).

This turned out to be an advantage for the multitudes, for “the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37). Jesus then went on to warn the people about the Scribes and about how they love recognition and honor, but devour widows’ houses and make long pretentious prayers (Mark 12:38-40) very obviously violating both points of the Greatest Commandment.

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<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV, xvi, 5

# **TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY**

**September 5, 2010**  
**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Revision C**

## **EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15**

Today's Epistle reading is used variously on the 4th Sunday after Pentecost or half of it on Transfiguration Sunday and the other half on the 4th Sunday after Easter.

## **BACKGROUND FOR THE CHURCH IN CORINTH**

Paul founded the Church in Corinth about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Silas was traveling with Paul at the time along with Luke, Timothy and Andronicus, where all but Paul were of the original Seventy. Luke was left behind to oversee the Macedonian Churches. (Note switch in tenses from "we" to "they" and back to "we" in Acts 16:16, 17:1, 20:6). Silas was left behind in Corinth and was later Bishop of Corinth. (Note that we never hear from Silas again traveling with Paul after he arrived in Corinth, Acts 18:5).

Before Paul arrived in Corinth for an extended stay again in late 55 AD, he wrote four letters to Corinth (two of which are lost) and paid the Church one brief visit. For more details of this see the Epistle lesson for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. In the interval from 52 to 55 AD, Apollos and the Apostle Peter visited Corinth. Apollos was one of the original Seventy, but must have been back home in Alexandria at the time of Pentecost. He knew only the baptism of John in 53 AD when he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, the overseers Paul left in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), straightened Apollos out and also wrote to the Churches in Achaia (Athens and Corinth) to receive Apollos when he arrived (Acts 18:27). Apollos proceeded to help out by vigorously refuting the Jews publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:28). In the chapter just prior to our Epistle reading (1 Corinthians 3:8), Paul said that he and Apollos are one; that is, of one mind in the work of establishing the Churches.

The same can be said for the relationship between Paul and Peter. Peter visited Corinth in the early 50's AD on his way to Rome. He obviously made a big impression in Corinth since there were factions that had developed by 55 AD (1 Corinthians 1:12) centered around Paul, Apollos, Peter and none of the above (i.e. Christ)!! On Peter's way to Corinth, Paul met him in Macedonia and together they ordained four bishops:

Olympas	for	Philippi
Jason	for	Thessalonica
Silas	for	Corinth
Herodion	for	Patras (SW Greece)

Thus we can definitely say that Peter and Paul were one in the work also.

From a detailed study of Paul's Missionary Journeys, one can see that Paul worked with at least 60 of the original members of the 70 at some point. For more details, see Appendix A. Many of them like Luke, Timothy, and Titus traveled with him a lot. In addition, Paul had some contact with Peter, John, Andrew and Philip.

## **EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15**

### **The Imagery of Gold and Precious Stones**

**The Garden of Eden:** In and around the Garden of Eden, gold and some precious stones are mentioned: bdellium and onyx (Genesis 2:10-13). The implication is that they are just raw materials, however.

**The Ephod:** As part of the ephod or garment worn by Aaron the priest, were two large onyx gem stones with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 28:9-12).

**The Breastpiece:** The breastpiece of judgment, actually a pocket or pouch, that contained the Urim and Thummin (meaning "lights and truth") had an embroidered face and held 12 large gems representing the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). Aaron continually carried the verdict or judgment of the sons of Israel before the Lord. This verdict was already given on the Altar of Burnt offering as part of Aaron's preparation (Exodus 28:29-30).

**The New Jerusalem::** The light of the New Jerusalem was like a precious stone. The gates were twelve pearls, on which were inscribed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The foundations were 12 precious stones on which are written the names of the Twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:10-21).

**The Church Today:** Paul was speaking of building with various materials: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw. In 1 Corinthians 3:17, the building is said to be the temple of God. Part of the building process is a fire test — this is part of the Word of the Cross (1 Corinthians 3:10-17).

We have a treasure in dirt (clay) vessels (2 Corinthians 4:6-9). The treasure is like the proverbial sword in the fire. The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6). As we carry our cross, the sword heats up and we begin to take on the image of God (v.4), which is the fire. This process is referred to as deification where we begin to become God-like. The words printed on icons of St. Athanasius reflect this: God became man that man might become god.

