

TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY

September 25, 2022
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

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

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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.

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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 point¹. 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.

The Imagery of Gold and Precious Stones

What is the Treasure?

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 Thummim (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

¹ For more details, see Mark Kern, The Life of the Apostle Paul, St Athanasius Press, 2014

on the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4), 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 Manner of Christians: Blessing, not Reviling

Christians have been a unique people for 2000 years in that they bless but don't revile their enemies, even when their enemies murder them², or steal from them. In this regard, Paul thought of himself as everyone's slave. Even when Christians appear to get injured, they are not really injured in any way, but the abuse from their enemies only makes them better in some way.

Christians have been a unique people. Consider the 1st century writing of an unknown author³ describing Christians of his day:

“For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. 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. Their course of conduct 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 and beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring⁴. 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

² This does not mean that no “Christian” has ever acted contrary to these principles. However those that have acted contrary are not considered to be following Christian theology.

³ “The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus”, 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1.

⁴ Literally, “cast away fetuses”.

persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred”.

John Chrysostom stated⁵ that Paul set a new standard for Christians in blessing those who persecute them. Paul thought of himself as everyone’s slave for Jesus’ sake. Chrysostom spoke of a similar situation where someone who was robbed, turned around and gave more of his goods to the robbers than they had taken. Such a person would be viewed as a liberal giver and not pitied as a victim.

“Who that seeks to please men, can be a servant of God? As Paul says, one who ‘not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart’ (Ephesians 6:6). It is possible to serve one’s fellow man with singleness of heart, and yet not with all one’s might, but only so far as fulfilling one’s duty. Therefore, Paul says, do it with cheerfulness, not of necessity, not with constraint. If we thus serve our fellow man, we are not a slave; if we do it by principle, with good-will, from the heart, and for Christ’s sake. This is the servitude that even Paul, the free man, serves, and exclaims, ‘We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your slaves for Jesus’ sake’ (2 Corinthians 4:5). Notice how Paul divests slavery of its shabbiness. Just like the man who has been robbed, if he gives still more to him who has stolen from him, is not ranked among those robbed, but rather among liberal givers. He is not among those who suffer evil, but among those who do good. He rather clothes the other with disgrace by his liberality, than is clothed with disgrace by being robbed. So, I say, in this case, by his generosity he will appear more high-minded; by showing that he does not feel the wrong, he will put the other to shame.”

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶ that Christians are not injured by others, but only by themselves. When people abuse us in any way, it only helps us, provided we are sober about it. Chrysostom gives many examples of the people of God who were abused, yet were only made better because of the abuse. On the other hand, the abusers are scheduled for penalties and punishment.

“Did God inflict injury on Adam, upset him, and cast him out of paradise? No; the cause was the listlessness of him who was injured, and his lack of temperance and vigilance. The demons, who applied such powerful and manifold devices and yet was not able to subdue Job, how could they by inferior means have mastered Adam, had not Adam betrayed himself through his own listlessness? What then? Has not he been injured who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of his property, having been deprived of all his goods, and is thrown out of his patrimony, and struggles with extreme poverty? No! He has not been injured, but has even profited, if he is sober. Tell me, what harm did this do to the Apostles? Were they not continually struggling with hunger, thirst and nakedness? And this was the very reason why they were so illustrious, distinguished, and won for themselves much help from God. Again, what harm was done to Lazarus by his disease, sores, poverty and dearth of protectors? Were they not the reasons why garlands of victory were more abundantly woven for him? Or what harm was done

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, vv. 5-8.

⁶ John Chrysostom, No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, 4.

to Joseph by his getting evil reported of, both in his own land, and in the land of strangers? He was supposed an adulterer and fornicator; what harm did servitude do him or expatriation? Is it not specially on account of these things that we regard him with admiration and astonishment? Why do I speak of removal into a foreign land, poverty, evil report, and bondage? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel, although it was a violent and untimely death, and perpetrated by a brother's hand? Is not this the reason why his praise is sounded throughout the whole world? Notice how the discourse has demonstrated even more than it promised? Not only has it disclosed the fact that no one is injured by anybody, but also that they who pay attention to themselves derive the greater gain from such assaults. What is the purpose then it will be said of penalties and punishments? What is the purpose of hell? What is the purpose of such great threatening, if no one is either injured or injures? Notice that I did not say that no one injures, but that no one is injured. And how is it possible, you will say, for no one to be injured when many are committing injury? In the way which I indicated just now. For Joseph's brethren did indeed injure him, yet he himself was not injured (Genesis 37, 41); and Cain laid snares for Abel, yet Abel himself was not ensnared (Genesis 4:2-10). This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. For God does not abolish penalties on account of the virtue of those who suffer; but he ordains punishments on account of the malice of those who do wickedly. Although those who are treated as evil become more illustrious in consequence of the designs formed against them, this is not due to the intention of those who plan the designs, but to the courage of those who are the victims of them. For the rewards are made ready for the victims; but penalties are established for the wicked. Have you been deprived of your money? Read the word 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there' (Job 1:21). Add to this the Apostolic saying 'for we brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out' (1 Timothy 6:7). Are you evil reported; have some men loaded you with countless abuse? Remember that passage where it is said 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets' (Luke 6:26) and 'Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake' (Luke 6:22). Have you been transported into the land of exile? Consider that you don't have a fatherland here; but if you are wise you can regard the whole world as a strange country. Have you been given over to a serious disease? Paul said, 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day' (2 Corinthians 4:16). Has anyone suffered a violent death? Consider the case of John the Baptist; his head cut off in prison, carried on a platter, and made the reward of a harlot's dancing (Mark 6:17-29). Consider the recompense which is derived from these things: for all these sufferings when they are unjustly inflicted by anyone on another, expiate sins, and work righteousness. So great is the advantage of them for those who bear them bravely.

What Happens to the Earthen Vessel?

But yet a very real problem that the Church has had to address over the centuries is: “What happens to the clay vessel?” Heretics in the 1st 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, and was taught by the heretic 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 heretics stated that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18) and occurred at baptism. Paul vehemently opposed this and even delivered some heretics 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.

John Chrysostom encouraged⁷ people that the dwelling of the Holy Spirit within us is a truly marvelous thing. Some people couldn’t understand how this was possible with a mortal body. It all depends on the power of God; He both gave the gift, and did so in spite of our weakness.

“Paul had spoken many and great things of the unspeakable glory, lest any should say, ‘How can we enjoy so great a glory and still remain in a mortal body?’ 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. Therefore, as admiring this, he said, ‘That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us’ (2 Corinthians 4:7); this alluded to those who gloried in themselves. For both the greatness of the things given and the weakness of them that receive show His power; He not only gave great things, but

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VIII, 3.

also gave it to those who are little. For he used the term ‘earthen’ in allusion to the frailty of our mortal nature, and to declare the weakness of our flesh. It is no better constituted than earthenware; so, it is soon damaged, and by death, disease and variations of temperature and ten thousand other things easily dissolved. Paul said these things both to take down their inflation, and to show to all that none of the things we hold are human. For then is the power of God chiefly conspicuous, when by vile means it works mighty things. In another place He said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). Indeed, in the Old Testament whole hosts of barbarians were turned to flight by gnats and flies (Exodus 8:21-24), wherefore also He called the locust His great army (Joel 2:25). In the beginning, by only confusing languages, He put a stop to that great tower in Babylon (Genesis 11:6-9). And in their wars too, at one time, He routed innumerable hosts by three hundred men (Genesis 14:14-17; Judges 7); at another He overthrew cities by trumpets (Joshua 6); and afterwards by a little and poor stripling, David, He routed the whole army of barbarians (1 Samuel 17:44-53). So then here also, sending forth twelve men only, He overcame the world; twelve, and those, persecuted, warred against.”

Irenaeus of Lyons looked⁸ at the earthen vessel in some detail from the Scriptures. This body of flesh will be transformed to conform to His glorious body. This transformation takes place while this body is mortal, where the mortality is swallowed up by life. Our soul and our spirit are created immortal, but the body of flesh needs help. As we glorify God in our body and carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, we become an Epistle of Christ written on the heart; and this is how we are transformed.

“Paul said, ‘For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself’ (Philippians 3:20-21). What, then, is this ‘lowly body’ which the Lord shall transform, so as to be conformed to ‘His glorious body?’ Plainly it is this body composed of flesh, which is indeed humbled when it falls into the earth. Now its transformation takes place while it is mortal and corruptible. It becomes immortal and incorruptible, not after its own proper substance, but after the mighty working of the Lord, who is able to invest the mortal with immortality, and the corruptible with incorruption. Therefore, he says, ‘that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee’ (2 Corinthians 5:4). He uses these words most clearly in reference to the flesh; for the soul is not mortal, neither is the spirit. Now, what is mortal shall be swallowed up by life, when the flesh is dead no longer, but remains living and incorruptible, hymning the praises of God, who has perfected us for this very thing. In order, therefore, that we may be perfected for this, aptly does he say to the Corinthians, ‘Glorify God in your body’ (1 Corinthians 6:20). Now God is He who gives rise to immortality.”

“He uses these words with respect to the body of flesh, free from all ambiguity: ‘Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always

⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V, xiii, 3-4.

delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh' (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). That the Spirit lays hold on the flesh, he says in the same Epistle, 'Clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, 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 which resurrection, Paul says, 'Being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Philippians 3:10-11). This is the same mortal flesh that is put to death on account of that confession which is made of God."

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹ two deaths that Christians experience: Baptism, where we die in the likeness of Christ's death; and Persecution, where we experience a death like His. This second death takes great faith as we are conformed to His death. We travel the same road that He traveled as His brothers and sisters.

"Persecution, affliction and difficulties shouldn't disturb us, but ought to even make us glad, because through them we are 'conformed to His death' (Philippians 3:10). This is as if he had said, 'we are molded to His likeness'; as he says in another place, 'carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus' (2 Corinthians 4:10). This comes from great faith. We not only believe that He arose, but that after His resurrection, He also has great power. We travel the same road which He traveled; i.e. we become brethren to Him in this respect also. This is as if he had said, 'We become Christs in this respect'. How great is the dignity of sufferings! We believe that we become 'conformed to His death' through sufferings! In baptism, we were 'buried with Him in the likeness of His death' (Romans 6:4-5); so here, with His actual death. In baptism, Paul rightly said, 'The likeness of His death', for there we died not entirely; we died not in the flesh, to the body, but to sin. There a death is spoken of; but Christ died in the body, while we died to sin. At the Crucifixion, the Man died which Christ assumed, who was in our flesh, but here the man of sin¹⁰. For this cause, Paul said, 'the likeness of His death'; but here, no longer the likeness of His death, but His death itself. For Paul, in his persecution, no longer died to sin, but in his very body. Therefore, he endured the same death. 'If by any means', he said, 'I may attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Philippians 3:11). All men will have a share in that."

Chrysostom also stated¹¹ that many trials were drawing near for the Corinthians; and even though their faith was weak, they could reap many gains. Besides this, their inward man can be made better by undergoing suffering. Thus, persecution is proportionately useful.

"Paul said, 'For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (2 Corinthians 5:1). He arouses their zeal because many trials drew near. For it was likely that they, in consequence of his absence, were weaker with respect to

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XI, vv. 7-10.

¹⁰ That is, the "old man"! See Romans 6:6, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, X, v. 1.

this need. What then did he say? One ought not to wonder that we suffer affliction; nor to be confounded, for we reap many gains thereby. Some of these he mentioned before; for instance, that we ‘carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus’, and present the greatest proof of His power. For he says, ‘that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us’ (2 Corinthians 4:7) and we exhibit a clear proof of the Resurrection. ‘That the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh’ (2 Corinthians 4:11). But since along with these things he said that our inward man is thus made better also; for ‘though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day’ (2 Corinthians 4:16). He shows that this being scourged and persecuted is proportionately useful; when this is done thoroughly, then the countless good things will spring up for those who have endured these things. When you hear that your outward man perishes, do not grieve; when this is completely effected, then most of all shall you rejoice and shall come to a better inheritance. Not only ought one not grieve at its perishing now in part, but even earnestly to seek for the completion of that destruction, for this most conducts us to immortality. Therefore, Paul added, ‘For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens’ (2 Corinthians 5:1). Paul was urging again the doctrine of the Resurrection with respect to which they were particularly unsound.”

Chrysostom mentioned further¹² that men with weak faith give up rather than endure suffering. They seek the things of this present life and judge the future based on this. To convince folks like this, Paul proved what he was saying. The bottom line is that if we suffer with Christ in this life, there is no way He would deny us a great benefit in the next life.

“Many of the weaker sort of men give up the effort of faith, and do not endure the deferring of their hope. They seek things present, and form from these their judgment of the future. When their lot here was death, torments, and chains, and Paul said, they shall come to eternal life, they would not have believed. They would have said, ‘What are you saying? When I live, I die; and when I die, I live? You promise nothing on earth, and do you give it in heaven? Little things you do not bestow; and only offer great things?’ In order that none may argue thus, he places beyond doubt the proof of these things, laying it down beforehand, and giving certain signs. ‘Remember’, he says, ‘that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead’; that is, rose again after death. And now showing the same thing, he says, ‘It is a faithful saying’, that he who has attained a heavenly life, will attain eternal life also. Why is it ‘faithful’? Because, Paul says, ‘If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him’ (Romans 6:8, 2 Timothy 2:11). Shall we partake with Him in things laborious and painful; and shall we not also partake in things beneficial? No one would act thus; if one had chosen to suffer affliction and death with Him, would He refuse to him a share in His rest, if he had attained it? But how are we ‘dead with Him’? This death he means both of that in the laver, and that in sufferings. For he says, ‘Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 4:10); and, ‘We were buried with Him through baptism into death’ (Romans 6:4); and, ‘Our old man was crucified with *Him*’; and, “We have been united together in the likeness of His death’ (Romans 6:5-6). But Paul also speaks here of death by

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, V, vv. 11-14.

trials, and that more especially; for Paul was also suffering trials when he wrote it. And this is what Paul says, ‘If we have suffered death on His account, shall we not live on His account? This is not to be doubted. ‘If we endure, we shall also reign with Him’ (2 Timothy 2:11-12). We shall only reign with Him, ‘if we endure’, showing that it is not enough to die once¹³, but there was need of much patient endurance. Timothy especially had need of it. For tell me not, Paul says, of your first sufferings, but that you continue to suffer.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁴ that some people who never have any difficulties may be strangers to the Kingdom of Heaven. They may have no discipline and they may not be able to bear any affliction. Other Christians endure persecutions and recover quickly, because they focus on the hope that is to come. After all, we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; everything in this life is trifling.

“All those who ‘call their lands by their own names’ (Psalm 49:11), have wood, hay, and straw (1 Corinthians 3:12) in their thoughts. People like this are strangers to difficulties, and become aliens from the kingdom of heaven. However, had they known that ‘tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint’ (Romans 5:3-5). They would have exercised themselves, after the example of Paul, who said, ‘I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified’ (1 Corinthians 9:27). They would have easily borne the afflictions which were brought upon them to prove them from time to time, if they had listened to the prophetic admonition: ‘It is good for a man to bear Your yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because *God* has laid *it* on him. Let him give *his* cheek to the one who strikes him, *and* be full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies’ (Lamentation 3:27). Though all these things should proceed from our enemies: stripes, insults, reproaches, yet they shall accomplish nothing due to the multitude of God’s tender mercies. We shall quickly recover from them since they are merely temporary, but God is always gracious, pouring out His tender mercies on those who please Him. Therefore, my beloved brethren, we should not look at these temporary things, but fix our attention on those which are eternal. Though affliction may come, it will have an end; though insult and persecution, yet are they nothing compared to the hope which is set before us. For all present matters are trifling compared with those that are future; ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:17). For what can be compared with the kingdom? Or what is there to compare with life eternal? Or what is all we could give here, compared to that which we shall inherit yonder? For we are ‘heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ’ (Romans 8:17). Therefore, it is not right, my beloved, to consider afflictions and persecutions, but the hopes which are laid up for us because of persecutions.”

¹³ The blessed Paul himself died daily (1 Corinthians 15:29).

¹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, 13, 4

We Need to Respect the Earthen Vessel

If the treasure of the Holy Spirit is contained in earthen vessels, we need to respect those earthen vessels because of the treasure, even if the earthen vessels are ragged and feeble. The demons, however, don't see this treasure. In baptism, the soft clay of our vessel is hardened by the fire of the Holy Spirit. But the earthen vessel doesn't preserve the treasure, the treasure preserves the vessel. Throughout history, as Christians have been persecuted, the earthen vessels have not been shattered. The Apostles were often sick, even though they healed others; even though they were scourged and persecuted constantly they considered this good lest the greatness of their miracles should cause people to think of them as gods.

Clement of Alexandria counseled¹⁵ everyone to be aware of the treasure in earthen vessels among us. Some may be ragged or feeble, but within them dwells the Father and the Son. They may be meek and unarmed, but they can serve as the best and most trustworthy bodyguards. The demons, however, don't see this wealth within, and they despise the earthen vessel as weak.

“Open your compassion to all who are enrolled as the disciples of God; not looking contemptuously to personal appearance, nor carelessly disposed to any period of life. If one appears penniless, ragged, ugly, or feeble, do not fret in soul at this and turn away. This form is cast around us from outside, the occasion of our entrance into this world, that we may be able to enter into this common school. But within dwells the hidden Father, and His Son, who died for us and rose with us.”

“This visible appearance cheats death and the devil; for the wealth within, the beauty, is unseen by them. They rave about the carcass, which they despise as weak, being blind to the wealth within. They don't know what a ‘treasure in an earthen vessel’ we carry, protected as it is by the power of God the Father, the blood of God the Son, and the dew of the Holy Spirit. But be not deceived, you who have tasted of the truth, and been reckoned worthy of the great redemption. Contrary to what is the case with the rest of men, collect for yourself an unarmed, an unwarlike, a bloodless, a passionless, a stainless host, pious old men, orphans, dear to God, widows armed with meekness, men, adorned with love. Obtain with your money such guards, for body and for soul, for whose sake a sinking ship is made buoyant, when steered by the prayers of the saints alone. When disease is at its height, it is put to flight by the laying on of hands; the attack of robbers is disarmed, spoiled by pious prayers; and the might of demons is crushed, put to shame in its operations by strenuous commands.”

“All these warriors and guards are trustworthy. No one is idle, no one is useless. One can obtain your pardon from God; another can comfort you when sick; another can weep and groan in sympathy for you to the Lord of all. Another can teach some of the things useful for salvation; another can admonish with confidence; another can counsel with kindness. And all can love truly, without guile, without fear, without hypocrisy, without flattery, without pretense.”

John Chrysostom took a look¹⁶ at what happens with our earthen vessels. In Baptism, the soft clay is remolded and hardened by the fire of the Holy Spirit. But it is not the strength of the

¹⁵ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 33-35.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 11-12.

earthen vessel that preserves the treasure, but the treasure that preserves the vessel. As a result, Christians throughout history have been persecuted horribly, but the earthen vessel has not been shattered. This is a dramatic contrast to earthly treasures, which need strong walls and good locks to preserve them.

“He took dust from the earth and made man. The devil came, and perverted him. Then the Lord came, took him again, remolded, and recast him in baptism; He didn’t allow his body to be of clay, but made it of a harder material. He subjected the soft clay to the fire of the Holy Spirit, as He said, ‘He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Matthew 3:11). He was baptized with water that he might be remodeled, with fire that he might be hardened. The Psalmist speaking beforehand declared ‘You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel’ (Psalm 2:9). By a potter’s vessels are meant those which the potter is fashioning on the wheel. I descend into baptism, and the fashion of my nature is remolded, and the fire of the Spirit recasts it, and it is turned into a harder material. Job says, ‘You have made me like clay’ (Job 10:9), and Paul, ‘but we have this treasure in earthen vessels’ (2 Corinthians 4:7). But consider that the strength of the earthen vessel was not shattered. ‘A night and a day I have been in the deep’ (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). He has been in the deep, and the earthen vessel was not dissolved; he suffered shipwreck and the treasure was not lost; the ship was submerged and yet the freight floated. What kind of treasure is this? A supply of the Spirit, righteousness, sanctification, redemption. Of what nature, tell me? ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk’ (Acts 3:6). ‘Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you’ (Acts 9:34). ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her’” (Acts 16:18).

“This treasure is more brilliant than royal treasures! What can the pearl of a king do, compared to the words of an Apostle? Set innumerable crowns upon dead men, and they will not be raised; but one word went forth from an Apostle, and it restored the dead to life. This treasure not only is preserved, but also preserves the house where it is stored. Do you understand what I have said? The kings of the earth, when they have treasures, prepare large houses, having strong walls, bars, doors, guards, and bolts in order that the treasure may be preserved. But Christ did the contrary; He placed the treasure not in a stone vessel but in an earthen one. If the treasure is great why is the vessel weak? The reason the vessel is weak not because the treasure is great; the treasure is not preserved by the vessel, but itself preserves the vessel. I deposit the treasure; who is able to steal it? The devil has come, the world has come, multitudes have come, and yet they have not stolen the treasure. The vessel has been scourged, yet the treasure was not betrayed; it has been drowned in the sea, yet the treasure was not shipwrecked; it has died yet the treasure survives. Where are those who blaspheme the Spirit’s majesty? ‘He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee’ (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). You all know that the down-payment is a small part of the whole; let me tell you how. Someone goes to buy a house at a great price; and he says ‘give me a down-payment that I may have confidence’. Or one goes to take a wife for himself; he arranges the dowry and property, and he says ‘give me a down-payment’. Since then Christ made a covenant with us (for He was about to take us as a bride) he also

assigned a dowry to us not of money, but of blood. This dowry which He assigns is the bestowal of good things: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him!' (1 Corinthians 2:9). He assigned these for the dowry: immortality, praise with the angels, release from death, freedom from sin, the inheritance of a kingdom (so great are his riches), righteousness, sanctification, deliverance from present evils, discovery of future blessings. Great was our dowry. Now listen carefully; note what He does. He came to take the harlot, unclean as she was, that you might understand the love of the bridegroom. He came; He took us; He assigned us a dowry; He said 'I give you my wealth'. How? Have you lost paradise? Take it back. Have you lost your beauty? Take it back; take all these things."

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁷ that the Apostles were often sick, even though they healed others. The Apostles were allowed to be scourged and persecuted constantly lest the greatness of their miracles should cause people to think of them as gods. All this was constant proof that they had earthen vessels, and that the power was of God and not from themselves.

"God made the world not only wonderful and vast, but also corruptible and perishable; and placed therein much evidence of its weakness. What He did with respect to the Apostles, He did with respect to the whole world. The Apostles used to perform many great and astonishing signs and wonders, He allowed them constantly to be scourged, to be expelled, to inhabit the dungeon, to encounter bodily infirmities, to be in continual tribulations, lest the greatness of their miracles should make them to be accounted as gods among mankind. Therefore, when He had bestowed so great favor upon them, He allowed their bodies to be mortal, and in many cases susceptible to disease; He did not remove their infirmity, that He might give full proof of their nature. Paul says, 'For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me' (2 Corinthians 12:6). Again, 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Corinthians 4:7). But what is meant by 'earthen vessels?' In this body, he means, which is mortal and perishable. Just as the earthen vessel is formed from clay and fire, so also the body of these saints being clay, and receiving the energy of the spiritual fire, becomes an earthen vessel. But for what reason was it thus constituted, with so great a treasure, and such a plentitude of graces entrusted to a mortal and corruptible body? 'That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us' (2 Corinthians 4:7). When you see the Apostles raising the dead, yet themselves sick, and unable to remove their own infirmities, you may clearly perceive, that the resurrection of the dead man was not affected by the power of him who raised him, but by the energy of the Spirit. For proof that they were frequently sick, listen to what Paul said with respect to Timothy, 'Use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities' (1 Timothy 5:23). Again, Paul said, 'But Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick' (2 Timothy 4:20). Writing to the Philippians, Paul said, 'Epaphroditus was sick almost unto death' (Philippians 2:25-27). For if, when this was the case, they accounted them to be gods, and prepared to do sacrifice to them, saying, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' (Acts 14:11); had such infirmities

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, X, 7.

not existed, to what extent of impiety might not men have proceeded, when they beheld their miracles?”

The Role of the Clay Vessels

In our fleshly bodies, we are an Epistle of Christ as we bear about in our body the dying of Jesus. As our fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit in this life, we receive that life which is granted by the Spirit. All this was put into place at the Creation, when we were created in the Image of God¹⁸. Then God created light to shine out of darkness; now He has become light for us, and we see God Himself through Christ.

So what is the proper role of our fleshly bodies in this life? Irenaeus quotes¹⁹ Paul regarding our fleshly bodies. We are an Epistle of Christ as we bear about in our body the dying of Jesus. As our fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit in this life, what is there astonishing if, in the resurrection, they receive that life which is granted by the Spirit?

“Paul declared 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). That the Spirit lays hold of the flesh, he says in the same Epistle: ‘That you 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 Paul says, ‘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 Ephesus²⁰, 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 you 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

¹⁸ It is our soul that is created in the Image of God, not our fleshly body.

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xiii, 4.

²⁰ At the Theater in Ephesus, there were many events that took place, one of which was fights between men and wild animals. For details, see “Archaeology Gives New Reality to Paul’s Ephesus Riot”, in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 2016, Volume 42, No. 4, p. 24.

(came) death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:13-21).

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 commented²¹ on this to say that the Light first shined out of Darkness as the prelude to Creation. But now Christ has become Light for us, and by the shining of this Light, but we see God Himself through Christ.

“First, he put them in mind of what was made in the beginning of the Creation, sensible light and darkness, showing that this creation is greater. 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’ (Genesis 1:14-18); but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. For He did not say, ‘has now commanded light’, but ‘has Himself shined’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). 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, ‘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’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). And of the Son, ‘That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them’ (2 Corinthians 4:4). And of the Father, ‘He that said God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

“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!”.

John Chrysostom noted²² that Paul used two different illustrations of clay vessels: one regarding the nature of the vessel for containing the treasure of the Holy Spirit; the other regarding what we become by the choices we make in our life. Regarding the latter, Paul was a clay vessel, but became a golden vessel from his choices; Judas was a golden vessel, but became a clay vessel because of different choices. Paul uses the term “great house” to refer to the world, not to the Church; in the world, therefore, there are different kinds of vessels, namely us. Some are honorable; some are not.

“Many men are perplexed to account for the fact that the wicked are allowed to remain, and are not destroyed. Various reasons may be assigned for this: that they may be converted, or that by their punishment they may be made an example to others. But Paul mentions a similar case. He says, ‘In a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay’ (2 Timothy 2:20). Paul shows by this, that as in a great house it is likely there should be a great

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VIII, 3.

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VI, vv. 20-21.

difference of vessels, so here also, in the whole world, for he speaks not of the Church only, but of the world at large. Don't think that he refers to the Church; for there he would not have any vessels of wood or of clay, but all of gold or silver, where the body of Christ is, that Christ might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing' (Ephesians 5:27). This is what he means to say: Don't let it disturb you that there are corrupt and wicked men. For in a great house there are such vessels. They do not receive the same honor. But 'some for honor and some for dishonor'. Though God doesn't employ them for honorable service, he makes use of them for other purposes. For instance, the vainglorious man builds much, so does the covetous man, the merchant, the tradesman, the magistrate; there are certain works in the world suited to these. But the golden vessel is not of such a nature. It is employed about the royal table. He does not say however that wickedness is a necessary thing, (for how should it be?) but that the wicked also have their work. For if all were of gold or of silver, there would be no need of the viler sort. For instance, if all were hardy, there would be no need of houses; if all were free from luxury, there would be no need of dainties. If all were careful only for necessaries, there would be no need of splendid building."

“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work' (2 Timothy 2:21). It is not of nature to be a vessel of gold or of clay, but this is our own choice! For otherwise the clay could not become gold, nor could the golden descend to the vileness of the clay. But in this case, there is much change, and alteration of state. Paul was a clay vessel, and became a golden one. Judas was a golden vessel, and became a clay one. The clay vessels, therefore, become clay from uncleanness. The fornicator and the covetous man become clay vessels. But how then does he say elsewhere, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us' (2 Corinthians 4:7)? Paul does not despise but honors the earthen vessel, speaking of it as the recipient of the treasure. There he shows the nature itself, and not the form of the material. For he means to say that our body is an earthen vessel. Earthenware is nothing but baked clay; so, our body is nothing but clay consolidated by the heat of the soul; for that it is clay, is clear. Since such a vessel is often broken by falling, so our body falls and is dissolved by death. How do our bones differ from a clay pot, hard and dry as they are? Paul does not speak contemptuously of our earthen vessel, because he is speaking of its nature; here he speaks of our choice. If a man, he says, purges himself from these, not merely cleanse, but cleanse out, that is, cleanse himself perfectly, he shall be a vessel for honor, sanctified, and fit for the Master's use."

What is "The Dying of Jesus"?

Paul said, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

The dying of the Lord Jesus refers to their daily “deaths”. The Apostles created lots of attention wherever they went; every time they died a little more to themselves, it encouraged everyone watching to believe in the Resurrection. Speaking using this imagery, Paul is quoting from Psalm 116.

John Chrysostom explained²³ what the “dying of the Lord Jesus” means, which the Apostles carried about. Their daily deaths encouraged people beholding them every day die and rise again, to believe in the resurrection. Christ’s life was demonstrated in their body. By snatching us out of the perils, that which seems a mark of weakness and being destitute proclaims His resurrection.

Paul said, ‘Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10). And what is the ‘dying of the Lord Jesus’, which they carried about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was showed. ‘For if any don’t believe,’ Paul says, ‘that Jesus died and rose again, beholding us every day die and rise again, let him believe in the resurrection from now on’. Notice how he has discovered yet another reason for the trials! ‘That his life also may be manifested in our body’. This happens, Paul says, ‘by snatching us out of the perils’. So that this which seems a mark of weakness and destitution, I say this proclaims His resurrection. For His ‘power had not so appeared in our living a quiet and peaceful life, as it is now shown in our suffering indeed, but without being overcome.’

Paul continued, ‘For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in us in our mortal flesh’ (2 Corinthians 4:11). Everywhere, when Paul has said anything obscure, he interprets himself again. So, he has done here also, giving a clear interpretation of this. In other words, we bear about His dying that the power of His life may be made clear, who doesn’t permit mortal flesh, though undergoing so great sufferings, to be overcome by the snowstorm of these calamities. This also may be taken in another way. As he says in another place, ‘If we died with *Him*, we shall also live with *Him*.’ (2 Timothy 2:11). ‘For as we endure His dying now, and choose while living to die for His sake; so also, will he choose, when we are dead, to beget us then to life. For if we from life come into death, He also will from death lead us by the hand into life.’

Paul concluded, ‘So then death is working in us, but life in you’ (2 Corinthians 4:12). Speaking no more of death in the strict sense, but of trials and of rest. ‘For we indeed,’ he says, ‘are in perils and trials, but you are in rest; reaping the life which is the fruit of our perils. And we indeed endure the dangerous, but you enjoy the good things; for you don’t undergo such great trials.’

In saying this, Paul was quoting from Psalm 116:

“I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!’ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IX, 1.

is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed, therefore I spoke, ‘I am greatly afflicted’. I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars’. What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:1-15).

John Chrysostom commented²⁴ on the connection between Psalm 116 and Paul’s Epistle. The Psalm contains much heavenly wisdom, and is just as applicable in David’s day as now. Sometimes we feel all alone in our difficulties, when in fact, similar problems have hounded the people of God from the beginning.

“Psalm 116 abounds in heavenly wisdom, and is especially fitted to encourage in dangers. For this saying Paul uttered when he was in great dangers, and from which there was no other possibility of recovery than by the aid of God. Kindred circumstances are most effective in comforting; therefore he says, ‘having the same Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 4:13); that is, by the same aid by which he was saved, we also are saved; by the Spirit through which he spoke, we also speak. Paul shows that between the New and Old Covenants great harmony exists, and that the same Spirit worked in both; we are not alone in dangers, but all those of old were so too. We must find a remedy through faith and hope, and not seek at once to be released from what is laid upon us. Having showed by arguments the resurrection and the life, and that the danger was not a mark of helplessness or destitution; he brings in faith also, and to it commits the whole. But still of this also, he furnishes a proof, the resurrection, namely, of Christ, saying, ‘we also believe, and therefore also we speak’”.

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 put it²⁵ in the following words: The Arians, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, misinterpreted the Scriptures saying that Jesus was a man like us and not God also. The Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council debated the Arians on this issue, considering all of what the Scriptures said, and put the Arians to shame for their blasphemy.

“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, unalterable, and always in Him without division. There was never a time when the Word was not;

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IX, 2.

²⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Defense of the Nicene Definition”, The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers

He was always, existing everlastingly with the Father, as the radiance of light. Eusebius²⁶ and his fellows did not dare to contradict, being put to shame by the arguments which were used against them at the Council; but they were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes. To them ‘like’, ‘always’, ‘power’, and ‘in Him’, were 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 who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake’ (2 Corinthians 4:11). ‘In Him’, that ‘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). 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 the concealing of their thoughts, and whereas it is written, ‘Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil’ (Proverbs 12:20), were again compelled on their part to collect the sense of the Scriptures. They restated 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. They showed 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). The Word is always in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance is connected to 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’.

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁷ that everything Paul did was for the sake of the Corinthians. He and the other Apostles are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, where they have taken over His functions. They do this not just in His place, but also in the place of the Father. What can match this excess of goodness?

“Paul stated, ‘We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God’ (2 Corinthians 5:20). What he says is this: ‘The Father sent the Son to plead with us, and to be His Ambassador to mankind. When He was slain and gone, we succeeded to the embassy; and in His place and in the Father’s place we plead with you. So greatly does the Father prize mankind that He gave up even His Son; knowing He would be slain, He made us Apostles for your sakes; so that Paul said with reason, ‘All

²⁶ This was Eusebius of Nicomedia, one of the Arian leaders.

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

things are for your sakes' (2 Corinthians 4:15). 'We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ', that is, instead of Christ; for we have succeeded to His functions. But if this appears to you a great thing, notice also what follows wherein Paul shows that we do this not in His place only, but also in place of the Father. Therefore, Paul added, 'As though God were pleading through us'. For not by the Son Himself only does He plead, but also by us who have succeeded to the office of the Son. Do not think therefore, Paul says, that by us you are entreated; Christ Himself, the Father Himself of Christ, pleads with you through us. What can match this excess of goodness? He was outraged, who had conferred innumerable benefits; having been outraged, He not only didn't exact justice, but even gave His Son that we might be reconciled. They that received Him were not reconciled, but even slew Him. Again, He sent other ambassadors to plead, and though these are sent, it is He, Himself, that pleads. And what does He plead? 'Be reconciled to God'. He didn't say, 'Reconcile God to yourselves'; for it is not He that bears enmity, but you; for God never bears enmity."