There will be tribulations in our lives, but this is just part of the process that refines the gold and cuts the precious stones. As we go on, we die a little more each day to our self-centeredness and death is working in us. The more this happens, the more we are aware of the will of God and grace and thanksgiving abound to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:8-15).

The result is that Christians have been a unique people. Consider the First Century writing of an unknown author describing Christians of his day: "For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they

observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor [are they]...the advocates of merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives as to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking manner of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry ... beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring [literally, "cast away fetuses"]. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time, surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless [2 Corinthians 4:12]; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as though quickened to life; they are assigned by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred" (The Epistle to Diognetus, Chapter 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers).

### **What Happens to the Earthenware Vessel?**

But yet a very real problem that the Church has had to address over the centuries is: "What happens to the clay vessel?" Gnostics in the First Century quoted Paul as saying that "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Therefore, they said, the flesh and blood doesn't matter and only spiritual things matter. The Apostle John vehemently opposed this idea (which was championed by ex-deacon Nicolas of Acts 6:5) regarding the gnostic Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 14-15).

In the same context as the above, Paul stated regarding the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52-54):

- The dead will be raised
- We shall be changed
- The corruptible must put on incorruption
- The mortal must put on immortality
- Death will be swallowed up in victory

The Gnostics stated that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18) and occurred at baptism. Paul vehemently opposed this and even delivered some Gnostics over to Satan (for the destruction of their flesh) in order that they may learn not to blaspheme in this regard (1 Timothy 1:18-20; compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

The Scriptures teach that in the resurrection the righteous will shine forth like the sun (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3) and that we will be like Him (1 John 3:2) who is the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15-18, Revelation 1:5). And when the resurrected Christ appeared to the Apostles in the upper room, He pointed out to them specifically that He

was not just spirit but that He retained flesh and bones in His resurrected state (Luke 24:38-39). There was probably something different about the risen Jesus' appearance. The Apostles didn't dare ask the risen Jesus who He was when He appeared to them in Galilee (John 21:12); Luke and Cleopas didn't recognize Him at all for a while on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). There was undoubtedly something different when the corruptible put on incorruption and the mortal put on immortality. It was changed (1 Corinthians 15:52-54). But yet it was still recognizable on closer inspection.

### **The Role of the Clay Vessels**

So what is the proper role of our fleshly bodies in this life? Irenaeus (2nd Century) quotes Paul using these words with respect to our fleshly bodies: "Paul declares that we are 'always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, that also the life of Jesus Christ might be manifested in our body. For if we who live are delivered into death for Jesus' sake, it is that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh' [2 Corinthians 4:10-11]. And that the Spirit lays hold of the flesh, he says in the same Epistle: 'That ye are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart' [2 Corinthians 3:3]. If, therefore, in the present time fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit, what is there astonishing if, in the resurrection, they receive that life which is granted by the Spirit? Of this resurrection the Apostle speaks in the Epistle to the Philippians: 'Having been made conformable to His death, if by any means I might attain to the resurrection which is from the dead' [Philippians 3:11]. In what other mortal flesh, therefore, can life be understood, unless in that substance which is also put to death on account of that confession which is made of God. He, Himself has declared: 'If, as a man, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise? For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. Now, if Christ has not risen, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. In that case, we are found to be false witnesses for God, since we testified that He raised up Christ. For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. But if Christ is not risen, your faith is in vain, since ye are yet in your sins. Therefore those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are more miserable than all men. But now Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those that sleep; for as by man [came] death, by man also [came] the resurrection of the dead' " [1 Corinthians 15:13-21].

"In all these passages, as I have already said, these men (i.e. the heretics) must either allege that the apostle expresses opinions contradicting himself with respect to that statement 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50); or on the other hand, they will be forced to make perverse and crooked interpretations of all the passages, so as to overturn and alter the sense of the words: (Against Heresies, Book V, chapter 13, 4).

All this was put into place when the Lord created Adam and Eve. Not only were they created in the Image of God, but the Epistle text states that God commanded light to shine out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6). John Chrysostom (4th Century) comments on this: "And where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the creation; for, says He, 'Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, let there be light, and there was light' (Genesis 1:2, 3). Then, He said: 'Let it be, and it was'; but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. For He did not say, 'has now commanded light', but 'has Himself shined' (v.6). Therefore, neither do we see tangible objects by the shining of this light, but we see God Himself through Christ. For of the Spirit, he says (2 Corinthians 3:18):

‘But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit’. And of the Son, (2 Corinthians 4:4): ‘That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.’ And of the Father (2 Corinthians 4:6): ‘He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ “.

“For seeing he had spoken many and great things of the unspeakable glory, lest any should say: ‘And how enjoying so great a glory can we remain in a mortal body?’ he said that this very thing is indeed the chief marvel and a very great example of the power of God, that an earthen vessel has been enabled to bear so great a brightness and to keep so high a treasure. None of the things we hold is human!” (Homily viii on 2 Corinthians 4).

“And what is the ‘dying of the Lord Jesus,’ which they bore about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was shown, ‘For if anyone doesn’t believe’, Paul says, ‘that Jesus died and rose again, beholding us every day die and rise again, let him believe henceforward in the resurrection. His life is manifested in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). By snatching us out of the perils, that which seems a mark of weakness and being destitute proclaims His resurrection. His power had appeared in that we suffered, but without being overcome. We bear His dying that the power of His life may be made manifest, who did not permit mortal flesh to be overcome by the snowstorm of these calamities” (Homily ix on 2 Corinthians 4).

### **Attempts to Link the Earthen to the Heavenly**

All this is so utterly unfathomable and glorious that there have been attempts in the past to water it down, sometimes by deceit. For example, in the 4th Century, the words of the Nicene Creed were carefully drafted to refute the attempts of the Arian bishops to craft Jesus more in our image rather than vice versa. The words co-essential and consubstantial were used to distinguish the nature of Jesus’ divinity from the nature of Jesus’ flesh — which is the same as ours.

Athanasius of Alexandria (4th Century) put it in these words: “When the Bishops said that the Word must be described as the True Power and image of the Father, in all things exact and like the Father, and as unalterable, and as always, and as in Him without division (for never was the Word not, but He was always, existing everlastingly with the Father, as the radiance of light), Eusebius [an Arian bishop] and his fellows endured indeed, as not daring to contradict, being put to shame by the arguments which were urged against them; but withal they were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes [at the Council], that ‘like’, and ‘always’, and ‘power’, and ‘in Him’, were, as before, common to us and the Son and that it was no difficulty to agree to these. As to ‘like’, they said it was written of us, ‘Man is the image and glory of God’ [1 Corinthians 11:7]; ‘always’, that it was written, ‘for we which live are always’ [2 Corinthians 4:11]; ‘in Him’, ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’ [Acts 17:28]...as to ‘power’, that the caterpillar and the locust are called ‘power’ and ‘great power’ [Joel 2:25], and that it is often said of the people, for instance, ‘all the power of the Lord came out of the land of Egypt’ [Exodus 12:41]; and there are others also, heavenly ones, for Scripture says, ‘the Lord of powers is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge’ [Psalms 46:7]...But the Bishops discerning in this too their dissimulation, and whereas it is written, ‘deceit is in the heart of the irreligious that imagine evil’ [Proverbs 12:20], were again compelled on their part to collect the sense of the Scriptures, and to re-say ... more distinctly still, namely, that the Son is ‘one in essence’ with the Father, by way of saying, that the Son was from the Father, and not merely like, but the same in

likeness, and of showing that the Son's likeness and unalterableness was different from such copy of the same as is ascribed to us, which we acquire from virtue on the ground of observance of the commandments. For bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relative to their parents ... but since the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but inseparable from the essence of the Father, and He and the Father are one, as He has said Himself [John 8:58, 10:30], and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance stands towards the light ... therefore the Council, as understanding this, suitably wrote 'one in essence', that they might defeat the perverseness of the heretics, and show that the Word was other than the originated things. For, after thus writing, they at once added, 'they who say that the Son of God is from nothing, or created, or alterable, or a work, or from other essence, these the Holy Catholic Church anathematized' “ (Athanasius' Defense of the Nicene Definition. The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers).