A Patristic Commentary



The Book of Romans

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Based on the Interpretations & Meditations of the Early Fathers

The Epistle of St Paul To the Romans

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Introduction to the Epistle

A-The Establishment of Christianity in Rome:

Some scholars indicate that the word 'Rome' has a Greek origin denoting 'power'; and that it was used to convey 'go safely' which implies 'may you have a sound health'[1]. Others note that the word means 'an elevation'. The city could have been given this name due to two reasons: first, it was called after Romulus who founded the city in the year 753 B.C. and so carried his name. Secondly, the name was inspired due its construction on one of the high elevations of the seven mountainous ranges of that area. Eventually, the city expanded and covered the other six neighboring ranges. In the middle of the Sixth Century, a wall was constructed around that whole city in spite of its huge scale. The circumference of the wall was five miles and it had 19 'Roman' gates.

The scope and power of Rome spread so that it became the capital of the Roman Empire which had captured all the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The city grew so big that houses were built outside the city walls as well. Eventually, Rome became the meeting place for world politicians and rulers, and the learning centre for the Sciences, Arts, and Philosophy. It became especially famous for the Roman law which is still being taught in most universities today around the world. As the city welcomed people from all over the world, Rome became infiltrated with controversial and immoral idolatry practices…this is clearly apparent from the content of Chapter One in the Epistle to the Romans[2].

In the First Century, the population of Rome was 2 million approximately, although this estimate is considered an exaggeration[3]. A third of that population consisted of immoral people. The inhabitants were mostly of varied origins and nationalities. There was also a big number of Jews who were brought captive by the great warrior Pompeii when he seized Syria in the year 63 B. C., and whom he allowed to live in one part of the city. These Jews eventually were set free, and their numbers grew and reached sixteen thousand approximately at the time of St Paul the Apostle. They existed peacefully and comfortably most of the period they lived in Rome; except in the year 19 A.D. during the reign of Tiberius. Later on, in the year 34 A.D, during the reign of Claudius Caesar, he gave an order to expel them all from Rome (Acts 18: 2). An indication to their great number is evident when a committee of Jews came to Rome when Herod the Great died. They had come to seek the favor of Augustus Caesar. At that time, about eight thousand of the wealthiest Jews in Rome came out to greet them. The Jews had more than thirteen Councils and were generally inclined to arouse divisions and rebellions[4].

The Birth of Christianity in Rome:

There is no mention in the New Testament about the birth of the Church in Rome. Moreover, the person who first carried the torch of faith to this city is unknown. However, we observe the following concerning the birth of Christianity in this area:

1. In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told that devout Jews from every nation came to Jerusalem on the day of the Pentecost…among them were 'visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes…' (Acts 2:10). During their visit they accepted the faith and

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[1] *Strong: Greek Dict. of the N T, article4517*
[2] *J Hastings: Dict. of the Bible, N.Y.1963, p862*
[3] *Ibid*
[4] *Fr Mina Iskander: (Arabic)Notes on the Epistle, Clerical School-Alexandria*

believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, when they left Jerusalem and returned to Rome, they preached among their Jewish fellowmen. Based on that, many scholars consider that the Church of Rome, in its early days and until the writing of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, was made up of members who were mostly of Jewish origin. This explains why the Epistle is directed to the triumphant converted Jews more than to the triumphant converted Gentles. As a result of this situation, the Roman leaders assumed that the Christians were just a Jewish sect that had chosen to be separate from the rest of the Jews.

2-The Roman Empire was characterized by freedom and the ease to travel especially from one part of the country to the capital. Rome had become the centre where the big leaders, scholars, and traders gathered. There is no doubt that many of these were Christians who were originally Jews or Gentiles. They came with their hearts filled with fervent faith and they preached and witnessed for the Lord Jesus Christ. Among them were those who had listened and accepted the teachings of St Paul as he preached in the Aegean cities, in Macedonia and other areas of Greece and Asia Minor. This is confirmed by the greetings St Paul sends in the last chapter of the Epistle where he mentions many of their names. It also reveals that he knew them and that they were his disciples, even though he had not visited Rome before the writing of the Epistle to the Romans.

3- The emperor Claudius had issued an order to expel many of the Jews, or possibly all of them, from Rome. As a result, many went to other cities, though they soon returned to the city again. Some of those had become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as Priscilla and Aquila, who had met St Paul in Corinth, (Acts 18:1, 2). Through him, they learned about the faith, and he used to join them in making tents…these and others like them actively participated in establishing the Church in Rome, (Rom 16: 5)

4- It is clear from the Epistle that none of the disciples had established a Church in Rome up to the time of its writing. St Paul expresses his principle on that issue as he says: "And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another's foundation," (Rom 15: 20). In the same Epistle, he speaks of his enthusiasm to go to Rome and how he had been hindered from doing so a number of times. He finally decided to go there, and this confirms that none of the disciples had visited Rome before him,(Rom 1: 9,19;15: 22-24).

5- St Paul felt he was the commissioned messenger to the Gentiles, (Gal 2: 7, 11). He therefore felt a responsibility towards this city as it was the centre of the Gentile world at that time. He also sought to make it one of the centers of his ministry since he felt indebted to preach to them, (1:13, 14).

6- Most Western and Eastern scholars find it hard to agree with the claim that St Peter the apostle is the one who established this Church and occupied the papacy seat in Rome for 25 years[1]. Actually, St Peter was present in Jerusalem up to the time when the Apostolic Council met in the year 50 A.D. approximately, (Acts 15). In 55 A.D. he was in Antioch where he met St Paul, (Gal 2: 11). Then he was in Babylon when he wrote his first Epistle in 60 A.D. approximately, (1 Peter 5: 13). If St Peter had established the Church in Rome in 41 A.D as some claim, then St Paul would not have undertaken to write this Epistle to the Romans. Or if he had written it, he would not have said that he would not preach the gospel where Christ had already been preached, lest he should build

[1] *Donald Guthrie: NT introduction, 1975,p393-4*

on another's foundation, (15:20); and he would have mentioned St Peter's name or he would have sent him greetings.

The Time and Place of Writing:

The Apostle wrote this Epistle while he anticipated his visit to Rome. He had taken the decision to stop there on his way to Spain, (Rom 15:23,24).This would take place after he had gone to Jerusalem where he delivered the donations from the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia to the poor in Jerusalem, (Rom 15:25,26; 1 Cor 16:1-16; 2 Cor 8: 1-4). Therefore, the Epistle was written during his third missionary journey to Corinth, and in the house of a man called Gaius. St Paul describes him as his "host and the host of the whole Church", (Rom16: 23). Gaius is one of two whom the Apostle St Paul had baptized.

The Apostle had dictated the Epistle to Tertius[1] , (Rom 16: 22), and it was Phoebe, the deaconess, who carried it to Rome. She was a servant in the Church in Cenchria[2], (Rom 15: 1). This was a port in the west of Corinth.

St Paul had gone to Jerusalem in the spring of 58 A.D. Therefore most scholars consider that the Epistle was written between 57 and 58 A.D.

The Members of the First Church in Rome[3] :

It would be impossible to comprehend the aim of this Epistle and to perceive the depth of its significance unless we get acquainted with those who were members of the early church in Rome and to whom it was directed. Were they Jews who had triumphantly become Christians? Were they Gentiles who had accepted the faith? Or were they a mixture of both?

Proponents of **the first opinion**: These represent the school of thought led by Tubingen, E. Renan, T Zahn, W Manson, and Leenhardt. They consider that the greater part of the members were triumphant converted Jews. They support that view by pointing out that the Apostle uses many quotations from the Old Testament, and specifically related the story of Abraham whom he called 'our father'. The reader therefore gets the sense that the Apostle most often directs his discourse to those of Jewish origin. Besides, in the first century, the Jewish population in Rome was significantly large.

Proponents of **the second opinion** are: J Munck, S Lyonnet, O Michel, and C K Barett. These claim that the vast majority of the members were originally Gentiles. They base their opinion upon the belief that St Paul's words are directed to them as he considered himself to be the messenger to the Gentiles, (1: 5-7,12-14; 11: 11-13,15: 16). They indicate that St Paul compares them with those from other Gentile nations, (1: 12-14). In his address to them, he says: "…you presented your members as slaves to uncleanliness and lawlessness…",(6: 19).These words apply to those of Gentile origin rather than to those of Jewish origin. He also addresses them by saying: "I speak to you Gentiles…", (11: 13).

The third opinion belongs to a mixture of the above two groups who were led by Headlam, Sanday, and Dodd…

Based on the above, we may conclude that the Church included both converted Jews and Gentiles; although those of Jewish origin greatly outnumbered the others.

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[1] *A Latin name for 'third'*
[2] *A Greek name for 'Dikhen' now known as 'Cackris'*
[3] *Jerome Bibllical comm.,p292; Guthrie p395*

The Importance and Purpose of the Epistle:

This Epistle is of great significance in the history of the early Church. It is said that **St John Chrysostom** used to read it twice per week.

1. A study of the Epistle will enable us to comprehend its importance, and to discover from its contents the reasons that have led to its writing, including its contemporary setting: a significant number of the Jewish Romans had become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. These were either of a Hebrew origin or were Gentile converts. Besides these, there were some educated heathen Gentiles, who were Greek scholars and who had come to believe in the Lord. All these needed to meet together in one spirit and as members in one Body. However, the Jews were unable to easily dismiss their feelings of superiority over the rest even though they had all converted into Christianity. Due to their uncompromising conservatism and strong adherence to their race, culture, and religious teachings, they belittled the converted Gentiles. They felt they were superior based on the following claims:

1. They were the children of Abraham, therefore the heirs to the promise made to his descendents.

2. They were the recipients – chosen out of all other people, to receive the Law of Moses.

3. They alone were God's chosen people.

This manner of thinking, which they maintained from their Jewish past, led to an embedded pride that hindered them from understanding neither the meaning of being Abraham's children, nor the ultimate aim of the Law, nor of God's purpose in choosing His people. Consequently, even after they had accepted the belief in the Messiah as Savior, they still believed they occupied a higher rank above all other believers.

On the other hand, and as a reaction to this Jewish concept, some converted Gentiles adopted a counter attitude. They regarded the Jews as an ungrateful nation, and that the door had been shut in their faces only to be widely opened to the Gentiles. This made them just as guilty of pride as the Jews.

In these the circumstances, the Epistle of St Paul has been written and directed to both parties. It intends to handle the practical implications of faith and spiritual behavior in daily life. These would affect Church life throughout generations to come. The Apostle discusses in his Epistle the message of salvation in its widest implications. He proclaims that the door has been opened to all nations through a living faith that is evident in deeds of love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle presents the meaning of faith and its close relation to salvation. He also reveals his apostolic heart that is greatly charged with love for the Messiah and for the whole world for whom the Lord was crucified. At the same time, St Paul deals with the problem of pride which threatens the lives of both Jews and Gentiles. He addresses the issues of sanctification, living faith evident in general relationships and compassion towards weak members, and the interactions of a believer in society.indeed, this Epistle has been described as "the cathedral of the Christian faith". St Paul's message leads the believer into the presence of the sublime holiness of God, and elevates him- through the altar of applied and living faith- to meet the heavenly Father through the action of the sacrificial Son and by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some consider that this Epistle has been written to confront the supporters of the 'Judaic movement' which called believers to return to the literal application of the Law. This dictated observing circumcision, purification, seasonal cleansing, and the

enforcement that Gentiles convert to Judaism before baptism. Others consider that this Epistle has been written to reconcile both parties- converted Jews and converted Gentiles. However, the Apostle St Paul has not delivered his Epistle in a defensive manner, nor intended it merely as an instrument of reconciliation. Rather, he has intended it as a message which elaborates on the faith of the Church, presenting with utmost precision the implications of an evangelical and saintly life. Therefore this Epistle has been described as the **'Gospel of St Paul'**.

2- One of the objects of this Epistle was to announce St Paul's intention to visit Rome. He had made many attempts to go there, so this was a message to prepare for his visit and for his aim to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there. The early Church had now accepted the new perception of proclaiming that the doors of salvation have been opened to all nations and Gentiles. Therefore St Paul was preparing the path so that when he would visit Rome, he would not get into conflict with the narrow minded promoters of Judaism. He might have been driven to write this Epistle after receiving news from his disciples and acquaintances concerning the Church in Rome. This could have led him to write and seek solutions before his upcoming visit.

The Problem with Chapter Sixteen:

Chapter Sixteen presents a concern for some scholars as they find it in discord with the rest of this Epistle. They believe that this chapter has been added and could have been written originally to the people of Ephesus. Such claims are based on the following[1]:

First: The apostle had not yet visited Rome, therefore he had sent greetings to a large number of members of the Church there. This is more relevant to the Church of Ephesus where the apostle had served and which does not apply to Rome.

Some scholars respond to this view by saying that it was not the policy of St Paul to send specific greetings to people in churches where he had served. He felt that he loved all without discrimination, and that it was more appropriate to mention this list of people in the church in Rome as he did not personally know the rest of the members there. In doing so, he intended to encourage those he knew in their ministry in Rome.

Second: There is a reference to Pricilla and Aquilla and to the Church in their home, mentioned in (1 Cor 16:19) and which was written a short while before the Epistle to the Romans. At that time they lived in Ephesus. We also understand from (2 Thess 4:19) that Pricilla and Aquilla were in Ephesus at the time the Second Epistle of Timothy was written. This was the period when St Paul was in Rome and just before his martyrdom…so how could he mention them as though they resided in Rome, (Romans 16: 3)?!

The response to that is that many of the Jews were businessmen; and that Pricilla and Aquilla were rich and holy people. They had business transactions in more than one centre and they had turned both their homes in Ephesus and Rome into churches.it is therefore not amazing that they moved between these two cities. Some scholars assume that they lived in Rome until Claudius issued an order in the year 49 A.D. to expel all Jews; therefore they appointed attorneys with Roman citizenship to take care of their business. They neither closed their business nor their home until they returned again to Rome when matters were under control.

[1] *Guthrie, p 400-404*

Third: Epaenetus is mentioned and St Paul refers to him as the first fruits of Achaia in Asia (16: 5). This is the designation that St Paul would give to a member of the Church of Ephesus in Asia Minor rather than to someone living in Rome.

The response to this is that since the Apostle describes him as the first fruits of his ministry in Asia Minor, he asks Epaenetus to pay the debt he owes to him by preaching to others, and in the same way as the Apostle had preached to him. Since St Paul had not yet traveled to Rome, he encourages Epaenetus to minister in Rome with zeal and great endurance.

Fourth: Some assume that the greeting to Phoebe, who is a servant in Cencherea (16:1, 2), should have been directed more appropriately to a Church that he knew and had served rather than to a Church whose members he did not know. The response to this is that the Apostle understood that his acts would gladden the hearts of believers even though they did not know him personally. It would make them feel that he spoke to them in fatherly love. There is no doubt that many had heard of St Paul, and of his ministry and zeal, and this would have led them to consider his address to them favorably.

Fifth: The tone of warning in this Chapter (16: 17-19) is in discord with the rest of the Epistle. So far, no mention had been made of propagators of divisions and hurdles contrary to the teachings they had received…the response to this is that the Epistle addresses the problems raised by the proponents of Judaism. While St Paul presents a positive solution, he does not adopt a defensive or hostile approach. Rather, he exposes the positive view of correct theological thought. To deal with the opposition mongers, he swiftly faces them as he feared losing the trust of the converted Jews.

Sixth: Chapter fifteen ends with a doxology or benediction that suggests that this is the end of the Epistle, since St Paul says: "Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen"(15: 33). The response to this is that he probably wished to conclude the didactic and practical part of his message. He would turn next to the private affairs of the Church in Rome, and this might appear as additional, yet it is an integral part of the Epistle.

The assumption that Chapter 16 is part of a lost message sent to the Church of Ephesus is just a theory that has no historical foundation…

Principal Topics and Subdivisions in the Epistle:

1-Faith and the Free Gift of Salvation:

Before accepting the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul went through a bitter internal struggle. Outwardly, he appeared to be a person who had great pride due to his race, sense of self-righteousness, and status as a Pharisee. His Hebrew descent marked him as a member of God's chosen people, besides being a Pharisee and a Law scholar. Accordingly, he observed strictly all the religious practices, and studied the traditions and the Law. However, within his innermost depths, he confessed to himself his utter weakness and submission to sin, as well as his inability to enjoy an inner sanctified life. He felt the need to renew his life rather than the need for teachings and commandments.

St Paul found the answer to his needs in the Lord Jesus Christ. He discovered he needed to have faith in Him alone, and that he did not need to practice the Law literally such as circumcision, washing, or purification. In the waters of baptism, he would be buried and resurrected with the Lord to become "a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," (2 Cor. 5: 17).

He chose the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ prompted by a most sublime reason: to enjoy the power and total change of a living faith. Therefore it was not a mere

outward change or just the adoption of new teachings. Rather, this change involved the sanctification of the heart, feelings, thoughts, and all the potentials of the body and soul through the Holy Spirit who lives in a person. Such a change can be fulfilled through a change in a person's orientation: moving from a state of enmity with God through the Law of sin, into a state of an adopted child of God through Jesus Christ His only Son. This change could never be achieved neither through the Mosaic Law nor through the observance of its many literal practices.

When the apostle speaks about faith without deeds in this Epistle, he is not referring to a spiritual struggle caused by true faith. Rather, he is referring to deeds carried out in literal compliance with the Mosaic Law. Initially, a conflict had risen between the two constituents of the first Christian Church: between converted Jews and converted Gentiles. This conflict was not about spiritual struggle, but it was about 'the application of the Law': some in the first group demanded that the Gentiles first convert to Judaism through circumcision, washing, and purification; then be accepted into the Christian faith…this is what became known as the Judaic movement.

The Apostle attacks this movement in an indirect manner as it subjects a person to the literal application of the Law and the appearance of fulfilling its dictates. Therefore St Paul focuses on faith…by this, he means a living faith that works through love, and which binds a believer to the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith enables a person to unite with the Lord (Rom 6: 5); suffer with Him (1 Cor 12: 16; Ro 8: 17); be crucified with Him (Ro 6: 6); die with Him (2 Thes 2: !1); arise with Him (Eph 2: 6); live with Him (Rom 6: 8); become seated with Him (Eph 2: 6); be glorified with Him; reign with Him (2Thes 2: 12); and have a share in His inheritance (Ro 8: 17).

2- The Universality of Salvation:

The apostle's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ shook the foundations of his fanatic thought. He had believed that the whole world had been created for the benefit and service of the Jews. Then he realized that God's love embraces all mankind, regardless of nationality, race, potentials, or behavior. His love is for the Jew as well as for the Gentile, for men and women, for young and old. God seeks sinners and the degenerate in order to sanctify them. He came for all. Hence the repetition of this word **'all'** or its synonyms occurs seventy times approximately throughout this Epistle.

The topic of "**the universality of salvation**" is the main line of thought throughout, and the apostle focuses on it with all his might. He sifts through all the narrow minded Jewish claims which are based on fanatic Jewish thought. His argument is spiritual, as he seeks to arouse the Jews, whom he also wishes to enroll, as well as all the Gentiles.

He dismisses their claim to be the children of Abraham, the father of fathers, and asks them to become Abraham's spiritual children by displaying his faith. This would raise them to be God's children and He would grant them inner freedom. He dismisses their claim to be the recipients of the Law, and he informs them that the Law has exposed their sins and condemned them to death. Therefore they are led to the Savior and the Giver of Life. Finally, the apostle denies that they are God's chosen people for He has opened His arms to the whole world, and so He has embraced a new people who did not know Him. God has transformed the unbeloved Gentiles into beloved ones as a result of their faith and this had come about after a long period of ingratitude…for God is the Creator of all and He cares for the salvation of all.

Grace, Justification, and Sanctification:

These words and their derivatives have been repeatedly used in this Epistle: grace, justification, holiness, etc… It is worthy to note that St Paul is not concerned with presenting mere definitions and bare intellectual ideas for these words. Indeed, he feels he wishes to bring every believer through the Holy Spirit into the enjoyment of these divine blessings and gifts. This is in contrast to contemporary scholars who are more concerned with the presentation of definitions and who delve into complicated philosophical research more than into real and living experience and application.

(a) Grace/ Charisma:

As St Paul deals with the topic of the 'universality of salvation', he often speaks about grace as an antithesis for the literal lawful deeds. The Jews sought justification through application of the law but the Lord Jesus Christ came to grant free grace to all for the justification of mankind… *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph 2:5-9).

Benjamin Brewery has attempted to extract from the writings of the Scholar Origen a definition for divine grace and which the Scholar could have learned from the apostle's writings. He came up with the following:

[Grace is the power of God entrusted freely into man's hands,

However, it is not granted unconditionally,

Grace prepares man, by the Holy Spirit, to receive the gift of salvation and to enjoy a completely new and eternal life.

This is the grace proclaimed and planned in the Holy Bible,

Through the Lord Jesus Christ and offered to the whole world.[1]]

Grace is the gift of God the Father. He offers it to us in His Son Jesus Christ who, through the Cross, carries us in Him so that we may enjoy all what is His. He has granted us His Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of fellowship and who lifts us up, as with wings, to the fatherly embrace; and presents us as children sanctified in the Truth.

The word 'grace'/ 'charisma' occurs as an antithesis to 'wage'/ 'opsonis'; for the wages of sin is death; and in contrast, grace grants the gift of eternal life (5: 15; 6: 23). What we receive from God is not the wage for some work we have done. Rather, it is a free gift that God has granted us through the sacrifice on the Cross. Its source is the bounty of God's love. That is why the word 'grace', in the Apostle's mind, is associated with the free redeeming act of God. The purpose of this act is to raise us from a state of subjection under the Law – that is, under its judgment- to a 'state of grace' (5: 2), in which we live with a new status.

This divine and free gift of grace is offered to the whole world. God neither demands anything in return, nor does He set any restrictions. However, the rebellious and the stubborn do not benefit by it. That is because grace does not demolish freedom of will. This leads us to the concept of spiritual struggle, and we do not bring this up as the price for grace, but as a proclamation of sincerity and involvement with God's free gift of

[1] *Origen & The Doctrine of Grace, London 1960,p 48*

grace. Spiritual struggle is essential to our salvation, and without such struggle many have lost God's free grace. Yet we do not consider such struggle or good deeds as a means of self justification. Therefore let us accept God's grace and His initiative to love us…this grace works in us so that our will and our deeds become sanctified. As we endeavor and struggle to sanctify our will and our acts, the heart is more prone to accept God's divine gift. In this manner we proceed from one glory to the next, and continue to struggle and work hard to live a holy life through God's free gift.

St Paul reports that 'grace' is a condition that an active believer enjoys. This refers to someone who has actively accepted the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, faith is expressed in deeds of love...this is the broad meaning of grace that is offered to all mankind. Nevertheless, there are other free gifts of grace, such as the gift of ministry which has been granted to St Paul so that he could preach among the Gentiles, (Rom 15: 15).

Note that the word **'charisma/grace'** is a military word used when an emperor ascends to his throne, or when he celebrates his birthday. At such a time, he grants his officers free gifts according to his charity and generosity. Similarly, when the Lord was lifted up on the throne of the Cross and reigned over the souls of mankind, He offered 'charisma' or 'grace' to all mankind. This is His redeeming act, which prepares the soul to let Him in and occupy a person's being. Consequently, the believer becomes steadfast in Him through the Holy Spirit Who ultimately leads him to the embrace of the Father. This is His gift: that a person enjoys the Holy Trinity through the blessings of the precious Blood. As a result, a person is invested with the divine image and enjoys sublime heavenly features.

The Holy **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** considers that this divine grace, which was revealed in its full power in the Cross, is not a new matter. He explains that since the beginning of time, God –through grace- brought into existence the created world out of emptiness. Moreover, He singled out human beings above all other creatures to grant them a specific gift: He created them in God's likeness and image so they could live eternally in paradise. The gift of the commandment was granted to reinforce this grace; for by remaining faithful in observing His words- that is to say, by enjoying grace- man would live in paradise where there is no grief, pain, or anxiety…[1]. Concerning the mystery of incorruption, it involves having fellowship with the Word 'for in Him was life', (Jn 1: 4). Now when man lost the divine grace through disobedience, the Word became incarnated to reinstate human beings to their initial state, and this by renewing their nature through a greater grace[2].

(b) Dikaisone/Justification:

May scholars consider that the essence of this Epistle is comparable to an essay about 'justification'.

The topic of justification has actually preoccupied man since his downfall. He has felt his failure to justify himself before God, and as it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one',(Rom 3: 10). Inspired by natural law, the saintly Job cries out: "…but how can a man be righteous before God?" (job 9: 2). And Eliphaz the Temanite said: 'What is man, that he should be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous? If God puts no trust in his saints; and the heavens are not pure in his sight, how much less

[1] *Incar. 3*
[2] *Against Arians2: 67*

man, who is abominable and filthy…', (Job 15: 14-16). Within the Mosaic Law, we find the Psalmist saying: '…for in Your sight no one living is righteous', (Ps 143: 2). The cure for this issue is found in the Holy Bible, and specifically in this Epistle:

"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, (Rom 3: 24,25).

"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him", (Rom 5: 9).

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ", (Gal 2: 16).

We do wish to deal with dry philosophical theories for this subject has preoccupied many Western theologian scholars. We seek to present a simplified explanation of justification or the enjoyment of God's righteousness through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Linguistically, the word 'righteous' is of Greek origin and is close in meaning to the word 'fair'. Consequently, many find that a righteous person is a respectable being though not necessarily attractive; for he is fair but not necessarily sweet or gentle[1]. The Apostle has probably chosen this meaning when he writes: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die," (Rom 5: 7). However, the term has come to have wider implications as it is used by St Paul and throughout the Holy Bible.

In the Old Testament, God has been called the Righteous One based on His relationship with us: He offers redeeming services to mankind, and claims: "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not linger, and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory", (Isa 46: 13); and also states: "My righteousness is near…", (Isa 51: 5). In the New Testament, His righteousness is evident in His redeeming work –through our Lord Jesus Christ – on our behalf: ' For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith', (Rom1: 16), and also 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption', (1Cor 1: 30).

Evidently, St Paul comprehended 'God's righteousness' to convey that God is just in His promise and faithful in His timely execution of them. Consequently, the apostle says: "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? Certainly not. Indeed, let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written: That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You art judged'," (Rom 3: 3, 4). It is as though the Apostle wishes to say that God is just in His promises to mankind even though men have been stripped of righteousness, for they did not respond to His redeeming act, and practically rejected His promises by disobeying Him. This leads us to understand the weight of the words: "There is none righteous, no not one…", (Rom 3: 10; Ps14: 1-3; 53: 1).

God is righteous in His divine promises to mankind. We have been unable to be righteous neither through our natural inclination nor through submission to the Mosaic Law. When a person breaks one commandment- even through his thoughts or his motives, he is considered as having broken the Law and cannot be justified…this is what the Apostle clarifies in the first three chapters of his Epistle to the Romans. He declares

[1] *J Hastings: Dict of the Apostolic Church v 2 ,p370-I*

that all persons- Jew or Gentile- have become in need of God's justification. So how did the Jews respond? They sought to justify themselves in their own eyes; for they considered that righteousness is based on their physical descent from Abraham, or on their literal study and observance of the Law, or their membership in the body of God's chosen people regardless of their way of life…as a result, they rejected justification through faith, and sought to be 'justified by the law' which is based upon a mere formal and literal study of it, (Rom10: 22). Here the Apostle distinguishes between righteousness rooted in the Law and which the Jews championed through vain formalities, and righteousness through faith and which God offers to the whole world through His Son Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself has proclaimed to the Jews this distinction at an earlier period, and He clarified that they sought the righteousness of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Consequently, they had rejected God's righteousness which tax collectors and sinners had accepted, (Matt 5: 20; 6: 33; 21: 3)….our early fathers have lived in a spirit of discernment and have chosen justification through a living faith that works through love since they feared to claim self justification. The Lord Jesus Christ has come to grant us His free grace as the door to enter and be steadfast in His righteousness. This cannot be done idly or literally but requires practical living application. Actually, righteousness is the fruit of His grace and does not result from any gained human entitlement. We struggle to attain it as we pray Him to sanctify our will and our practical life by His Holy Spirit. Consequently, we will attain 'Christ's righteousness' as we proceed from depth to greater depths and as we gain new experiences in His righteousness through the divine Spirit.

St Augustine perceives righteousness as a possession granted to man by God. His point of view is that righteousness is not the mere forgiveness of sins and refraining from sinfulness; but it implies the acceptance of 'Christ's righteousness' as our own righteousness. In other words, righteousness has a negative sense when it is interpreted as avoiding wickedness, but it has as positive sense when it is interpreted as carrying the features of Christ actively within one's being. This is also proclaimed by **St John Chrysostom** who speaks about a virtuous life as having two aspects: positive and negative: doing well, and rejecting evil.

Finally, what we need to underline is that righteousness is not a personal achievement or a human virtue. Rather, it is an act of faith, and declared in the features of Christ which are evident in the lives of believers struggling spiritually and living in the Truth. This is what we seek to deliver in our study of this Epistle, for when the Apostle speaks about 'the righteousness of Christ', he associates it with practical spiritual behavior. He uses the title of 'concerns of the spirit' or in other words 'living by the Holy Spirit'; and 'rejecting the concerns of the flesh' or in other words 'rejecting physical lusts that dominate the soul'. St Paul concludes his Epistle by a long exposition about practical righteous living as demonstrated in his own manner of worship, personal behavior, and his social relationships especially with young and weak souls…he seeks to underline that righteousness through faith is a living and practical experience that is evident in all aspects of a person's life.

(c) Sanctification/ Agiacmos:

Sanctity is an attribute of God only, and He tells us that as He calls Himself 'holy', (Lev 11: 44, 45; 20: 26; 22: 2; 1 Peter 1: 16). He pours this feature upon His beloved creatures and considers them to be saints, Besides, He relates Himself to them by

declaring Himself to be 'the most Holy', (Daniel 9: 24); and He calls His people- in the Old and New Testament- 'a holy nation', (Ex 19: 6; 1 Peter 2: 9).

Sanctity/holiness is a gift that God grants to His believers. It is free grace granted to God's children who struggle to be like their heavenly Holy Father "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification", (1Thes 4: 3), and as St Paul says: 'that *we* may be partakers of His holiness', (Heb 12: 10)

Since the Holy Spirit is known a 'the Spirit of holiness', then God grants us a sanctified life through His Holy Spirit Who leads us to be steadfast in the holy Jesus Christ. As a result, we carry His features and the words become fulfilled in us which state that we become holy as He is holy, (Lev 11: 44; 1Peter 1: 16).

This free gift is granted to those who struggle through God. It is not the price for their struggle but comes as a result of their response to His generous free gift. They have responded in order to live in holiness and attain 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ', (Eph 4: 13). That is why **Origen the Scholar** believes that St Paul addresses the struggling believers as ones 'called to be saints', (Rom1: 7). He says that, not because they have attained a perfectly holy life, but because they are walking in that way and are anxious to attain its fullness.

Choice and Freedom of Will:

The study of Chapter Nine in this Epistle constitutes a hardship for those whose faith is weak. The reason for that is their attempt to study it while disregarding the circumstances in which it was written. In this manner, they cut this chapter out of the rest of the Epistle. The result is that they have come to consider that God discriminates and chooses or rejects according to whom He favors. They support their view based on the following verses:

'So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy', (16).

'Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens', (v 19).

'Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?' (21).

Although we will tackle this issue in greater detail when we come to this chapter in our study, yet we wish to underline the following at this point:

1-In this Chapter the Apostle is not addressing the issue of free will. Rather, he is speaking about God's right to choose the Gentiles just as He had chosen the Jews. He has shown mercy to the Jews not due to any virtue they possessed other than God's mercy towards them.

2- At the core of the Epistle, St Paul underlines man's free will. He states that God sanctifies it; for He honors a human being as a person who possesses free will which is a gift from God.

3-God is merciful towards believers not as a reward or a price for their will or their struggle; at the same time He asks us to be willing and to struggle through His grace in order to receive His free gift of mercy.

4- While the potter has authority, yet he wishes that all become vessels of honor. Yet if a pot rejects honor, God will be glorified in it even though it is a vessel of dishonor. This is illustrated when God was glorified in Pharaoh and the hardness of his heart…

We will discuss this more fully as we study the chapters of this Epistle, God willing.

THE BLUEPRINT:

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PART 1

THE NEED OF ALL MANKIND FOR SALVATION

Introductory Opening Ch1

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE

This Chapter constitutes the introduction to the Epistle. St Paul reveals in it the essence of his whole message. He does not begin with a formal opening that expresses a sweet compliment to the people of Rome. Rather, he writes with wisdom in order to reveal in a few words the 'Gospel of God' and its influence in the lives of believers. He also proclaims, in this introduction, his personal relationship with God, his manner of thinking, his wisdom, his mission, and his spiritual longings. Because St Paul desires to oppose the movement of Judaism, he avoids doing so in a negative manner, and he endeavors to touch the hearts in a positive way through a call to desire and seek lovingly the salvation of all Gentiles. He begins by indicating the sins of the Gentiles first. By doing so, he creates a path to attract the supporters of the Judaic movement, (that is those who called for a return to the literal teachings of the Mosaic Law), so that they would not condemn him as a biased person championing the Gentiles over them. Rather, he underlines that he loves all and everyone.

1. The Apostolic Blessingv 1-7
2. An Encouraging Openingv 8-17
3. The Wickedness of the Nationsv 18-23

1-The Apostolic Blessing :

St Paul does not deliver the 'apostolic blessing' as though it were a formal seal used to mark the introduction to his Epistle. Rather, he delivers the blessing in the Lord Jesus Christ in a manner that is appropriate to the stature of the speaker as well as to the topic of his conversation with the people. We note the following:

First: St Paul begins the Epistle by using three designations to identify himself as he says: **":Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,…",** (1).

The first designation is '**doulas'** that is **'servant'**. He probably uses that identity first because he is writing to people who were arousing racial discrimination between converted Jews and converted Gentiles. Since he is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, then he belongs to the rank of all believers…for all are servants of Jesus Christ regardless of their previous origins or religions.

In the Old Testament, all the holy people took pride in that title for they considered themselves 'servants of Jehovah', (Ps 27:9;31: 16; 89:50). Now everyone had become qualified to bear the title of 'servant of Jesus Christ' since all have come to live through Him and enjoy His righteousness and holiness. Believers boast and take pride in no one else but Him, and that is something they all share in common.

With this in mind, we note that this designation was used more specifically to refer to those who had leading roles in the story of redemption due to their submission and service to Jehovah. Examples of such leaders are: Moses (2 Kings 18:12), Joshua (Judges 2:8), and Abraham (Ps 105:42). Since St Paul has been 'separated unto the gospel of God' then he is fulfilling a role in the history of redemption. That role is an extension of the role played by the fathers and prophets in the Old Testament….consequently, it is appropriate for the converted Jews to listen and accept his message without misgivings or opposition.

The second designation St Paul uses to identify himself is **'called to be an apostle'**…he does not use the word 'apostle' but rather 'called to be an apostle' because the theme of this Epistle is the 'invitation to the Gentiles to the faith', and in the same manner that the Jews had been invited in the past. St Paul feels thankful that God has called him to be an apostle. Even in his earlier faith, he had been among those invited. Now having accepted to carry the Cross, he considered himself 'called' to the ministry…it is as though we cannot be praised for bringing ourselves to accept and have faith or in our witnessing for the Lord…whatever our ecclesiastical affiliation might be…all recognition and praise on that account belongs to Him who has invited or 'called' us.

The third designation St Paul uses is **'separated to the gospel of God'**…the word 'separated' in this expression is equivalent to the Aramaic word 'berissee' or 'pharrisee' which means 'separated'. It is as though his first separation had prepared him for his new second one. This would not be the separation of the deadly literal law which was established upon self pride and vanity. Rather, this would be a 'spiritual separation' based upon preaching and separation in order to be dedicated to preach and minister the gospel of salvation to the whole world.

In using these three designations, St Paul proclaims himself to be **'a servant'**: his life is an extension of the lives of God's servants who have struggled in the Old Testament in accordance with the history of salvation. He undertakes his apostolic and missionary role in answer to a divine '**call'** and not out of his own goodness. He has no work or goal other than to present '**the gospel of God'** to every single person if possible.

St John Chrysostom comments on these three designations as follows: ['**Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ'**…he considers himself to be the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in more than one way; for there are many ways of serving: there is one that is the result of the creation and which is evident in these verses: '…for all are thy servants', (Ps119:91); and ".. Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jer 25:9)…indeed the created is servant to his Creator and Maker. There is also the ministry that is inspired by faith as these verses reveal: "But God be thanked, that though you were the servants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness", (Ro 6: 17, 18). Moreover, there is another kind of service that is based on submissive work, and we are told that "Moses my servant is dead", (Joshua 1: 2). It is true that the Jews were slaves, but Moses was a slave in a specific sense which made him sparkle brilliantly among the congregation. Similarly, St Paul was a servant in all these (three) forms of an amazing slavery. He uses the title as an honorable one in the words **'a servant of Jesus Christ'**…, **'called to be an apostle'.** He uses these designations to identify his nature throughout all his writings: Being '**called**', he displays his faithfulness; and his availability- not because of his own incentive- but because he was called and he responded. Similarly, he invests the same features to believers as he says that they are 'called to be saints'. However, while they are called to be believers, he has been granted- besides that- a different designation known as 'apostleship'. This is an issue that carries loads of blessings which exceed the greatest and most sublime gifts…Indeed, St Paul proclaims aloud and glorifies apostolic work in these words: 'Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us', (2 Cor 5:20). '**…separated to the gospel of God',:** Just as in the home everyone is entrusted with a certain task, similarly in the Church different tasks

are assigned. We believe that in this passage the Apostle is implying that he has been assigned this task, not only by the present members, but that it had been assigned to him ever since time began. This is an issue that Jeremiah the prophet speaks about when he says that God said about him: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer 1:5). Since St Paul was writing to a city characterized by vainglory, everyone strutting boastfully, and he writes to express in every possible manner that he has been chosen to be an apostle by God; and that God is He who called and separated him[1]].

Second: St John Chrysostom comments on the words: **"separated to the gospel of God"** in these words: [St Paul speaks about the gospel of God in order to bring joy to his listeners from the start (for the word gospel means joyful proclamation). He would come with news that would not sadden them as former prophets had done. In the past, they had come to reprimand, condemn, and severely reproach them; but he would come with joyful news- that is with the 'gospel of God'-that contains countless treasures of established and unchanging blessings[2]].

Third: St Ambrose uses this expression, along with other writers, (2 Cor 13:14), to respond to the followers of Arius who proclaimed that the Father is greater than the Son. They supported this claim by stating that the Father is always mentioned first. In this verse, however, the apostle mentions the Son before the Father, as he says: '...the servant of Jesus Christ' first and then he follows by 'separated to the gospel of God'…this is an indication of the Divine unity[3].

In the same article, **St Ambrose** says that St Paul, who cautions us against worshipping nature, is concerned with worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. By calling himself 'a servant of Jesus Christ' he indicates that He is the Creator and not a created being[4].

Fourth: St Paul is committed to confront the Judaic movement which delays the propagation of the Gospel among the Gentiles. He therefore seeks to confirm to converted Jews that he does not support any Gnostic ideas which some had introduced. These had become more widespread among the Marcarians later on in the Second Century and these disregarded and even scorned the Old Testament. Therefore the Apostle seeks to clear himself of these erroneous ideas by proclaiming that the 'gospel of God' for which he has been 'separated' is just a fulfillment of God's ancient redeeming plan. He explains that the Old Testament also constitutes a partial fulfillment of that plan by saying: 'which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures'. Indeed, the men of old and the prophets yearned eagerly for what he preaches, and his message is a fulfillment of their holy prophecies.

Just as the core theme in St Paul's Epistle is 'the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God', so is the Lord the focus of men's ministry in the Old Testament. Prophets prophesied about Him, and through Him we have received the promise in the Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament). St Paul probably wants to confirm that he would never forget that the prophets came from the Jews, and that they are the ones to whom the Law

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[1] *In Rom, hom 1*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Of the Christian Faith 5:9 (115)*
[4] *Ibid 1:16(104)*

and the Holy Scriptures were delivered. Indeed, what they had received has prepared the way for the redeeming Messiah.

St John Chrysostom comments as follows**:** [When God wishes to do great deeds openly; He announces them a long time ahead. He does so in order to prepare mankind to listen and accept them when they become fulfilled. St Paul speaks about **'the Holy Scriptures'** because the prophets did not only speak but they also wrote what they said. Moreover, they performed deeds which were shadows of things to come. For example: Abraham who offered Isaac; and Moses who lifted up the snake, spread his hands to conquer giants, and offered the lamb of the Passover[1]were shadows of things to come].

Fifth: Since the Epistle, in its totality, is a proclamation of the '**gospel of God',** St Paul identifies that gospel in the introduction as follows: "…**Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was born of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead".** Therefore our gospel is to accept 'our Lord Jesus Christ'. He is the 'Son of God', as the Apostle repeatedly confirms, and through Him we are granted to be God's children. He is the Son with whom we become united and therefore become transformed from a status of slavery into 'sons' by baptism. Ultimately, God finds His pleasure and joy in us …this is the crux of the whole message.

In this manner, St Paul confirms that the Lord Jesus Christ is a descendant of David according to the flesh. He primarily seeks to encourage and attract his hearers to his message; therefore he could not ignore the fact that the Savior of the whole world was incarnated and descended of them. Another consideration was the need to confirm that in Him all the prophecies were fulfilled, especially the ones stating that He would be the son of David Who would sit on the throne of his Father in a heavenly spiritual kingdom (Matt 12:9; Jn 12:13; Lk 1:23; 2 Thes 2:8). **St Cyril of Jerusalem** comments: [Therefore accept the one born and descendent from David, and obey the prophecy that says: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek", (Isa 11:10)[2]].

This is He who is the descendent of David and of' Whom it has been said: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever", (2 Sam 7:12, 13). **St Augustine**[3] comments: 'The descendent of David who built a divine home is the Lord Jesus Christ and not Solomon, for the Lord built an altar for God that is not made of wood or stone but made of the flesh- in other words, it is made up of believers of whom the Apostle says: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?!" (1Cor 3: 16). It is the Lord Jesus Christ and not Solomon who has established His kingdom for ever according to the divine promise, (2 Sam 8:13).

St John Chrysostom and other Eastern fathers point out that St Paul's use of the word 'declared' carries the meaning of 'announced' or 'revealed'. They explain that the first Church could not proclaim Him as the Messiah and Lord except after His resurrection, (Acts 2:34-36; Phil 3:10; 1Cor 15:45). We also have noted that point clearly in our study of the Gospel according to St Mark, where the Lord Himself disguised His

[1] *In Rom. Hom 1*
[2] *Cat. Hect.12:23*
[3] *City of God 17:8*

Divinity and requested His disciples not to reveal His identity until he had risen from the dead. His resurrection is the ultimate confirmation that He is by nature the Son of God. Accordingly, **St John Chrysostom** comments: [In what way can I then proclaim Him? He has been discovered, announced, and confirmed through the feelings and testimony of everyone. This was conveyed through the prophets, as well as through His astonishing birth according to the flesh, through the powerful miracles, through the Spirit granted to the sanctified, and through the resurrection through which He has laid an end to the tyranny of death[1]]**.**

Sixth: **St John Chrysostom** says that the Apostle, after having stated that he has been separated to the gospel of God, goes on to speak about the incarnation of the Son of God through the seed of David so that we would accept Him. Consequently, He would lift us up to His heavenly mysteries. Without the divine incarnation and without humility, we would be unable to arise to His heavens. In that context, he says: [Anyone, who wishes to lead mankind to the heavens by the hand, needs to lift them up from below; and this is how the (Divine) plan functions. The same manner was used by the Lord in presenting His teachings; and His disciples have adopted the same strategy in order to guide us to the heavens[2]].

St Ambrose comments: [According to the flesh, He became a descendant of David. Yet He is God born of God (the Father) before the world ever existed[3]].

St Gregory of Nazinzea also comments: [He was considered a descendent of David. This could lead you to assume that man had been honored, (since He came as a man and of a man's lineage). However, a virgin gave birth to Him, and consequently a woman has been honored too[4]].

Seventh: Having recorded the name of the writer and his titles by indicating his call to apostleship and his evangelical mission, and having revealed the implication of the gospel of God for whom he has been separated; St Paul goes on to record the names of those he is addressing and their response to this divine message. He states: **'through whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ. To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints'. (5- 7).**

Before engaging with them in any conversation related to the conflict between the converted Jews and the converted Gentiles, the Apostle undertakes the task of encouraging them all by proclaiming that what he himself had received is due to God's free gift of grace. This is a gift offered to honor the Lord's Name, and not due to any virtue in him or in any Jew or Gentile among them. That is the reason behind his words: "**through whom we have received grace and apostleship…".**

This Epistle repeatedly speaks about the grace of God. St Paul reveals how grace works in his own life, not only transforming him from an unbeliever to a believer, but from one who persecuted believers to a witness and preacher of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He also indicates how grace works in the lives of those who have come into the faith –Jews as well as Gentiles. Actually, St Paul does not present a definition of 'grace', but he does speak about the power and influence of grace in the life of the Church and of

[1] *In Rom. hom 1*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Of Chris.Faith 3:5 (34)*
[4] *Orat. 37.7*

each of her members. It is as though the Apostle does not want us to be involved in theoretical and philosophical definitions; for he seeks to bring us to the true knowledge and practical experience of these matters. Similarly, this is the strategy of the Eastern Church as we have found in our study of 'grace' in the writings of **Origen the Scholar**[1].

What is grace other than that it is a free gift of God? It is the gift of the Father Who, in His great love, gave His only begotten Son as a sacrificial offering to redeem the world (Jn 3: 16; Ro 8: 32). This is the grace of the only Son who has loved me and delivered Himself for my sake. Moreover, He has sent, from the Father, His Holy Spirit-the Comforter –to testify to Him through our lives (Jn 15: 26). The Comforter will teach and remind us of all His words to us (Jn 14: 26). Since grace is associated with the Holy Spirit, therefore the Spirit is the Giver of blessings. At the same time, He is a Gift, for He has come to live in us, abiding within us, for we are the altars of God and His Holy Spirit dwells within us.

The Father proclaims His grace through the plan of salvation. The Son proclaims the same grace through carrying the Cross on our behalf; and the Holy Spirit proclaims the same grace through dwelling within us and leading us to accept the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

This is the divine free gift of grace that works in the Church in order to grant us all membership in one Body. Now, although each member possesses distinct characteristics yet this does not lead to separation from the Head or from the other members. Through grace, each member has a role and talents. The Holy Spirit distinguished St Paul with the apostleship in order to preach and shepherd people. This grace of 'apostleship' motivated him to write to them and to others with authority for he sought to fulfill the work of divine grace in himself as well as in others.

Eighth: Since the Holy Spirit had distinguished St Paul with apostleship, therefore by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he is enabled to influence his hearers to accept the faith in obedience and submission. He does not seek to participate in debates and arguments, but worked: "…**for obedience to the faith among all nations …"(5)**. This is the work of divine grace or the action of the Holy Spirit Himself in the lives of those being served. **St John Chrysostom** comments as follows: [Note the candidness of the slave. He does not wish to give credit to himself but all credit is given to his Master. Truly, it is the Spirit who grants all that. That is why the Lord says: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16: 12)…In the Epistle to the Corinthians, St Paul says: "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit" (1Cor 12: 8); and "…that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (1 Cor 12: 11) [2]].

Therefore the grace of God that blessed St Paul with the 'apostleship' is the grace that brings obedience to the faithful, not solely to the Jews but to 'all nations'.

St John Chrysostom considers that by saying 'all nations' St Paul includes the work of grace in all the apostles and not only in himself. Grace works in everyone and for the sake of all nations. He could have also intended to indicate that although at that time he had not reached out to all nations, yet the work would continue to be carried out even after his death. **St John Chrysostom** probably believes that the Apostle would continue

[1] *The Early Fathers of the School of Alexandria (Arabic)*
[2] *In Rom. hom.1*

to be a minister in Paradise due to his zeal for the salvation of the world through his unceasing prayers on behalf of all mankind.

Ninth: St Paul addresses his hearers as '**the called of Jesus Christ',** for it is thanks to Him who has **'called'** us to His free grace. He also addresses them as **'called to be saints'.** In the past, the Jews were referred to as **'holy people',** (Ezk 12: 16; Lev 23: 2-44), for they were the chosen children of the Holy God, (Lev 11: 24; 19: 2). However, that nation had failed in accomplishing holiness although they were the recipients of the symbols and prophecies. Now that our holy Savior has come, He invites us to enter and be steadfast in Him, so that we might be counted as righteous and saintly through Him.

In his tender and fatherly love, St Paul seeks to convey his feelings towards his audience. He tells them that he respects and appreciates them because they are 'the called of Jesus Christ'(6), 'beloved of God' (7), 'called to be saints' (7),…it is as though he is boasting about being a minister and servant to them!

St John Chrysostom considers that this invitation to holiness is a great honor which a believer retains even after he has departed from this life. He comments as follows: [Other honors are granted for a period of time, they end with the passing away of the present life, and they can be bought with money…as for the honors that God grants- the honor of sanctification and of adoption as His children- even death cannot ever destroy these. These make human beings honorable on earth, and this stays with us in our journey into eternal life[1]].

The mystery of our sanctification is our acceptance of 'grace and peace', (5)…the word 'grace' was used for a salutation by the Greeks[2] , and 'peace' or 'shawam' was the Hebrew salutation. Now that all have become unified in one body, they not only receive 'grace and peace' from one another, but they enjoy these as a divine gift for the one body which includes Greeks and Hebrews together. They have received God's sublime gifts- that is, His free gifts- which are evident by God's indwelling and proclamation of his kingdom within them. This has been achieved through the shedding of Blood upon the Cross and His heavenly peace. Mankind has become unified through these with His Creator. Moreover, the flesh has become unified with the spirit, and mankind with his brother regardless of race!

St John Chrysostom finds that the Apostle wisely begins by mentioning grace and then peace (Rom1: 5). He says that we cannot enjoy inner peace- when we have rebelliously entered into fierce spiritual wars- unless God's grace works within us and grants us, through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of victory and triumph. Then we are enabled to live in real peace and as children of our heavenly Father. This is God's gift to us, and this is His grace which supports us in this life and accompanies us until it brings us into the Father's eternal embrace. **St John Chrysostom** states:

[This is a greeting that offers us countless blessings:

This (peace) is what the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles to use as the first word to pronounce when they entered into people's homes, (Lk10:5). Therefore the Apostle begins his message with the blessing of grace and peace. Indeed, a considerable war had been going on and the Lord has put an end to it. Actually, it was a war with different facets and which had lasted for a long time; finally it was brought to an end through the grace of our Lord and not through our own personal endeavors.

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[1] *Ibid*

[2] *Erdman: The Epistle to the Romans, p 25*

Love brought grace, and grace brought peace. Consequently the greeting came appropriately in this sequence (grace and peace). St Paul prays that they would live in constant and unshaken peace so that the fire of war would not arise once more. He prays that God would establish these matters and says: **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ", (7)**.

O, how amazing is the power of God's love! We, who were previously enemies and outcasts, have become saints and children! By calling God 'our Father', St Paul reveals that his hearers are God's children, and when he calls them children he reveals the store of all blessings[1]].

Peace is the gift of God for which we need to pray. The Lord will grant it to us if we possess a holy will. Accordingly **St Jerome** states: [We need to acquire peace through prayer. It is not available among all people, but only among those who have goodwill…].

St Ambrose notes in these words that grace and peace are attributes of the Father as well as of the Lord Jesus Christ: [As you note, we speak of the one grace which belongs to the Father and to the Son, and the peace of the Father and Son as one. However, this grace and this peace are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. This is in agreement with the words of the Apostle who says: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control', (Gal 5:22)[2].

2- An Encouraging Opening :

The opening words in this Epistle, as well as in all the introductions in the other epistles by St Paul, reveal an important aspect of the Apostle's approach to his ministry and his daily interactions. In a spirit of wisdom, he provides encouragement and support even when he needs to argue or reproach. Therefore although he discusses in the core of his message the problem of the Judaic movement- which had created many difficulties to the Church- yet he wins those he addresses with his love. Note how he proclaims in the prologue the following:

First: His acknowledgement of their faith: **"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world**", (8). Clearly, he starts with the positive matters and not the negative ones. He does not mention, for instance, the danger of the Judaic movement or the failings of that nation. Rather, he proclaims their faith which has underlined the need to preach to the whole world, and he offers thanks to God through Jesus Christ on that account. This approach is basic in the theology of shepherding…the need to encourage and support primarily, recommending active and successful aspects in the lives of those being served, before dealing with aspects that are negative or erroneous.

St Paul offers thanks to God his Father as a sign of active worship. He does so through the Lord Jesus Christ to make it acceptable…for we can meet the Father and bring to Him the offering of love and thanksgiving only through our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the object of the Father's joy.

St John Chrysostom notes two points of interest in this thanksgiving praise:

(i) The Apostle offers the first fruits of his work and preaching in the form of praise and thanksgiving to God. He begins his Epistles with thanksgiving, and it is astonishing to note that he offers thanks for the blessings granted to everyone and not

[1] *In Rom. hom 1*
[2] *Of the Holy Spirit 1:12 (126)*

only for those granted to himself. This is because he considers that he also benefits from what others enjoy. Consequently St Paul, in this passage, thanks God for the faith of his hearers and considers this to be a personal gain as well. In an attempt to interpret the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans, the **Son of Ceasar's Clerk** says: [This is the opening of the Epistle…it is imperative to offer thanks to the Grantor of blessings; and St Paul is more knowledgeable than anyone of the extent of the blessings which those being addressed had received. This is particularly relevant as he finds that their faith is the fruit of his endeavors. Indeed, this has been his sole aim. By offering thanks because they had accepted the faith, St Paul wishes to teach us to begin our conversation and our work with thanksgiving].

(ii) St John Chrysostom notes that St Paul claims his kinship to God, and comments in these words: [Note how the apostle offers thanksgiving, for he says 'my God' and not just 'God'. This is what the prophets also did as they regarded what belonged to everyone as though it was their personal property. How amazing it is that the prophets did so?! Indeed, God Himself always does that, and He does so very clearly as He claims His kinship to His servants: He says that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and as though He was solely available to them[1]].

Second: Besides revealing the aspects of the success of those he addresses, St Paul proclaims his love towards them through the prayers he offers on their account. He calls God Himself as witness to his deep and broad sentiments towards them as he says: **"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (9).**

He would have been unable to mention in his prayers constantly those whom he was addressing – even though he had not yet actually seen or met them physically- if his heart and thoughts and all his energy were not consecrated and separated totally to God. This is what he means by his words 'whom I serve with my spirit'. In other words, 'to Whom I submit myself with all my potentials- spiritual, emotional, and physical- to worship God and enjoy His gospel'

St John Chrysostom comments on these words and clarifies the two following points:

(a) While the Apostle preaches the Gospel, he worships God in spirit and in truth: [For our manner of ministry is done not by offering sacrifices of sheep and goats, or by raising smoke or grease, but by a spiritual soul. This is according to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth", Jn 4:24[2]].

(b) He teaches the Gospel of the Son which is identical to the Gospel of the Father: [He had previously stated that these were the teachings of the Father; and here he states that these are the teachings of the Son. This is because there is no difference in the two statements; and because the Apostle has learned from the blessed Voice that what belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son, and what belongs to the Son also belongs to the Father. Accordingly, the Lord states: "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine" Jn 17:10[3]].

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[1] *In Rom. hom 2*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Ibid*

Third: His love is demonstrated practically through his unceasing prayers for them, as well as through his eagerness to see them and deliver to them 'a spiritual blessing' which is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This would establish and comfort them as much as it comforts him too. It is the Gospel that rejoices the hearts of listeners as well as preachers, and as he states: **"Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (10-12).**

They are truly the object of his love as they preoccupy his thoughts, plans, prayers, and even his actions which have one target: that they might enjoy the spiritual and divine gift; the Gospel of God! And God has fulfilled this spiritual and holy yearning of the apostle but through a sublime divine plan, for he went to them as a prisoner on account of the Gospel, and after having passed through many hardships such as the wreckage of the vessel he was traveling in (Acts 27:43), and standing before the throne of Caesar (Acts 27: 24).

St John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Apostle to the Romans. He explains the Apostle's great love to preach especially among the Gentiles. He also underlines how he is spiritually wise as he prays ceaselessly while he submits the matter to God who knows what is best for the growth of the Church. **St John Chrysostom** states that: [He constantly prays even though he does not get an immediate response and this reveals his great love for them. However much he loves them, he submits to God's will which underlines the depth of his love to God. In another passage, the Apostle says: **'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice', (2 Cor12:8).**Not only did he not receive his request, but he accepted the denial with great thanksgiving for he looked up to God in all conditions. In the present passage, the apostle's prayers were answered, yet not at the time they were requested but at a much later time. Nevertheless, the Apostle was not upset. We refer to that so that we might not complain when our prayers go unanswered or when the answers come slowly and after a long time. We are not better than St Paul who was thankful in both cases and submitted himself into the hands of Him who plans all things. He submits totally and just as the clay submits into the hands of the potter, walking wherever God leads Him[1]].

Fourth: By submitting to God's will, the Apostle was able to delay his journey to Rome in spite of his deep yearning to go and witness there. He had no earthly goal, for he wanted to go and present a 'spiritual gift' which is 'the Gospel of God'. He expresses his humble submission in these words: **'That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me', (12).**

In true humility and void of any pretense, the Apostle feels he needs the support of the very people he has set out to serve. He inquires about their needs not only to guide, instruct, and recommend them; but also to reassure himself regarding their faith. They are in need of God's grace actively working through him, while he is in need of reassurance regarding their faith and consolation.

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [How great is his humble mind! He reveals that he is in need of them rather than that they alone are the ones who need him. He gives his disciples the esteem of teachers by not considering himself of a higher

[1] *Ibid*

status. Rather he wholly equates them with himself for they all gain beneficially. In other words, they are mutually comforted by each other. How is that achieved? "by the mutual faith both of you and me". This is similar to a fire: if a person connects one torch to another, they will glow more brightly and strongly and all will give light. This also happens naturally among believers[1]]. **St John Chrysostom** also states: [The Apostle says these words not as someone who needs any assistance from them, but as someone avoiding to appear as too harsh or violent and reprimanding. That is why he says that he needs them to comfort him. Some might claim that he could find comfort as he rejoices on account of their growing faith. This is what St Paul needed to hear and in that sense the claim would not be wrong[2]].

The **Son of Caesar's Clerk** states that the word 'comfort' as used here denotes joy and gladness. The Apostle is comforted because he was being persecuted and had now become a witness and apostle called for that good hope. His hearers are glad because they previously walked in the devious paths of idol worship; and had now become children of God, worshipping Him and looking forward to His eternal kingdom.

Fifth: St Clement of Alexandria finds in the words of the Apostle the comfort he and his followers receive through their common faith. By that he means that faith carries a constant motion of growth[3], for he finds that there is a shared faith which becomes a hidden foundation in the lives of all believers. This faith does not include anything rigid; but it is rather in constant flux of development and growth. This explains why the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ asked Him to 'increase (their) faith'. In other words, we could consider that faith is a dynamic motion of life, void of any rigidity, which a believer experiences daily. It springs from the practical knowledge and meeting with the Lord and moving into a deeper acquaintance with Him- moving from strength to strength, and from inner glory to glory yearning daily to achieve 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' as St Paul proclaims.

Sixth: St Paul proclaims his love for the Romans in a practical way. Until the time of writing his Epistle to them, he had been prevented from visiting them. Nevertheless, he writes to them to express his yearning and his actual attempts to come to them. He states: "*Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written: The just shall live by faith"*, **(13-17).**

A. The Apostle had already produced fruit in many nations; yet he was eager to bear fruit in Rome also. This was the capital of the Gentile Roman world, and he considered that preaching there and gathering them as fruit in the Lord's Church would be the fulfillment and success of his apostolic mission. He was ready to struggle for that shamelessly and whatever the cost.

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Strom 5:1*

As the capital of the Roman world, all the nations introduced into Rome all their idols, their degrading practices, and the corrupt customs related to them. It was the mirror of the heathen world with all its evils and misery; and the object of God's wrath. That explains why St Paul specifically desired Rome to be the centre of his ministry, and where he hoped to deliver the meaning of God's Gospel in the fullness of its power[1]. In other words, the Apostle wished to serve where evil was most dominated. He was not seeking an easy and wide path, but the narrow grim path. That would be where he would proclaim the Gospel more powerfully, and reveal the work of divine grace and its efficiency more clearly. This is what we conclude from St Paul's words: **"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you…".** This indicates that he is prepared to suffer all hardships and pain in order to deliver the good news which ise the Lord's Gospel. He is aware that preaching among them would involve many hardships. **St John Chrysostom** comments on this point: [What a noble soul! The Apostle took responsibility to undertake this task which involved great dangers – he traveled by sea where he faced many obstacles and plots…and though he expected all these immense difficulties, yet his resolve was not diminished. Indeed, he was the more determined to rush and struggle and mentally prepared to endure whatever came his way.

B. Before coming into grips with the glorified Cross, St Paul was ashamed of the Cross. He considered the Cross a disgraceful and inappropriate insult for the long awaited Messiah and king of the Jews. After his conversion, he realizes that the Cross is God's redeeming power and should be preached to all mankind.

St John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Apostle as follows

[St Paul tells the Galatians: ***"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ",* (Gal 6:14).** Due to their wealth, vast empire, and vanity, the Romans cherished passionately all temporal matters. They took pride in regarding their emperors as gods, and even constructed for them temples where they would offer sacrifices to them. As for St Paul, he wanted to preach to them about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Romans thought that the Lord was just the son of a carpenter and that he had been brought up in Judah, in the home of a poor woman. He had no maids or servants, and He finally died the death of murderers and thieves, after being tortured and humiliated. Some converted Romans tried to avoid these matters at the beginning, and before they came to the realization of the immensity of such great and inexpressible events. That explains why the Apostle says that he feels no shame, and that he wishes to teach these Romans that they too ought not to be ashamed of this glorious Gospel. Consequently, he ends up equating them with himself for they too, like himself, should be proud of their faith although they had been ashamed of it at the beginning. If someone asked you: Do you worship the Crucified? Do not be ashamed, do not look down but lift your head up answer with esteem 'Yes we worship Him!'…for us, the Cross is the act of endless love towards humanity, and the sign of God's unspeakable care[2]].

C. the Apostle realizes that the theme of the Gospel and of preaching about the Cross is to convey **'the power of God unto salvation'.** He has experienced this power in his own life and he wishes to offer that to all: to the Greeks –those who upheld Hellenic teachings, as well as to the Barbarians- the rest of the Gentiles. He wanted everyone to

[1] *In Rom. hom 2*
[2] *Ibid*

enjoy the influence of the Cross: the wise who are versed in philosophy, as well as the simple who are considered to be ignorant.

St Paul had been saved by the Cross, therefore he felt indebted to the whole world…he considered that the heathen were his creditors and that he had to return the debt by preaching to them. They would consequently enjoy that which he himself enjoys.

D. He speaks about the Gospel as '**the power of God unto salvation',** for this is not just a theoretical message or a philosophical educational principal. Rather, this is a 'dynamic divine action' working in the lives of men. It is an unceasing action of divine love which presses forwards a person to attain fellowship in the heavenly glories.

E. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was offered first to the Jew and then to the Greek. This priority does not reflect any racial discrimination prejudice on God's part. It is based on the sequence of events that lends them priority. The Jews had been entrusted with the written commandments, and had received proclamations and prophecies, as well as having produced godly men…it was therefore appropriate for them to seize eagerly the redeeming act of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to embrace the Cross in order to bring to the Gentiles the torch of the joyful news of salvation.

St John Chrysostom explains: [The word 'first' is just a reference to time. There can be no qualification for righteousness for it is like some one who is the first to go into the baptismal font and then the second one follows. Does the first receive more blessings? No, they both would enjoy the same grace. In the same manner, the Jew and the Greek receive equal gifts of grace once they acknowledge and embrace the Gospel[1]].

F. What does St Paul want to convey through his words: "…from faith to faith"? The scholars **Tertullian[2] and Origen, and the Clerk of Caesar** consider these words to convey that the righteousness of God becomes evident in those who have faith in His commandments; and it is simultaneously reflected in believers who are moved to accept faith in the Gospel. Clearly, the fruit which the Apostle yearns for the whole world to receive is the very same kind for which men of faith in the Old Testament had yearned. **St Clement of Alexandria** states: [He teaches us that it is the same redeeming act, working from the time of the prophets and leading to the Gospel, and it is achieved by the same identical God[3]]. **St Ambrose** considers that the righteousness of God is proclaimed in His faithfulness in holding His promises, and this faithfulness is transferred into the faith of a person who enjoys godly righteousness.

The Apostle provides us with the key to all divinely blessed gifts in these words: **"The just shall live by faith"** (17). A firm believer in God carries God's righteousness within himself. This does not mean that he is immune from sin as some like to believe. However, such a person enjoys continuous progress and endless spiritual development as he walks in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. **St Augustine** warns us against misinterpreting these words as though they implied that we become without sin[4].

St John Chrysostom comments on the words (Rom1: 17) of the Apostle as follows:

[As long as God's blessing completely transcends our comprehension, it is logical that we need to have faith. Do you not realize that lack of faith is a state of utter

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Adv. Marc. 5:13*
[3] *Strom 2:6*
[4] *City of God 20:26*

emptiness and decline which has destroyed thousands? On the other hand, faith did not only lead to the redemption of the adulteress, but it also made her the mother of many other believers. We welcome the mother of all blessings- which is faith- in order to be as those walking towards a calm harbor that is perfectly stable. We hold on to our orthodox faith through which we guide our ship uprightly and receive blessings through the grace and love of mankind in our Lord Jesus Christ[1]].

3- The Wickedness of the Nations :

St Paul addresses Judaism by proclaiming the universality of salvation for both the Greeks as well as the Jews. He does not start by exposing the evils and failings of the Jews. On the contrary, he openly and clearly speaks about the wickedness of the Gentiles. This serves as a lead into his criticism of the Jews as well. In this manner, he could condemn and answer all their claims and excuses without being accused of bias. He had been blamed as they accused him saying: **"…that you teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs", (Acts 21:21).** This is what drove the Apostle to start by revealing the evils of the Gentiles and their responsibilities. His intention was not to despise or degrade them, but to open the door and attract converted Jews to accept the Gentiles with them as equals and members in the One Body. Therefore he proclaims that the Gentiles were prisoners to natural (physical) law, and the Jews prisoners to the Law of Moses. Consequently, they all were in need of Divine intervention: they all needed to become righteous through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of all mankind. This could neither by achieved through natural law nor through the Law of Moses.

In his discourse about the wickedness of the Gentiles who embraced natural law, the Apostle underlines the following:

First: While God had entrusted the Jews with the Law of Moses, He did not neglect the Gentiles or leave them with no one to witness for Him. He had revealed Himself to them through the visible nature. St Paul explains: **"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse", (20).**

God has not left Himself without a witness, for **'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork', (Ps 19:1).** He declares His eternal power and divinity through His sublime acts of creation which He has established by His word. He did so not to display His power but to reveal the depths of His love towards us. Indeed, God's sublime and invisible love is experienced by us through His amazing care for He has offered all this creation to cater for our well being.

While St Paul blames mankind for 'suppressing the truth in unrighteousness' (18), and for going to great lengths to invent various wicked means to suppress 'the truth', he indicates they do not proclaim it. God, however, proclaims His 'love' to us in various ways through His blessed creation which is formed by His own hands. Mankind struggles to the point of death in order to suppress the truth, whereas God is sacrificed to proclaim His eternal love!

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[1] *In Rom. hom 2*

St Augustine interprets this apostolic statement as an indication that God offers us this world as a gift for our own benefit but not for the indulgence of our desires. Through His creation, we need to see His invisible deeds, and grasp the spiritual and heavenly matters through things which are material and temporal[1].

St Ambrose comments on the words **'his eternal power'** as follows: [Since the Lord Jesus Christ is God's eternal power, then the Lord is Eternal[2]].

When man suppresses the truth by sinfulness, he becomes subject to the wrath of God, (18).However, those who repent and turn to Him hear His divine voice saying: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over past. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain," (Is 26: 20,21). What are the chambers that are entered and which lead to the secret life with the Lord Jesus Christ? Where is this place where we can hide from His wrath and become the object of the Father's pleasure? Concerning the words of Isaiah: "…the Lord cometh out of his place to punish…", they indicate that God wishes to remain in His place and proclaim His love and mercy but the insistence of the earth's inhabitants to sin obligates Him to inflict punishment!.

Second: The Gentiles could not be saved in spite of what had been revealed to them through both the tangible nature and the recorded law. On the contrary, they adopted a resistant attitude which was evident in the following manner:

A. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, (21- 23).

According to **St John Chrysostom,** this accusation is a far more serious one than the previous one. The matter did not end with their rejection of God who had revealed His love and power through all His wonderful creation; for when they got to know Him, they neither glorified nor thanked Him. Moreover, they substituted the worship of the living God by the worship of idols. God speaks through Jeremiah and says: **"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," (Jer 2:13).** The reason for their corruption is their dependence on their on human wisdom and their rejection of God's assistance. Therefore, **"professing themselves to be wise, they became fools…"** According to **St John Chrysostom**, they became like mariners navigating in unknown waters. Consequently, their boat ran into hard rocks and got destroyed. This was the result of their attempt to reach up and attain the heavens after having turned off the light within them; and of depending on the darkness of their own thoughts,

St Augustine considers that the reason for their fall was their ingratitude and insensitivity. He remarks that: [Due to their insensitivity, they became stupid. God withdraws from the ungrateful that which He grants freely (i.e. wisdom)[3]]. He also notes

[1] *On Christian Doctrine 1:4*
[2] *Of Christ. Faith 1: 10 (62)*
[3] *In Ioan, tr 14:3*

that: [They learned how they should live, but they praised themselves for the insight that God had granted them. Having fallen into the sin of pride, they lost their vision and relapsed into the worship of idols, statues, and devils. They worshipped things created and abhorred the Creator[1]].

St Augustine indicates that those who had claimed to be wise and had fallen into the corrupt worship were the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians. These had glorified themselves under the claim of wisdom[2].

B. Because they had abandoned God who reveals Himself in nature, God abandoned them as well. This is what the Apostle conveys in his words: '**Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves' (24).** They abandoned Him by their own free will, for God acknowledges man's free will and honors it. Therefore He granted them their heart's desire and relinquished them. In this manner, they indulged in their evil lusts as men and women committed atrocities that were unacceptable even by the law of nature, (26,27).

St John Caspian[3] considers that when a person becomes proud- even though he could be physically pure- God abandons him. As a result, he engages in physical lust that he perceives to be wrong. In this manner, he is enabled to realize the hidden pride which he could not formerly perceive.

That is why we see many youths submitting to physical lusts in spite of their regular observance of spiritual means of salvation, such as Bible study, prayers, confession, and communion…however, the main weakness and reason for sinning is the pride which governs their hearts. Pride strips a person of God's grace which grants sanctification. Consequently, a person surrenders under the weight of the lusts and corruption of the flesh.

St Befnotious explains that we ourselves cause this corruption and that is why God allows this kind of sinfulness. It is due to our own pride or our negligence, and he goes on to say: 'We need to know that everything that happens occurs either by God's will or by His permission. Everything that is good occurs by His will and protection. Everything that is contrary to that occurs by His permission ,and when God no longer protects as He abandons us due to our sins, or due to the hardness of our hearts, or due to our submission to Satan and submitting to shameful physical lusts which we allow to dominate us. The Apostle instructs us about that and confirms it in his words: **'…for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections' (25);** and **'even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient', (28).** God speaks through His prophet saying: **'But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels' (Ps 81:11,12)** [4]**.**

Fr Hanna states: ['The fairness of God's wisdom is evident as He grants good talents to the humble, and these are withheld from the proud who are rejected and of whom the Apostle says that: '**God gave them over to a reprobate mind…', (28)**[5]**].**

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[1] *Ibid 2:4*
[2] *City of God 8.10*
[3] *Instit.12:21*
[4] *Conf. 3:20*
[5] *Ibid 3:20*

This is how man, in his wickedness, chooses corruption. Therefore corruption inhabits him, whereas God **'is blessed forever. Amen',(25).** It is evident that what man practices just backlashes on himself and is not inflicted by God. **St John Chrysostom** accordingly says: **' [**Just as a philosopher is unaffected by humiliating remarks of ignorant people; so- and to a greater extent- God's unsurpassed and unquestionable glory is untouched by the arrogance of men[1]].

St John Chrysosotom stops here for a moment to ask us to imitate God who tolerates the wicked and is unaffected by their evil. His nature is too sublime to be affected by them. Similarly, as we imitate Him, we are enabled to tolerate the evil of the wicked. He states: [It is appropriate for us not to attempt to flee from humiliation. Conversely, we need to tolerate the wicked, for such long suffering is an honor in itself. Why? Because it is in your power to tolerate whereas correcting others is another person's task. Do you hear the echo of the pounding hammer as it falls on a diamond? You might say that this is the nature of diamonds. Correct. And it is within you to practice what the diamond intrinsically possesses. Have you not heard how the three youths were unharmed? And how Daniel remained safely inside the lion's den? What happened to these can possibly happen to us for we are surrounded by lions. Lust and anger are ready to tear up those who fall victim to them. Therefore be like Daniel and remain steadfast. Do not allow reactions to tear, with their fingernails, your soul. You might think: This is the effect of grace. True, but grace springs from training the will. When we are ready to train ourselves following the model of these men, grace will flow within us. Consequently, savage beasts will humbly crawl before us in spite of their hunger. If beasts have retreated before slaves, shall they not retreat before the members of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. before us)?![2]].

C. Some might find an excuse for their wickedness by claiming that it is the fruit of the weakness of human nature and of humans in the uncontrolled pursuit of pleasures. That is why the Apostle indicates that it is man's wickedness that drives him to practice matters that are contrary to nature. People damage nature so that it transforms their lives into torture. According to St Paul: '**For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet', (26, 27).**

St John Chrysostom states: [St Paul speaks on behalf of the world and states that mankind could enjoy the pleasures of their nature with confidence and heartfelt joy while avoiding shameful acts. However, they do not have the determination to do so…for they humiliate Nature herself…they bring shame to Nature and trample human laws at the same time[3]].

St John Chrysostom finds that man has turned his life into an internal fight and unbearable torture. He explains that while God has granted men and women to be naturally inclined to marry and become one flesh, and to live in harmony as they share love and intimacy; both sexes have humiliated themselves and each has entered into an

[1] *In Rom.hom 3*
[2] *Ibid 4*
[3] *Ibid*

inner war. The women have sought each other and the men have acted in the same manner. As a result, human life has been transformed into heated disputes and unending inner wrangling. These conflicts do not solely arise between a man and his wife, but they also occur between same sex individuals- whether they are men or women. Consequently, they have deserved to receive 'in themselves the penalty of their error', (27). Many holy fathers have underlined that sin carries corruption within it, and ultimately pours it out on the doer. Consequently, that person bears the penalty, not only outwardly in the form of a judgment issued against him, but also inwardly as he commits that sin itself.

D. First, St Paul presents a horrendous picture of mankind's submission to wickedness. He reveals how men do not seek the pleasures they have been naturally granted. They have corrupted nature rather than uplifting it. Instead of progressing in the spirit to elevate his animal instincts, and so sanctify his body and instincts to the Lord; man has become an evil and destroyer of nature. He commits what beasts do not do through abnormal physical relationships which occur either between two or more women or between two or more men. Next, St Paul presents a bitter list of trespasses committed by fallen mankind. **St John Chrysostom** notes that the Apostle uses the following expressions in his list: 'filled', 'with all', 'burned in their lust'. It is as though these evils are no longer temporary matters in a man's life, but they flood his inner being and charge him fully so that he performs 'all unrighteousness' and not just one or two evils!

E. The amazing thing is that sin and corruption destroy man's inner peace and joy, yet they drive the doer to pride and arrogance. That is why the list describes them in this manner: **[backbiters, haters of God, violent, boasters… 30]. St John Chrysostom** comments that [pride coupled with sin is a great falling…a person who does a good act but is guilty of pride loses his reward, so how much greater would the sin be of someone who adds to his evil deeds the sin of pride? Indeed such a person would be unable to practice repentance[1]].

F. When we contemplate this list of sins and evils, we feel that humanity has subjugated itself willingly to rebellion and resistance to God who is the source of life and its sanctity. Every sin engages a person so that it delivers him into other sins, and this continues so that he becomes the laughing stock of all sins and evils. We could summarize here the order of this list in the following manner:

* A person begins to indulge in physical pleasure so he/she surrenders to adultery (29).

* As that person encloses himself within his physical pleasure, he seeks his own satisfaction though outwardly seeming to be generous and lavish. Yet he is ruled by greed and that drives him also to devious ways in order to satisfy such lusts, (29).

* Greed leads to envy, separation, and slyness. These could lead to murder, (29).

* This envy and slyness drive a person to conceit and haughtiness, (30).

* The lust for greatness leads a person to inventions and departure from truthfulness, (30).

* The rejection of truth drives a person to infringe on nature and to disobey his parents, (30).

* By violating even the simplest codes of nature, man loses his discernment (31), and breaks all covenants-natural or written. This ultimately leads to the loss of his natural tendency to love and to be tender (31). Consequently, man is guilty of a fall to which the

[1] *Ibid 5*

Lord has alluded: "**And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold**", **(Matt 24:12).** Finally, men become worse than savage beasts who come together as gangs. Whereas beasts are controlled by their instincts, men are driven by their hatred towards their brothers.

G. This descent and fall of mankind into the lowest natural state has produced hardened hearts. Men have not only befriended wickedness, they have become supportive of those who fall like them. The Apostle states: **"Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them", (32).**

H.In general, note that this Epistle speaks about the Gentiles. He therefore proclaims the role of natural law which is the Law of God. According to **Tertullian the Scholar** [1]**,** this Law dominates the world and is inscribed on the face of Nature. Therefore the Apostle states: **"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law …', (2:14).** In this chapter, St Paul speaks about nations who have broken the Law of nature and describes them as those who 'do those things which are not fitting' (28). Examples of their deeds include women who 'exchanged the natural use for what is against nature…',(1: 26). When the Apostle speaks about the women's observance to cover her head during prayer, he says: 'Doth not even nature itself teach you…?' (1Cor 11:14).

Therefore a Christian is required to obey the Law of Nature. Moreover, not only is he required to fulfill the Law of Moses; but he also needs to progress in order to fulfill the sublime gospel commandment.

[1] *De Corona 6*

Part 2

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CHAPTER 2
THE NEED OF THE JEWS FOR SALVATION

When a Gentile commits many evils and impure acts, it is not appropriate for a Jew to indict him; for the Gentile has committed sin without possessing a written Law, whereas the Jew would have has done so by disregarding the Law. In the case of the Jew, he has not only committed a sin, but he is also guilty of 'violation'. Therefore his responsibility is greater and his penalty is more severe. This indicates that the Law does not justify a person who possesses it yet does not apply, observe, and live it (13). A Jew is not a Jew outwardly (28), nor is the circumcision of the flesh considered circumcision. Rather, a Jew is someone who has lived as a true spiritual man of God, and whose heart- not his flesh- has been circumcised by the Spirit

This is what the Apostle clarifies in this Chapter. It is a discourse that is useful to us believers. Since a person who is outwardly a Jew is convicted due to his lack of spirituality and his deadly literal observances, then a Christian will be all the more guilty if he keeps the name and the formalities but without staying the course. That would make him more evil and more violent than a Jew for he has humiliated the holy Blood.

This discourse is all the more relevant to the lives of ministers and shepherds. The Apostle directs a warning to them to avoid being carried away by temporal glory and honors. Such matters would distract them from leading an inner life inflamed by the Spirit and the Truth.

1. The Law and the Indictment of Others 1-.11.
2. The Law and it Practice in Life 12-. 16.
3. The Law and Edification 17- 29.

1. The Law and the Indictment of Others:

St Paul the Apostle deals with the issue of the conceit of the Jew who claims he has been chosen out of all nations to be the recipient of the Law. Jews do not realize that the Law is a mirror that reveals sins and weaknesses. Sadly, instead of its being instrumental in helping the Jew in discovering his failings and consequently crying out to God, repenting, and praying for salvation; he becomes hardened and uses the Law to uncover the sins of others. In doing so, instead of allowing the Law to bring him to repentance, he has usurped the status of the Judge and ordained himself to judge others, claiming knowledge of God's will and plan. He has used the Law to demand the first seats and to set himself up as the judge over others.

The indictment of others is in itself a revelation of inner problems. This is what the Jews did when they caught the adulteress and sought to justify their indictment by having her stoned. As for the Judge, He covered up her sin by His love. However, He did not abandon her to her sinfulness. Rather, through tough love, He commanded her: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more". What a great difference between the manner by which a man indicts his brother while he shares the same failings and God's judgment! He is longsuffering towards us so that we might repent and be clear of the guilt of judging others...

St Paul associates, in this manner, between our indictment of others and God's indictment as our Judge. He explains this association as follows:

First: When we ordain ourselves judges of others while we share the same failings; we inflict judgment upon ourselves through our indictment of others. He states:

"**Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest does the same things… And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (2: 1-3).**

St John Chrysostom writes: [This reflects the logic of the Apostle who seems to proclaim: You judge the adulterer while you commit the same sin, do you not condemn yourself at the same time, even though no one has judged you?...If you punish someone who has committed a lesser sin than yours, then how would God not condemn you for your acts and indict you for your harshness, especially that you have brought condemnation on yourself by your own acts?![1]].

Second: By judging your brother, you do not only indict yourself by that act, but you are usually wrong as well in your judgment. This is because you base your verdict on appearances and are unaware of the motives and inner depths of the others. As for God, He judges you fairly for He knows all your secrets…in other words, even if you believed yourself to be more righteous than your brother and so judge and indict him, your verdict would probably be unfair. Therefore the Apostle states that: **"… we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things",** (2: 2).

St Paul underlines the characteristics of God's judgment, which differ completely from our manner of indicting others. These are:

a. His judgment is **"according to the truth"** (2), for He is the Truth itself.

b. God does not desire to punish. In His mercy, patience, and long- suffering, He wishes to **"lead you to repentance"**, (v4).

c. It is a **"righteous judgment"** (5).

d. He **"will render to each one according to his deeds" (6).**

e. 'There is no partiality with God", (v11).

f. It is not based on what a person knows, but **according to deeds** and manner of living, (13).

g. God judges the inner depths, the conscience, the thoughts, and the secrets of men, (15, 16).

h. It is based on the reality of the inner person and not on his outward appearance as a religious person or a teacher, (17- 29)

Third: The Jews were at fault, especially their leaders-whether priests or Pharisees. First, instead of using the Law as a way of life and spiritual work, they had transformed the Law into a means to criticize and indict people in a spirit of arrogance and pride. Second, having comprehended God's gentleness and long suffering, they abused their knowledge. In other words, by being harsh and judgmental towards others, they abused God's love and goodness. As St Paul explains: **"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (4)**…However, God is long suffering towards us in spite of our rashness to condemn others. This does not mean that He relieves us of punishment but that He retains it for a specific time**. "But after thy**

[1] *In Rom. hom 5*

hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (5,6).

God is longsuffering towards us as He provides us the opportunity to repent. However, if we persist in our wickedness, the penalty becomes more severe. That is why the holy fathers tremble to see no penalty inflicted in this world. They consider that the light and quick punishment, pronounced for sins in this world by inflicting temporal penalties, are easier to tolerate than to face God's wrath on the Day of Judgment[1].

❖ We pray that those who love God's tenderness also respect His justice; for God is 'good' (merciful) and 'upright' (truthful). (Ps 25: 8).

You love Him as He is 'good' (merciful), therefore fear Him as He is the Truth…

He is gentle, long suffering, and tender; and He is also the Righteous and the Truth.

He has granted you the opportunity to correct yourself. However, you like to delay judgment more than to correct your ways. Have you been wicked yesterday? Then be good today!

St Augustine[2]

❖ We often speak to you about the goodness of God not in order to encourage you to disregard Him and do whatever pleases you; but to tell you that we should not be discouraged when we sin and that we should repent. Otherwise His goodness would be harmful to our salvation.

God's goodness leads you to repentance rather than to commit greater evil. If you become corrupt due to His goodness, then you are humiliating God before men.

❖ Longsuffering is beneficial to us; yet we would be subject to greater penalty if we do not capitalize on it.

St John Chrysostom[3]

❖ [For the wicked to repent, God may not be long suffering at times; and at other times He may not be severe. Whereas towards the righteous, He uses punishment at times, and shows mercy at other times:]

God's long suffering invites the wicked to repent. Inflicting punishment is God's way to train the righteous to endure

Moreover, God's mercy embraces the righteous in order to teach them. Besides, God sternly averts the wicked as they submit to punishment.

St Augustine[4]

In other words, a person may experience God's love and long suffering; and yet that person naturally tends to be hard on his brother, and indicts and reproaches others. In contrast, God desires everyone to be redeemed and He is longsuffering as He wishes all to repent and turn back to Him.

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[1] *Cassian: Conf. 7:31*
[2] *In Ioan.tr 33:7*
[3] *In Eph.hom4; In matt. Hom 75*
[4] *City of God 1:8*

St Paul may have wanted to underline that even though God has been long suffering, this does not indicate that He is pleased with them. It is a sign of His goodness as He is waiting for them to repent

Fourth: Even though God is the Judge, yet we are the ones who **"are treasuring up for (ourselves) wrath"**…for God wishes to be merciful and He provides us with every means to deserve His mercy. However, man- being unrepentant- reserves wrath for himself. **St John Chrysostom** says: [Note how precise these words are: **"treasuring up for (ourselves) wrath"** as they clarify that it is not the Judge who issues the judgment but it comes as the result of our own wrongdoing. St Paul does not say 'God treasures up for you' but he says 'you are treasuring'…God tries to attract you by every possible means. However, if you persist in your obstinacy, then you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath when God will declare His righteous judgment. It should not cross your mind that His wrath is a violent reaction for it is a pronouncement of Justice. It is a 'revelation' when every person receives what he deserves[1]].

Fifth: Addressing the subject of God's Judgment of mankind, St Paul first speaks about the righteous who are rewarded with eternal life. Then he speaks about those who are subjected to the wrath of God and says: **"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile", (2: 7-10).**

God wishes that everyone attains eternal life through perseverance in doing good deeds. As a result, they are rewarded with glory, honour, and eternal peace. That is why the Apostle mentions them first. As for the second category who become subject to righteous anger and wrath, and moan due to their hard and terrible condition; these have brought it upon themselves through their submission to sin. God does not wish anyone to fall under such a pronouncement. This is the difference between the manner God judges and how people judge: God considers first the righteous and righteous matters; whereas man tends to focus on faults, and first considers the evil in others to promptly condemn them.

St Iraneous notes that St Paul has focused in this Epistle on man's free will, (2: 4, 5, 7). That is why God grants blessings to those who do good- according to the Apostle- and so they receive glory and honor. Those who practice good works although they could have chosen to do otherwise and consequently submit to the righteous judgment of God[2].

Sixth: The Apostle underlines that God does not discriminate: **"For there is no partiality with God" (11).** If God rewards the Jew first for his good or evil deeds, it is because He condemns, more harshly, those who have received knowledge or have been entrusted with leadership and ministry roles. **St John Chrysostom** comments: [It is only fair that someone who has received a greater share of knowledge should get a greater share of punishment if he disobeys the Law. Consequently, our punishment becomes more severe as it corresponds with our wisdom and authority. If you are rich, you are

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[1] *In Rom. hom 5*
[2] *Adv.Haer 4:37:1*

required to give more than what is required of the poor. If you are wiser than others, you are required to be more obedient than others; and if you are entrusted with authority, you need to offer remarkable services[1]].

Showing favouritism or discrimination is a human characteristic. People deviate from judging truthfully as they favour a person based on his relatives or his wealth, or as they seek some benefit. St Paul explains: **"having men's persons in admiration because of advantage."(**jude16) Judges were warned against partiality (Lev 19: 15, Deuteronomy 10: 17). In this context, St James warns us and says: '…do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality, (James 2: 1); and St Paul tells the Ephesians and the Colossians to avoid favourtism, (Eph 6: 9; Col 3: 25). The Lord Jesus Christ displayed His impartiality on the Cross: **"For God so loved the world-** (without favoritism)**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3: 16).** St Paul also says: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things', (Rom 8: 32).

2. The Law and its Practice in Life:

The Law no longer fulfilled the divine role it was intended to play in the life of the Jews. Rather than being the means leading them to acknowledge their sins and realizing their need for God's redeeming act, it led them to haughtiness and pride as they claimed to be the heirs and teachers of the truth. In this light, they indicted the Gentiles and therefore fell under the condemnation of God. Clearly, the Law is not an end in itself or a mere theoretical proposition. The Law, more appropriately, is intended to be embraced and observed practically in our day to day experience. In this manner, the Law would become the means to our coronation. That is why St Paul says the following:

First: "**For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (12).**

The Law is not an opportunity for boasting but for work. Since the Law grants knowledge of God and His will, those who have received the Law have the obligation to observe its commandments. Otherwise they have failed through the Law and become subject to condemnation. The Jews differ from the Gentiles who sin because they have no Law and therefore perish. Indeed, they are more wicked for they knowingly sin as they are under the Law. **St John Chrysostom** comments and says: [St Paul here indicates not only the equality between Jew and Gentile; but also clarifies how the Law has laid a burden on the Jew. This is because the Gentile is judged without the Law- and the words 'without the Law' indicate that the judgment is lighter-for the Law does not testify against him. In such a case, the Gentile receives punishment based upon the logic of nature and reason. As for the Jew, he is judged in the light of the Law. In other words, he is judged according to the logic of nature, reason, as well as the Law: what he has received has increased his responsibility. Note to what extent St Paul urges the Jew to understand his need to seek grace and pray for rescue. Whereas they are satisfied to have

[1] *In Rom. hom 5*

the Law and do not need grace, he indicates to them that they need grace more than the Gentiles since through the Law their punishment will be greater[1]].

St Augustine says: [Those who have not heard the Word (the Gospel) are judged in a manner that is different from those who have heard and mocked It[2]]. He also says[3] that those who have no Law perish and this sounds terrible. As for those under the Law, they are judged – meaning that they have no excuse, therefore they are condemned to destruction…and so their condemnation is more severe.

St John Chrysostom explains that: [Not all penalties are alike for all sins. Rather, they are various and numerous: it depends on the times and the persons- their ranks, intelligence, and circumstances…for example, if a priest commits adultery, his penalty would be greatly doubled due to the honor he has received as a minister[4]].

The Apostle intends to underline that all have been convicted – both Jew and Gentile- and this leads him to proclaim that all are in need of salvation.

Second: Anyone who receives the Law receives a harder penalty since the Law or knowledge testifies against him on the Day of Judgment. In this light, the Law does not justify a person who has merely heard or studied it. The Law justifies when it is wholly observed. It is impossible for any person to fully obey the Law: **"for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (13).**

Note how the Apostle is accurate as he says: '**are just before God',** for many hear and recite the Law, and are consequently counted as righteous and religious by their fellowmen. But God does not judge a person based upon his outward appearance but upon the righteousness of his inner depths. We may deceive our fellowmen and even ourselves by claiming to hear the Word, but can we justify ourselves before God?

The Law demands us to be fully obedient to it (Deut 4: 1; Lev 18: 5). This is impossible for there is no man who is without sin…consequently; there is a dire need for someone who justifies.

Third: While St Paul indicates that the Law has burdened the Jew, he elevates the case of the Gentile who has not received the Law. In the case of the Jew, the Law would testify against him on the Day of Judgment since he has heard with his ears and has not applied his heart and deeds and this would have justified him before God. As for the Gentile who has struggled with his nature to obey the Law, St Paul says**: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;** i**n the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (14-16).**

St John Chrysostom comments:

[St Paul wishes to communicate the following: I do not reject the Law, but I justify the Gentiles due to it…revealing that they are better and more excellent than the Jews as they practice goodness even though they have not received the Law. Being the

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *In Ioan tr 54:6*
[3] *Ibid 89:3*
[4] *In matt. Hom 75*

recipients of the Law has led the Jews to be conceited and arrogance. In this respect, the Gentiles are worthy of admiration, for they fulfilled the Law through deeds and not through words which they heard…Therefore note how the Apostle blames the Jews for that, and consequently demolishes their conceit. He proclaims that Gentiles are more deserving of honor than the Jews as they have struggled to fulfill the Law – though they had no Law. We are all the more astonished at the Apostle's wisdom as he reveals the prominence of the Gentile over the Jew without a direct statement to that effect[1]].

[In order to intensify their concern, St Paul is not satisfied to speak of 'the sins of people' but speaks about God who will 'judge the secrets of men'. Therefore do not think that you are capable of avoiding the judgment of God…for men set up courts of justice to judge acts done in public (as for God, He judges the secret acts)…therefore let every man enter into the depths of his conscience and examine himself carefully so that 'we should not be condemned with the world', (1 Cor 11: 32). That Judgment will be awesome, and that Chair fearsome, and that Accountability severe; for 'none of them can by any means redeem his brother', (Ps 49: 8). How will we feel when we stand before the whole world and all our secrets are proclaimed on an enormous illuminated stage where those we know and those we do not know are seated.?![2]].

The **Son of Caesar's Scribe** believes that St Paul is speaking about the Gentiles who have advanced- through walking with God- over the Jews. These are the 'early fathers' who had lived before the time when the Law of Moses was delivered, such as Abraham, Job, and Joseph. Abraham believed in God and offered his son as a sacrificial offering. Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his children as he feared any of them could have spoken wrongfully or held within himself matters that would displease God, (Job 1: 5). Joseph practiced a pure life, and avoided evil in order not to sin before God, (Gen 39: 5). All these lived under the rule of nature and not under the Law; for they did not need the written Law; since they did not trust their intentions or will to guide them but acted according to their own natural dictates of goodness. Therefore they abandoned all temptations to corruption. In that light, they were different from us who are guided by our willful intentions and our books].

The **Son of Caesar's Scribe** also comments on the Apostle's words, mentioned above, and clarifies that their thoughts were 'accusing', (15). In other words, they indicted themselves through their own minds when they did something wrong, as their reason played the same role as that of the Law.

Fr Sirianus considers these words to be a confirmation of man's control over his thoughts; otherwise our thoughts and consciences would not have betrayed us. To support his comment, he goes on to say: If we struggled, as human beings, against all turmoil and sin, these become subject to our control and obey our will. Being in control enables us to fight against the desires of the flesh and to destroy them, and leads us to imprison all sins by our authority. In this manner, we dispel from our chest the terrifying guests; and we do so through the power granted to us through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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[1] *In matt.hom 5*
[2] *Ibid*

Ultimately, we are enabled to enjoy spiritual victory, such as that enjoyed in the parable of the centurion , (Matt 8: 9) [1]].

Fr Joseph considers these words as a revelation about [the willful intentions of man which will ultimately cause him to be rewarded or punished[2]].

Origen the Scholar comments on the expression "**according to my gospel" (16)** saying: [Until now we do not have a written text named as "Gospel', but all that he has preached and all he has said are the Gospel, and all that he has preached and all he has said are considered as though they have been written, besides what he has actually written. Now if what Paul has written is a Gospel, then what Peter has written is Gospel too. To sum up, we consider that the word 'Gospel' covers all that has been said or written to commemorate the knowledge of the Lord's descent to the world, and which prepares for His Second Coming. All these sayings and writings have been applied by such men who aim to present this knowledge for they are actual living facts. They are living words that exist in the souls of those who desire other men to accept the Word of God Who is standing at the door and asking to enter into the hearts[3]].

3-The Law and Edification :

In the previous chapter, St Paul has addressed the evils enacted by the Gentiles, and stressed their need to receive God's free gift of grace. This would support them and lead them to attain salvation from God. In this chapter, St Paul addresses the Jews and reveals to them that they are in need of divine grace more than the Gentiles- if such an expression were appropriate- for they had used the Law- which had been granted to assist them to repent, as a weapon by which to indict others. Moreover, instead of applying the Law, they were satisfied with merely hearing it. This has revealed that there are some Gentiles, who struggled inwardly to live a pure life, to be better than them. These had applied what was contained in the Law through their own nature and logic. As a result, the Law appeared to be written in their hearts and consciences. In contrast, those who had received the Law continued to hear with their ears while their hearts and inner thoughts were excluded...In order to clarify the dreadfulness of their deeds, St Paul proclaims that the Jews had become nominal teachers communicating the Law while opposing it in their deeds, whereas they should have preached the Law through applying it in their daily lives. They had considered themselves leaders in spiritual thinking, a light to the world, educators of the rich, and children's teachers. They had the appearance of knowing the teachings of the Law and of the truth, whereas their lives and behavior indicated the complete opposite of that.

In this discourse, the following points are noteworthy:

First: St John Chrysostom finds that St Paul has used a style that is appropriate to address people who claim to be qualified and knowledgeable and who have set themselves as teachers to the whole world. The apostle reveals that they deride and mock everyone; for he says:

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[1] *Cassian. Conf. 7:5*
[2] *Ibid 17:14*
[3] *Comm. On John, book 1:6*

[**"Behold thou art called a Jew"** and "**makest thy boast of God" (17),** but he does not say 'Behold you are a Jew'. In other words, 'you imagine you are loved and honored by God above all mankind. We believe that the Apostle is gently sarcastic about their lack of logic and their wild lust for glory. However, they have abused such favor by making it a cause of treating others arrogantly and despitefully, instead of using it as a means of salvation…for the apostle tells them: '(you) are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind'- and here too, the apostle does not say: 'you are a guide'. Rather, he states: 'You are confident that you yourself are a guide' implying that 'you boast'; and that is because the arrogance of the Jews was tremendous. Actually, St Paul is using the same expressions that were commonly and repeatedly used among them in their arrogant complacence. Listen to the words of the Gospel: "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" (Jn 9: 34). This kind of haughty contempt reflected their attitude towards others[1]].

[St Paul uses the very same words the Jews used: "a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes". These were the words the Jews used as a label to those who were their students. By repeating these expressions, St Paul intends them to realize that what they claimed to be an advantage worthy of boasting about had become a cause for condemning them all the more[2]].

Second: Even though a spiritual teacher could be described as 'a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes', yet he does not accomplish that on his own. Indeed, God Himself is the One Who works through His ministers by entering into their hearts. He provides light within, educating and training as to a child. The Lord Jesus Christ became incarnated to fulfill that spiritual role. He did so by constantly transforming and renewing the heart and not by just delivering commandments.

❖ The perfect Teacher of children became a child among children in order to grant wisdom to the rich.

St Cyril of Jerusalem[3]

Third: The Apostle is not satisfied with reprimanding them by just repeating expressions which they used as they occupied the status of teachers to the heathen world and yet did not practice any of their teachings. He moves on to accuse the Jews of demeaning God Himself though they imagined that they were teaching others about Him. He tells them: **"You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say "Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?!" (21-23).**

The teachers of the Jews were concerned with theoretical preaching and left out the practical aspect, therefore the words lost their power. That is why St Paul urges his disciple Bishop Timothy and tells him: **"…be thou an example of the believers, in**

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[1] *In matt. hom 6*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Cat. Lect. 12:1*

word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine…Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"(1 Tim 4: 12, 13, 16).

❖ Anyone who plays a leading role needs to shine more brilliantly than any other star.

St John Chrysostom

Fourth: Demeaning God does not end in the divergence between their teachings and their behavior, but the Apostle charges them with a new accusation which he supports by quoting the prophets: "**For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written"** (Rom 2: 24; Is 52: 5;Ezk 36: 20,23; 2 Sam 12: 24)**.**

In this context, **St John Chrysostom says:** [The Jews are not only insolent towards God, but they encourage others to do so …they drive them to blaspheme[1]].

To help avoid committing this error, the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us to pray and say: "Hallowed is Your Name…" There are no half solutions: either the Name of God is hallowed through us or blasphemed because of us.

❖ Naturally, the Name of God is holy, whether we say so or not. However, it sometimes gets soiled among sinners…that is why we pray that God's name is sanctified and not that it would become sanctified and as though that were not the case. We pray that His name would be sanctified in us as we seek to become holy and behave accordingly.

St Cyril of Jerusalem[2]

Fifth: What is the aim of the Jew when he teaches a Gentile? It is to draw him away from the uncircumcised and to transfer him into the family of the circumcised; and from a person who has no Law to one controlled by the Law. That is an aim which the Jew achieves as a formality but which is lacking in spirit. This is what St Paul proclaims by revealing two types of circumcision, as well as two types of Law. The Jew cares about physical circumcision and not the spiritual one. He is concerned with circumcising the body and not the spirit, and with hearing and boasting about the Law without living and applying its teachings. This is how the Apostle distinguishes between circumcision according to the flesh and that according to the spirit. Also related to circumcision: he indicates the difference between just hearing the Law, and actually applying it. The Jew is concerned with the body and the outward appearance of his life. The same applies to his role as teacher to the Gentiles, as the Apostle says: "**For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?**

And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

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[1] *In matt. hom6*
[2] *Cat. lect. 23:13*

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God". (25-29).

Note the following points in this apostolic passage**:**

A- St John Chrysostom[1] finds that St Paul is like a judge who wants to issue a verdict on persons who enjoy a certain rank, therefore it was appropriate to strip them of their ranks first, and then to indict them. That is what he does by stripping them of their advantages. He reveals their reality as being uncircumcised spiritually. Moreover, they were not enjoying the Law in its spiritual implications. Indeed, they lived in spiritual uncircumcision in spite of their being physically circumcised…in this manner, he strips them in order to announce their indictment.

St Paul has not diminished the importance of circumcision, yet he has not favored uncircumcision over circumcision. He has clarified that those physically circumcised could be uncircumcised spiritually. Besides, someone physically uncircumcised could be spiritually circumcised inwardly. In this manner, circumcision becomes uncircumcision, and uncircumcision becomes circumcision!

❖ How does a person become uncircumcised after being circumcised? The Apostle hopes that this would not be the case. He should not live as though he were uncircumcised, otherwise he would become as though he had been covered again with the flesh which had been cut off. This would make him no longer a Jew.

St Augustine[2]

❖ This is consistent with his words: **"Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised…"** (1 Cor: 7: 18). St Paul was a Jew and he was called to serve when he had been circumcised, so he does not wish to become uncircumcised…that is, he does not wish to lead the life of an uncircumcised person.

St Augustine[3]

❖ When a Jew sins, his circumcision becomes uncircumcision. When a Gentile lives uprightly, his uncircumcision is counted as circumcision. Hence, matters that are considered pure are counted as unclean by those who do not use them appropriately.

Origen the Scholar[4]

Jeremiah the Prophet has spoken earlier, very clearly, about the circumcision of the heart and ears a subject we hope to address, God willing, in our study of the Book of Jeremiah.

B- Origen the Scholar, in his comments on the Gospel of Matthew, observes that this apostolic passage intends to clarify that the true Jew – not in the light of the flesh, but as a spiritual man of God- is someone who is associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that the word 'Jew' refers to Judah the son of James, but that now it carries a spiritual implication that applies to a person who is related to Him who became incarnated as a descendent of the tribe of Jude…such a person is a Jew inwardly as his heart is circumcised by the Spirit.

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[1] *In matt. hom 6*
[2] *On lying 8*
[3] *Of the work of the Monks 12*
[4] *Comm. On Matt. book 11:12*

In the same line of thought, **Pope Gregory the Great** says: [I now ask: What is Israel today? The Apostle answers: Those who act according to the Spirit and not according to the letter. Those walking according to the Law of the Lord Jesus Christ: these constitute the Israel of God[1]].

Concerning the characteristics of such a spiritual Jew or the new Israel, they are those: **"whose praise is not of men, but of God" (29). St John Chrysostom** accordingly says: [I do not warn you against the lust for glory, but I desire you to have true glory whose source is God…may we be pure inwardly and avoid being burdened with parading, appearances, and flattery. Let us remove the sheep's clothing and be real sheep. Nothing is more trivial than human glory. When you see young children, suckling, do you desire to receive glory from them? This is the situation of all mankind in the context of glory- that is why it is called 'vainglory'][2].

[1] *On the Trinity 5:28*
[2] *In Titus hom 2*

CHAPTER 3
THE NEED OF ALL MANKIND FOR SALVATION

Having presented the relationship between God and mankind, St Paul proclaims in Chapter Three that even though the sins of men are different yet the end result is the same: all have fallen under the yoke of sin. In other words, all are unrighteous and need true and efficient justification.

This chapter, therefore, sounds like an indictment of all humanity: all lack true righteousness and need to be justified.

1-The Accusation: Our Unfaithfulness and God's Faithfulnessv	**1-8**
2-The Reason for the Accusation: None is Righteous	**9- 20**
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1- The Accusation: Our Unfaithfulness and God's Faithfulness :

The accusation is directed to all mankind: All lack righteousness or faithfulness as they have rejected God's promises, and in spite of God's fulfillment of His promises to them. Both Jew and Gentile have this in common and are therefore equally guilty.

Jews might misunderstand this accusation and consider that the Apostle is debasing the privileges granted to them. That is why the accusation is presented with adequate details in order to avoid offending or hurting their feelings. The issues can be summarized as follows:

First: The Gentile is doomed when he breaks the Laws of Nature (Ch 1). The Jew who breaks the written Law and disregards spiritual circumcision becomes subject to a greater and more bitter indictment than the one pronounced against a Gentile…Then why does God need to have a chosen people for Himself? Why is there a need for the covenant of circumcision and a written Law? This is the question raised by St Paul as he ends his discourse on the state of Jews and Gentiles. In order to avoid the accusation that he belittles God's gifts and blessings which are mentioned in the Old Testament, St Paul says:

"***What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.***" **(1- 4).**

The Apostle is careful not to be misunderstood and he does not want anyone to believe that he demeans God's ways towards His people, especially what concerns His trusting them with His Law, His choosing them to be His sanctified people, and making a covenant with them while instituting circumcision as a sign of this covenant…that is why St Paul is quick to underline that the fault does not reside in the blessing or in the Giver, but in the receiver who is not worthy of trust. In other words, the Apostle criticizes the response of the Jews to God's blessings and not criticizing God's blessings. God, in His faithfulness, has offered free divine and holy gifts. But mankind has unfaithfully corrupted them and abused their beneficial applications in their lives.

St John Chrysostom comments on the Apostle's words and says:

[If the intention was to convey that all these things had no value, then why were they called God's people? Why was the covenant of circumcision instituted?

What could the Apostle do in this situation? How could he solve the problem?

He could solve it in the manner which he has used earlier: he praises God's blessing and explains that these have not been granted due to the personal merits of the Jews. Being Jews, God had granted them to know His will and to perceive ultimate matters. This was not on account of their deeds but it was due to God's grace. The Psalmist says: '**He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them**'. Moses acknowledges that by asking ' whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? (Deut 4:32, 33). That is what St Paul is doing in this situation, for he adopts the same technique when he tells his hearers that circumcision is beneficial when combined with good deeds(Rom 2:25). He does not say that circumcision had no benefits, and therefore he asks *:* 'For circumcision is indeed profitable, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision', **(2:25).** It is as though he is telling them: 'You who have been circumcised, it has become uncircumcision'. However, he does not say 'You who have been circumcised, this has no use whatsoever'…in this manner, St Paul is striking the wrongdoers and supports the Law. This is precisely what he does here as he first asks: **What advantage has the Jew?** He does not give a negative answer, but rather underlines the advantage so as to reprimand them and clarify that their punishment comes in measure with the advantages they have received.

He backs his question with another one: **'…or what is the profit of circumcision?'**

He answers both questions by saying: **'Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God'.**

In this manner, St Paul seizes every occasion to number God's blessing and not the advantages of the Jews.

'Unto them were committed'- what is the implication of these words? It conveys how the Law was entrusted to the Jews as God granted them a valuable status. Therefore He set them up as faithful guards watching over His words which descend from above. Through these words, St Paul is constructing a complaint against them, for he aims at revealing their ingratitude for being privileged despite the advantages granted to them

He goes on to say: "***For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid,***" **(3,4).**

Note how St Paul underlines the indictment by presenting it in the form of an objection. He seems to say: 'An opponent could ask: How is circumcision beneficial since it has been abused? The Apostle does not take the stand of a violent accuser. Rather he adopts the status of someone devoted to justify God in the face of all the accusations raised against Him. He seeks to transfer them from being against God to being against some of the Jews. He tells them: Why do you complain that some have not become believers? Does this affect God and the blessings He grants? Does the ingratitude of those using these blessings affect the nature of the blessings? Or does it transform the honored object into a corrupt one? This is the implication behind his question: **'For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?'** And he answers: **'God forbid'.** This is similar to saying: 'If I honor someone, and my act is

rejected, does the rejection of honor become reason to complain against me? Or does this response reduce my being honorable?

Note how the Apostle places them behind bars through the use of the same issues which led them to be conceited! God had done everything He could but they did not know how to benefit of His kindness to them. The Psalmist therefore says. **'... that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest'[1].**

[Note St Paul's plan to avoid accusing everyone generally with unfaithfulness, for he says: *"…if some…"* (3). Some have been unfaithful and St Paul does not wish to appear as an enemy or severe accuser[2]].

That is how the Apostle does not degrade the divine gifts of God. Considering circumcision, it is a sign of God's covenant if it is applied spiritually. Similarly, God's Law needs to have a spiritual impact. What St Paul attacks is man's infidelity and this does not negate God's faithfulness.

The people of the New Testament did not disregard God's blessings to the men in the Old Testament, especially the gift of the Law. The deacon, St Stephen speaks of Moses as a saint and says: *"who received the lively oracles to give unto us"* (Acts 4: 38).

God has lovingly granted living words bearing divine promises. However, mankind has responded with rigidity and rebellion against His words. They neglect observing them spiritually and practically, in spite of their conceit as the recipients of the Law and their display of the literal knowledge of it. Nevertheless, God remains faithful in the fulfillment of His promises.

The Jewish person has rejected the 'truth' by rejecting the promises contained in God's Word and especially those concerning the Redeeming Messiah. In that light, He was considered a liar; yet God remained truthful and fulfilled all His promises.

St Jerome offers a spiritual interpretation to the following expression: "**…** ***let God be true, but every man a liar"*** **(4).** He proclaims that as long as a person walks according to the dictates and potentials of his own humanity, then he is leading a fake and untrue life. But when he meets with God the 'Truth' and carries His characteristics; then he becomes God's child, enjoys the truth that is in Him and becomes truthful himself. Accordingly, he says: [A holy man becomes a god, and so stops being a person who speaks lies[3]].

St Caprianus considers that this same expression urges us not to despair when we see people deviating from faith or rejecting it. As godly people, we need to remain steadfast and follow the truth even when many walk in the path of lies. In a passage from his writings he says:

[If all people are liars and God alone is truthful, then we as His ministers- especially those who are priests- have no other choice but to dismiss human errors and lies and to persevere in pursuing the divine Truth and in keeping His commandments][4]..

[God chose Judas to be one among His disciples, and Judas betrayed Him. Has this weakened the faith of the disciples or shaken their steadfastness due to this traitor's failure to follow the Master?! Similarly, saintly martyrs and their honor does not diminish because the faith of some has been destroyed[5]].

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[1] *In Rom. hom.6.*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *On Ps. Hom 20*
[4] *Ep. 67: 8*
[5] *Unity of the Church 22*

[St Paul also advises us not to be troubled when the wicked perish outside the Church. Our faith should not get weaker when unbelievers walk away from us…our duty is to struggle so that others would not abandon the Church and perish due to mistakes we have committed. If someone perishes due to his own will, and sins, and does not choose to repent and return to the Church, then we are not to be blamed on the Day of Judgment as long as we have tried to correct him. Such a person is condemned alone as he has rejected treatment and rejected our good advice[1]].

Fr Paul, Bishop of Bobba in Moritania, is of the same opinion, and says that we should not be disturbed when a person rejects the faith of the Church[2].

St Augustine considers that the 'lies' refer to emptiness, and 'truth' or honesty refer to fullness. He explains: [God is fullness and man is emptiness: if anyone seeks fullness, let him go to the One who is the Fullness: 'They looked to Him and were radiant…' (Refer to Ps 34:5). As man is a liar, he is empty; yet he seeks to be filled by rushing zealously towards the Source[3]].

St Augustine also says: [When a person follows the Truth in his life, he does not live according to his own dictates but according to God who says: "I am the truth",(Jn 14:6). A person who lives according to his own dictates- that is a person who lives according to men and not according to God- definitely lives a life based on lies. That is not because man is intrinsically a liar, for God has brought him into being and is His Creator. Besides, God does not bring lies into being nor does He create them: man has been created in righteousness, and so that he might live according to God, his Creator, and not according to man's own dictates. In other words, man is created to fulfill God's will and not his own. However, man has chosen to live in a manner that has changed the purpose and way for which he was created; and that constitutes the lie… that is why it is not written that every sin is a blasphemous lie[4]].

Second: The Apostle has so far addressed the first problem, and that is: what is the benefit of God's blessings and gifts to the Jew if the Jew has abused them? Consequently, these holy and blessed gifts have become the reason for greater condemnation to those who have wrongly used them. St Paul indicates how some have been unfaithful and yet God has remained faithful in spite of that. He also underlines that we should not dishonor the Grantor of gifts due to their abuse by the receiver. In the next part of his discourse, St Paul addresses another problem which is similar to the first one and complementary to it. **St John Chrysostom** reports that the pagans demeaned the words of the Apostle: **'… where sin abounded, grace did much more abound**'…for they concluded that the natural response is that we sin and so increase in grace. In other words, they told themselves 'Let us be unfaithful so that God's faithfulness might be revealed'!

The Apostle says: "***But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?***

[1] *Ep. 54:6,7*
[2] *Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian*
[3] *Ser. On N.T. lessons 83:6*
[4] *City of God 17:4*

***And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.*"(5-8).**

From these verses, we draw the following points:

A- The enemy dos not cease to fight the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in every possible way. While the Jews attack the ministry by claiming that St Paul demeans the Law, belittles circumcision, and opposes the Jewish nation; the Gentiles also oppose evangelism. They misunderstand the Apostle's words and consider that he is calling them to do evil in order to receive blessings. Wickedness seems to produce goodness, and our unfaithfulness seems to be a glorification of God's loyalty. Clearly, this is a total lie…and it leads the Apostle to proclaim that the whole world has stumbled into evil. Next, he speaks about the need of all mankind for the Redeemer, and explains that he is innocent of what he has been accused since his words would be true if one of two conditions existed: Either that God is unfair as he rewards man for his unfaithfulness and wickedness; and this would bring victory and glory to God. Or if God did not punish us, then His victory would be the outcome of our sins…and both possibilities are repulsive to the Apostle.

B- St Paul wishes to confirm that God is always glorified and in spite of our wickedness. He is glorified in His righteousness and love towards sinners, yet He does not relieve man from his responsibility when he sins. Ever since his fall, man has become accustomed to putting the blame on others, just as Adam did when he blamed the woman whom God had created to be with him (Gen 3:12), and as Eve did when she put the blame on the serpent.

The Apostle says: '**I speak as a man'** (5) as he is obliged to confront the accusation that some had brought against him saying that he spoke as some one above God and the Law. They accused him of describing God as being unfair as he condemned a sinful person; and of encouraging people to continue in sin with the claim that this reveals 'the righteousness of God'…Due to such accusations, St Paul's Epistle intends to underline God's righteousness and faithfulness in keeping His promises. Moreover, he explains that His generous gifts to sinners are not intended to encourage wickedness but as he says: "**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein**? "(Rom 6:1,2).

C- **St Clement**[1] comments on the Apostle's words in the above passage to clarify that God pronounces judgment not as a hasty act but to achieve justice. God is not to be blamed; for the wrongdoer has chosen to subject himself to punishment by his own free will, and therefore he is the one to be blamed.

2- The Reason for the Accusation: All Have Sinned:

The Apostle so far has answered the Jews who have accused him of demeaning the gifts of God to them as the recipients of the Law and of the circumcision. He also has answered the Gentiles who considered him to be encouraging them to wrongdoing so that goodness would follow. Next, he underlines again that all mankind have become corrupt, and consequently all are in need of the one and only way to redemption: by recognizing the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in His redeeming act. He says:

[1] *Instru. 1:8*

'What then, are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both the Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They are all gone aside,

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes', (9-18).

Having pronounced the corruption of all mankind, St Paul turns to the fathers in the Old Testament to support his words and which reinforce his indictment:

He quotes the king and prophet David who says: ***"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one,"*****(Ps 14:2- Septuagint version).** In the Hebrew version, it says: 'Is there one who comprehends and seeks God?!' As all have wronged God, their spiritual inner eyes have become blinded and can neither see Him nor comprehend His divine mysteries. They are like Adam who failed and became unable to comprehend God's love. Consequently, he avoided facing Him and could not call on Him. Does this apply to the Jews who have come to know God through the Law, and who call on Him through their customs and unceasing worship? The Psalmist answers without making any distinction between the Jew and the Gentile: '**There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God'.** The Jew, due to his literal interpretation, could not comprehend the depth and aim of the divine Law. All the customs became formalities which do not assist the heart to know and see God.

From the same Psalm, St Paul uses another verse: '**they are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one,' (Ps 14: 3).** Once more, he stresses that **'all'** have sinned, without any distinction, as they all did not understand or desire to do good; but became corrupt and there was no longer a place for goodness in them. Isaiah the prophet also makes a similar proclamation as he says: **'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way', (Isa 53: 6).**

Having spoken about corruption in general, St Paul next proclaims that the corruption of man is total: **'their throat is an open tomb', (Ps 5:9)** out of which comes the smell of death and rotting; the tongue has become busy with flattery; the lips have become a hidden storage of serpent's poison, (Ps 140: 3); the mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud , (Ps 10:7); their feet hurry to spill blood, (Isa 59:7; Prov 1:16),and they know the way of destruction and hardship rather than the way of peace. Their depths have lost their inner vision therefore there is no fear of God before their eyes, (Ps 36:1). It is as though corruption has invaded the inner life of mankind as well as his outward members.

3-The Verdict: Pronouncement of Guilt and the Need for General Vindication :

If those who have no written law are doomed to be destroyed, and those who have received the Law have become indicted, then how is redemption possible?

St Paul presents the remedy as he proclaims the need for the Savior who offers His life as a sacrifice to redeem the whole world. In this manner, He grants divine righteousness to all who believe in Him…note the following points in this remedy:

First: The Apostle says: *"**But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed***" **(21). St John Chrysostom** also says**: '[**He is not satisfied to just say 'righteousness' for he describes it as 'the righteousness of God' to underline the extent of the blessings and the greatness of His promise since He is the source of all goodness].

Since man has failed to attain righteousness through natural Law or through the written Law, as he proved by breaking the Law; therefore God has offered His righteousness to us. By uniting with the Father through His righteous Son Who is without sin, we carry Him within us, and He carries us within Him, and so we are considered righteous. This is something we have not attained as a result of our own effort or our own obedience; but it is the fruit of the work of His Holy Spirit Who grants us fellowship with the Father through the Son. Consequently, we carry the features of the Son and His righteousness becomes our own.

In other words, when all have become unrighteous, the righteousness of God became necessary. This is what God spoke about through Isaiah the prophet saying:

"Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry**."** (Isa 46:12,13).

"My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth… but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished... but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation**".** (Isa 51:5-8).

"Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed **".** (Isaiah 56:1).

Second: By saying that 'the righteousness of God is revealed' rather than 'He offered the righteousness of God', St Paul proclaims that this righteousness is nothing new but that it has been in the mind of God who wishes to offer it to us. However, the right time had to come and that is why the Apostle says: 'being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets'. **St John Chrysostom** says in this context: [The Apostle intends to tell them not to be disturbed or afraid because they had not received blessings until that time even though the Law and the Prophets had referred to Him a long time ago in the past[1]].

This righteousness which God has proclaimed through the mouths of His prophets, He has also proclaimed in His Son for our sake: the righteous Jesus Christ. St Paul states**:** ***"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference"***, (22).The Prophets pointed to Righteousness from a long distance, but the Lord Jesus Christ came alone on our behalf and in order to carry us believers within Him, to make us enjoy the righteousness of the Father which is also that of the Son. This is what the Lord proclaims in His farewell prayer: 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was', (Jn 17:4,5). Such eternal glory belongs to Him and He carried it in the flesh in the form of divine righteousness which would be ours as we live, and practice it as we proclaim: 'The Lord is our righteousness', (Jer 23:6;33:16; 51:10).

[1] *In Rom. hom 7*

Third: The verdict has been issued: ***"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".*** **(24);** and the pronouncement has come in general and in all inclusive terms as it covers all Jews and Gentiles.

In another passage, the Apostle includes himself among sinners and even considers himself as 'chief' among sinners, (1 Tim 1:15); even though he also says about himself in (Phil 3:6) **'touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless'.** How could he have considered himself chief among sinners but at the same time blameless regarding righteousness according to the Law? **St John Chrysostom's** answer is that in the light of God's righteousness all are sinners, even those who are righteous in the eyes of the Law. He likens this to a person who has amassed money and considers himself wealthy yet, when he compares himself with kings, he appears to be extremely poor and chief among the poor. [Compared to angels, even the righteous are considered sinners. If Paul, who has practiced righteousness according to the Law, is chief among sinners, then can any other person consider he righteous?![1]].

St Augustine says: [The Lord Jesus Christ has come for the sick and He has found everyone in that condition. Therefore no one should boast about his health, otherwise the doctor would stop treating him. ..He finds that all were sick, but there are two kinds in the sick flock: one kind comes to the Doctor and adheres to the Lord-listening, honoring, and following Him and therefore becomes transformed... as for the other kind, it is plagued by the illness of wickedness and is unaware of his disease. This second kind of flock asked the disciples: *"Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"* (Mt9: 11) And the one who knew them and knew their condition replies**: 'They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick'[2]].**

St James the Apostle says: *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* (James 2:10). Is there a person who has not broken any one of the Commandments/Law?! Therefore all are in need of a doctor for all have become deprived of real glory *"and fall short of the glory of God"***.**

All of mankind has become in need of and hunger for 'glory'; yet sadly none seek God but tend to be satisfied with human glory(john 12: 43).

Fourth: The Apostle hits the target of his speech, and that is that the Jew enjoys righteousness and glory just like everyone else; even though the Law exposes his sins and strips him of divine glory. This has been achieved through the redeeming act of the Lord Jesus Christ and through His Blood. Such is the Divine Plan which God has prepared and would reveal in the fullness of time. Accordingly, St Paul says: ***"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"*** **(24).**

While the verdict applies to all mankind without exception: all have lost real 'glory' and have surrendered to inner and outward corruption. Nevertheless, the Healer offers 'freely' the remedy. This is not because the remedy is cheap but because its value is priceless and beyond any estimation. No one can pay the price except the Son. He has graciously offered His life as our redeeming sacrifice and seeks to reveal His righteousness in us. Therefore the Lord stands and proclaims: **"whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).** In other words, this water is free through His grace.

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[1] *In Tim. hom 4*
[2] *Ser. On N.T. lessons 30:4*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sacrificial **'redemption'** offered on our behalf**.** This is a principle preplanned and foretold in the Old Testament. God had prepared a ram for Abraham to offer as a burnt offering instead of his son, (Gen 22:13), or as a redeeming sacrifice on his behalf. God had also commanded Moses that each person should offer a payment (ransom) to Him, (Ex 30:11). However, in the New Testament, the Apostle says:

'And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world', (1Jn 2:2). '…He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins', (1Jn 4:10).

"In whom we have redemption (ransom) through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14).

"…ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things… but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot', (1 Peter 1:19).

Fifth: By saying: **"that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus",** St Paul proclaims that it is easy to receive His righteousness and it is granted to all**.** That is why **St John Chrysostom** encourages all believers to enjoy the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He tells them: [Do not doubt therefore…and do not distance yourself from God's righteousness for it is a blessing that is easy to obtain and it is granted to all without exception. Do not be ashamed or embarrassed, for if God is proclaiming His willingness to do that for you, and is even joyful and appreciative, then how could you be sad, embarrassed, and evading to bring your face out of shame due to that act by which your Lord is glorified?![1]].

This is the work of the holy God and His heart's desire. He is holy and He desires to sanctify everyone. He is able to make this happen but not without our willingness. **St Augustine** says: [God is holy and He sanctifies, He is righteous and He justifies[2]].

Sixth: The Apostle seizes this occasion to repeat that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is achieved not through obedience to the Law but through faith. He states: ***"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith",***(27). **St John Chrysostom** also comments: [If the Law had been influential, there would have been an indication before the coming of the (Savior). But now that He has come, He just demands faith since the need for the Law to be effective has ceased. Since all have sinned, He has come to redeem them by His grace, and He has come now for this reason. If He had come earlier, they would have claimed that they could have been saved through their own struggle and goodness due to their obedience to the Law…they are more like a person who has been sentenced and, on his way to be executed, a royal edict of pardon is issued. However, that person arrogantly claims that he has saved himself. Would not those around him ridicule him and say: It would have been better for him to make that claim while on the way to his execution and before the pardon was issued. Now that he has been pardoned, he has no reason to boast. This is the condition of the Jews: they have been disloyal to the promise given them, and the Lord Jesus Christ came to save them and has torn away any reason for boasting. The person who had described himself as the teacher of children and educator of the wealthy, and who appears to be a picture of knowledge and truth according to the Law, now finds

[1] *In Rom. hom. 7*
[2] *City of God 17:4*

himself in need of a Teacher and Savior. He is just like those he claims to be teaching; therefore how could he boast after that?![1]].

Seven: The Apostle underlines repeatedly that redemption cannot be obtained through the literal observation of the Law such as by circumcision, washing, and purification. It is obtained by the ***"law of faith"*** (27) so that we could enjoy the righteousness of the Lord...for St Paul confirms that faith also has a 'law', meaning that faith is a commandment or a law to which a believer is committed. Faith is not a condition of irresponsible and bewildering confusion. When we are liberated from slavery to the letter of the Law through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we live 'the freedom of the Lord'. We walk in a spirit that is consistent with a life of faith marked by submission to the law of love and the law of heaven and to a spiritual plan that is serious and focused. That is why **St Augustine** comments on the Apostle's words that say: *"…**we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law".*** **(28).** He comments:[There are deeds that seem to be good, but since they are done without belief in the Lord Jesus, they are not good since they do not fulfill the aim of good deeds: 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth', (Rom 10:4) this god does not want us to distinguish faith from business, faith, we proclaim himself of being a job, the same factor as the faith of love (gal5: 6)][2].

Eighth: St Paul clarifies that salvation is achieved through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and without the need for the literal application of the Law. In this manner, the door becomes fully opened for all nations, and all peoples are equally accepted. This is unacceptable to the Jews. Therefore St Paul asks: ***"Or is He the God of the Jews only?"*** **(29). St John Chrysostom** comments: [St Paul seems to be telling them: On what basis do you condemn the principle of salvation for all mankind? Does God favor and discriminate? Through his words, the Apostle underlines that by despising the Gentiles, the Jews dishonor the glory of God since they do not consider Him Lord of all mankind. Being the God of everyone, He cares for everyone and consequently saves all in the same manner, and that is through faith[3]].

That is how St Paul responds to the objections of the Jews. He underlines that God ***"shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith"***, (30)...He pours His love on all mankind in order to justify them all, and according to **St Clement of Alexandria:** [His divine grace descends like rain on the just and the unjust, (Matt 5:45)[4]].

Ninth: By declaring that the door of salvation has been opened to all mankind, St Paul does not disregard the Law for he says: ***"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law"*** (30)**.** However, he explains that the literal application of the Law makes it incapable of achieving salvation. He establishes the Law by establishing its purpose; and not by enforcing the nations to obey its literal practice. God has granted the Law to reveal our wickedness and make us discover our need for salvation and for the Savior. Now faith is the means by which this purpose is achieved in its perfection.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 7*
[2] *In Ioan tr 25:12*
[3] *In Rom. hom 7*
[4] *Strom 5:3*

CHAPTER 4- 11

Justification by faith working through love

St Paul has explained in the preceding chapters that the Gentiles have no excuse since God has granted them the Law of Nature. However, they have broken it intentionally and boldly and not just because of their weakness. As a result, they have become rebellious towards the truth, and have acted against Nature. They have corrupted their bodies, and rejoiced on account of the souls that have joined in their corruption. In the next chapters, he also dismisses the excuses of the Jews in order to underline that all mankind is corrupt and deserves the penalty of death. Hence all have become equal in their need for justification. Whether Jew or Gentile, both have become subject to death. Can one boast over the other or is there any difference between them? The Jew could have been justified by the Law of Moses, and the Gentile could have been justified by the Law of Nature!

The excuses of the Jews can be summarized in these three points:

1. Their claim to being the children of Abraham, the father of fathers.

2. Their claim to being the recipients of the Commandments or the Law of Moses.

3. Their claim to being God's chosen people, selected from among all others.

St Paul dismisses all these claims as he reveals that all these considerations cannot justify anyone. It is only through the Lord Jesus Christ that all believers-Jews and Gentiles- become the children of Abraham. They become his children by practicing his faith and not by being his physical heirs. As a result, they would enjoy the purpose of the Law of Moses-not in its literal sense –as they meet with the Messiah the focus of the Law and its purpose. Finally, all would realize that they are chosen, through the Lord, as children of God.

In this manner, St Paul draws an important conclusion in his response to Jewish thought: he proclaims that God cares and loves all mankind, although He shows that in various means and ways. Nevertheless, people have failed to achieve "righteousness" in order that all would find it in the Lord Jesus Christ: the converted and struggling Jew, as well as the Gentile, without any favoritism or discrimination.

CHAPTER 4

ABRAHAM CALLED WHILE UNCIRCUMCISED

In the past three chapters, St Paul has revealed the corruption of all mankind- Jews and Gentiles alike- and all have become in need of the One who would redeem and justify them. In this chapter, he presents examples of two righteous men from the Old Testament: Abraham is one of them, since he is the father of all fathers. He was justified through his faith even though he was uncircumcised and before he had practiced any of the instructions in the Law, especially the one concerning circumcision. The second example is David who received the promise that out of his line the Messiah and King would come. David was a child of the circumcised, yet he praised those who are righteous through faith and not through the mere practice of the Law.

St Paul focuses more on the character of "Abraham" since the Jews felt they were free just by being his physical descendants. Such a belief drove them to be arrogant and proud, rather than motivating them to live according to Abraham's ideals and faith and imitating his way of life. Therefore St Paul dismisses this claim and reveals that Abraham's power rested in his living faith which he practiced even before being circumcised, as well as after his circumcision. Consequently, he is considered the father of the uncircumcised as well as the father of the circumcised.

1-Abraham and Faith :

2- Abraham, the Father for all Believers :

3- Abraham's Faith and Our Faith :

1-Abraham and Faith :

The Apostle proclaims that the application of the Law has failed to provide the righteousness of God, and this has opened the door for all mankind to come and enjoy this righteousness through faith. He explains that Abraham was the first to receive the promise of the circumcision yet he was not justified through that (the practice of the Law). He was justified through his faith. He says: **"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God"**, (1).

Note the following points in the discourse of St Paul about Abraham and his faith:

First: "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?" (1)…St Paul seems to specify that what relates them to Abraham as a father is "the flesh". This weakens their relationship since they do not benefit of his fatherhood by having his faith. **St John Chrysostom**[1] accordingly comments that St Paul, in this manner, opens the door for the nations to enter since they are related to Abraham as they followed his example of faithfulness.

Second: Why does the Apostle choose Abraham? Why did he not choose Abel and Noah who had lived before him and were godly? In (Hebrews 11: 4), we are told that Abel was "righteous"; and in (Genesis 6: 9), we are told that **"Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations"**.

The answer is that the Apostle makes this choice based on a number of important considerations, namely:

[1] *In Rom. hom 8*

a. The Jews boasted of their lineage from Abraham who is the father of believers. When the Lord spoke to them about freedom, they answered Him and said: **"We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (Jn 8: 33)**…therefore the Apostle seeks to knock down this claim**.**

b. Neither Abel nor Noah was known as the father of believers; but we are told these words about Abraham: **"thou shalt be a father of many nations", (Gen 17: 4).**

c. Abraham is considered the connecting link between the uncircumcised and the circumcised since he lived uprightly through faith while he was uncircumcised. It was later on that he received the divine promise and became circumcised as an indication of the promise. Besides, he continued to live uprightly as a circumcised person. In this manner he embraced believers-both circumcised and uncircumcised- in his own being through faith.

Third: The Apostle does not deny that Abraham could have boasted of his achievements, but not in defiance of God. Indeed, when he obeyed the Law – such as the act of circumcision- he did not do so on account of his own virtue, for it was a gift from God granted through the covenant God had made with Him. Abraham could have also boast on account of his faith but without feeling superior to God. Rather, he could boast of having hurried into God's embrace to seize- by faith- God's covenant and promises and to earn justification before His sight. St Paul says**: "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness". (2,3)**.

If Abraham is compared with his counterparts-men of his generation- he could have boasted of his achievements before mankind. He could have boasted of being the first to be circumcised as an indication of the covenant between God and himself. He could have also boast of being greater than any of them for his good deeds…However, his real pride before God would be that he had seized God's righteousness through his faith which was evident in his everyday life. This faith was evident in his obedience to God as he worshipped Him though he was surrounded by heathens, as well as in leaving his father's home, land and family, (Gen 12). Moreover, he did not care to choose the better share when he dealt with Lot, his nephew, (Gen 13). He loved to entertain strangers, (Gen 18), and interceded on behalf of his brothers in humanity, (Ch 18). He did not hesitate to offer his son as a sacrifice (Ch 28), etc…all these acts, as well as many others were a result of his faith in God and his unity with Him and they were done to glorify God.

In other words, Abraham would not have boasted of his obedience to the Law in itself; but rather he would have boasted of his living faith. Faith enabled him to apply the Law and become justified and considered righteous in the sight of God who examines the hearts of men.

Note that there is harmony between the words of St Paul and those found in the Epistle of St James the Apostle: **"Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2: 21-23).**

St Paul proclaims that Abraham was righteous before God through his living faith and not through the ritual application of the Law- such the observance of purification and

washing. St James similarly proclaims that Abraham was justified, not through an oral, theoretical, and rigid faith; but through faith demonstrated in real life practices such as the sacrificial offering of Isaac. The deeds mentioned by St James are deeds of faith and cannot be done without faith! St Paul warns against dependence on the literal enactment of the Law; and St James warns against dependence on a faith lacking in deeds, or on a theoretical faith that is not demonstrated and applied in everyday life. St Paul asks us to practice living faith through our Lord Jesus Christ, and says: "**For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them", (Eph 2: 10).**

Fourth: Abraham, our father, had faith, and also applies the teachings of the Law as he accepted physical circumcision for himself as well as for all males of his household…However, there is a great difference between faith and the deeds ordained by the Law. St Paul says about this point: **"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (v4).**

Which is greater: the reward one gets for applying the Law or the grace obtained due to faith? There is no doubt that justification is greater than being rewarded?! Justification means God"s forgiveness of our sins, granting us His righteousness which works within us and enabling us to attain eternal glory. The Apostle has quoted from the Psalmist, King David, these words: **"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (7). St John Chrysostom** also comments: [St Paul the Apostle does not use these words randomly, for he wishes to say that those whose sins have been forgiven through grace are blessed. Therefore whoever believes and is justified is all the more qualified to be blessed; and shame is, in this manner, torn away and replaced by glory[1]].

The prophetic words: "Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven" reveal the joyous heart of the Psalmist for being freely justified without having to receive it in reward for submitting to the Law. This justification is a divine gift which God grants to his believers. **St Clement of Alexandria** says: [These blessings fill those chosen by God through the Lord Jesus Christ, "**for charity shall cover the multitude of sins", (1 Peter 4: 8)**. These have been washed through Him who desires the repentance of a sinner rather than his death, (Ezk 33: 11)[2]].

Fifth: What is this faith that will justify us?

- What does it mean "to believe in Him"? Believing in Him means loving Him, appreciating His sublimity, going to Him, and uniting with His members.
- Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is believing that He justifies sinners, believing that He is the Intercessor without Whom we can never be reconciled with God, believing in the Savior who came to seek and save those who were condemned, (Lk 19: 10), and believing in Him who said: **"... without me ye can do nothing", (Jn 15: 5).**
- Our own faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the work of the Lord Himself as He works within us. Listen and understand now that this does not take place without our participation: ", He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also". The Lord first says: "The works I do…", then we shall do after Him; therefore He

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Strom 2:15*

performs but believers perform as well. What are these works other than raising a righteous man from a wicked one?!

- The soul becomes justified or righteous by lifting herself up towards God and adhering to the One who justifies her…for if she abandons Him, she becomes evil; whereas when she returns to Him, she is justified.

Do you not realize that when a cold object draws close to the fire it gets warm? And when it is pulled away from it, it gets cold? If something is dark and it draws close to the light, does it not become illuminated? And if the light is removed, does not this object become dark? The soul is affected in a similar manner, whereas God is otherwise!

St Augustine[1]

Sixth: What does the Apostle mean when he says: **"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (5)?** Does the Apostle encourage us to ignore works so as to become justified through faith alone?

Our response is that St Paul was addressing the Jews who believed they were superior to the Gentiles by doing the works of the Law in a literal and deadly manner. These works sanctify only when they are done in a spiritual manner, so that people are driven to comprehend salvation and justification through the Lord Jesus Christ whom they awaited. At the same time, we as Christians are not justified by our good works as we do not claim them to be the outcome of our own goodness. If we do so, we would be guilty of being "self righteous" and we would impede our salvation. We do good deeds as the outcome and fruit of the Lord"s work in us. St Paul accordingly says: "… it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure", (Phil 2: 13); and "For we are labourers together with God", (1 Cor 3: 9)**.** It is for this reason that St James confirms: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also", (James 2: 26).

2- Abraham, the Father for all Believers:

St Paul makes a comparison between the works of the Law and the acts of faith in the life of our father Abraham. He proclaims the supremacy of faith by which Abraham was justified. At the same time, St Paul does not ignore the acts of the Law which Abraham obeyed and practiced, even though these were incapable of justifying him. However, he underlines the link between acts of faith and acts of the Law which do not conflict as demonstrated in the life of this father: **"…he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised**," (v11). Circumcision is a physical sign which came as a seal and confirmation to his faith and was not contradictory to it. Anyone who carries this seal should also adhere to faith… Besides, this sign was instituted after faith, for Abraham first believed when he was uncircumcised. Then he also remained faithful when he became circumcised. In this manner, his fatherhood to the uncircumcised is proclaimed if they accept to imitate him in his faith. The same applies to the circumcised if they follow in the same footsteps.

St John Chrysostom comments on the Apostle's words to reveal that the Jews have only come as guests following the uncircumcised people. They were added to the

[1] *In Ioan. Tr 29:6;53:10; 72:2;19:11*

uncircumcised, or in other words, they came to the house of faith as guests to Abraham who had accepted the faith while still uncircumcised. He says: [Since Abraham was justified and praised while he was still uncircumcised; the Jews came at a later time. Therefore, first Abraham is a father to the Gentiles which are related to him through faith; and second, he is also a father to the Jews- in other words, he is the father of both races…this is why St Paul says: **"that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also**: **And the father of circumcision", (v11, 12).** The Gentiles are related to Abraham not on account of being uncircumcised but due to their imitation of his faith. In the same manner, the Jews do not benefit by being his children on account of their circumcision if they do not believe…Therefore you are entitled to claim Abraham as your father if you follow in the footsteps of his faith; and while, at the same time, you find no conflict nor deviation in obeying the Law[1]].

St John Chrysostom considers that circumcision is just a sign that Abraham carried on account of the weakness of the Jews. Accordingly, St Paul says "that he might be the father of circumcision". However, the intention was not that they should carry the physical sign and so become his children. The intention was that they would carry what that signal conveyed, which is faith…for this sign is nothing other than the seal of faith. If the Jews do not seek faith, and are satisfied with the physical sign, then it becomes nullified and unnecessary. Besides, it is inappropriate for them who have become circumcised to despise the uncircumcised. Indeed, they should support them so that they would all come together and share the one and same faith.

The Jews have believed that they are the heirs of Abraham, who received the divine promises, just because they carry this sign which implies the practice of the Law. They have ignored their obligation to imitate Abraham's faith and to follow in his footsteps. That is why the Apostle says: "**For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect", (14).** In other words, if the Jews adhere to the practice of the Law as a sign of being heirs to what belongs to Abraham; and are satisfied with their literal application only, then they cheat faith of its deeds. Consequently, they lose the divine promise which God granted to Abraham saying that through his descendents the nations would be blessed. In contrast, if the uncircumcised have not practiced the Law literally, yet they become, through their faith, heirs to Abraham and are counted as owners of the promise, and as his children.

Dependence on the application of the law does not only deprive a person of the effect of the faith of Abraham; but it also deprives him of enjoying God's promise. It also brings upon him the wrath of God as he practices apparent acts such as circumcision and cleansing, while at the same time he breaks the commands governing behavior such as the Ten Commandments. Indeed, breaking just one of these commandments is considered a transgression. The Apostle explains this as he says: **"Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression" (15).** Without the Law, a person commits errors; but in the presence of the Law it reveals the error that a person commits by transgression of the Law and great wrath results. It is written: **"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," (Gal 3: 10).**

[1] *In Rom. hom 8*

St Augustine presents an interpretation of this verse as follows: [Before the Law was issued, it was possible to call a person a sinner but it was not possible to call him a transgressor. However, now that the Law has been delivered, he is no longer just a sinner but he is a transgressor as well. In this manner, "transgression" has been added to "sin" and so sin has been greatly multiplied[1]].

While on the one hand the Jews have lost the privilege of being heirs to the promise and have brought upon themselves the wrath not only for being sinners, but for being transgressors as well; on the other hand, faith opens for them- as well as for the uncircumcised - the possibility of being the children of Abraham the faithful believer.

"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all", (v16).

According to **St Chrysostom,** without faith no one can be saved. For the circumcised, the Law cannot justify them, and it results in wrath for all have been indicted as transgressors. Therefore faith has come to lift them out of danger, while the Law does not…faith also lifts the uncircumcised, so that all are considered children of Abraham: **"(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations)", (v17).** Just as God is the God of all mankind and is not confined to a specific nation, similarly Abraham –on account of His faith- is considered the father of all mankind according to the promise he had receive(Gen 17: 5).

3- Abraham's Faith and Our Faith :

Due to faith, the door has been opened wide for all nations to enter into the family of Abraham and to be considered as his children. So what is the substance of this faith?

The Apostle states: **(As it is written, "I have made thee a father of many nations) in the presence of him whom he believed- God, who gives life to the dead, and calls those things which do not exist as though they did,** (17).

The Apostle has borrowed this promise from Genesis 17: 5 (Septuagint Translation): "**I have made thee a father of many nations".** This promise is fulfilled according to faith alone and not according to nature, for Abraham is not the father of all nations according to the flesh.

The substance of his faith is that God **"gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did"…**who are the dead whom He raises? Or what are the things which do not exist and which He calls as though they did?

First: The inside or the bowels of Sarah were like a dead person who no longer carried life. God granted a living Isaac in these dead bowels, and according to the words of St Paul: **"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb," (19).**

The promise Abraham received was **"contrary to hope"** since no man before him had ever received a son in this manner. Therefore he became an example to those who came after him. An example as he put his hope in God who raises the dead and grants life. He had faith in God and believed He would give him children out of emptiness. This opened the door of hope for those who lived after him and conceived children in their old age and with infertile wives.

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[1] *Ser on N.T. lessons 75:2*

Second: Abraham believed he would enjoy fatherhood not only of Isaac- whom God granted to him in his old age and through the flesh of Sarah that was as though dead- but also of many Gentiles. These were dead according to nature and were unrelated physically as Abraham's children. However, God raises them from such death and presents them to Abraham as his children.

St Paul clarifies this as he says: **"Who contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall thy seed be", (18). St John Chrysostom** also comments that it was contrary to the hope of mankind regarding God, and how Abraham believed in the promise and so received it. Faith provided him with sustenance, for God did not give him any evidence or sign but just promises in words. Yet Abraham did not hesitate or doubt in spite of the great obstacle: "**He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God".(v20).**

In other words, let us learn that God fulfills His plans and promises no matter how great the impediments or hardships, for he was **"fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (21,22).**

As we have said, Abraham received the promise not only by the birth of Isaac as it were out of a void, but also by being the father of many Gentile nations through faith and not on account of any physical ties. Besides, these Gentiles were also condemned to die and as it were they were voided and non-existent due to their idolatry. When they would come and accept the faith, they would receive the gift of being raised to life as they become God"s living people and the holy Church of the New Testament. This explains the verse that says: **"And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people" (Hosea 2: 23).**

Third: Whereas sin destroys a man's life and turns him into a state of lifelessness, faith enables man to enjoy the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and to be like a person raised from the dead; or like someone who was found after having been lost. This reminds us of the father who said upon the return of his son: **"…for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found", (Lk 15: 32).** That is why **St John Chrysostom** comments on this chapter and provides us with a spiritual weapon which we should use. This weapon is faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Cross. He says:

[This weapon not only draws out the snake from its hole, but also throws it into the fire (Acts 28: 5). Besides it heals all wounds.

When someone pronounces that Name and is not healed, it would be due to his lack of faith in the words themselves. Some have spent time with the Lord and pressured Him, (Lk 8: 44- 45) and have not benefited. Yet the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years was healed even without touching Him physically. She just touched the hem of his clothes and the fountain of blood that had drained her for so long just stopped.

This Name frightens devils, and drives out poisons, and diseases. May we find the joy of being empowered by saying His Name.

What excuse can we give? If the shadow of the (Apostles) and their clothes could raise the dead (Acts 5: 15), then how do our prayers not strip us from our desires?! What is the reason for that?!...St Paul had the same nature as ours, he grew up like us, and he

lived on earth and breathed the air like us. However, he was greater and better in matters of zeal, faith, and love. Therefore let us imitate him and let us allow the Lord to speak through us. He desires that more than we do, and He has provided these teachings and wishes us to apply them. He does not desire them to be useless or a hindrance to us…

When the Lord speaks to us and His Holy Spirit shines within us, we become better than the heavens. The sun and the moon do not appear in our bodies, but the God of the sun, moon, and angels lives and works within us.

We do not say these words so that you would raise the dead and purify lepers, but so that a greater mystery than all these occurs; and that is the proclamation of love. Where there is love, there is a place for the Son to live with the Father and the Holy Spirit…it is written: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them", (Matt 18: 20). This is fulfilled as a result of the great tenderness and strong friendship ties. In other words, it is the reward of those who love each other…].

Therefore, may we have faith, similar to the faith of our father Abraham, and trust in the divine promises. On account of his faith, he received not only the power to work miracles, but a greater reward for we receive true love in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the joy of the Holy Trinity living within us. This would constitute the mystery of our lives, our joy, and our eternal glory…this is the first resurrection for our souls!

St Augustine comments as follows on the expression "**and calls those things which do not exist as though they did"…: [**You had not existed, so God created you and granted you to exist. Would He not care for you now when you have become in this state, the One who calls into existence things which do not exist as though they did?![1]].

The final point St Paul makes deals with what has been written about Abraham concerning his faith in the resurrection of the dead. He believed in God who granted him Isaac from Sarah's dead womb. He also believed God would make him the father of nations which were not his descendants through the flesh. Besides, he believed that God grants righteousness as a renewed way of life to those who die to sin…all this has been written for our sake. It addresses our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the One who raises us from death, and grants us His righteousness as a new and resurrected life evidenced by our daily walk in His ways. The Apostle says: **" Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification", (v24,25)….**

The following points stand out in this chapter:

A-The aim of the divine discourse about the faith of Abraham is to proclaim the path of true righteousness through faith…Abraham became justified through faith so that we, as his children, would be justified with him too as we seek to have that same faith. **St John Chrysostom** says that this is intended for any hearer who might ask "What has this to do us?" The Apostle intentionally relates us to our father Abraham so that we might be justified like him. Since we believe in the same God in whom Abraham believed, and we have faith in the same matters in which he trusted, then what has happened to Abraham is not restricted to him alone but will happen to everyone else.

[1] *Ser. On N.T. 19:3*

B- Abraham had received a promise concerning his descendents. This promise has been fulfilled in us by the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection. He is an offspring of Abraham according to the flesh. Abraham believed he would receive a blessing in the future through his descendents, and the Lord indicates this in His words: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad," (Jn 8"56).** As for us, we have enjoyed this promise by the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection.

Tertullian the Scholar states: [You see how the wisdom of God has killed her beasts, (Prov 2: 9), the only Son lives and restores life to others. We consider that the wisdom of God is the Lord Jesus Christ who offered Himself to redeem our sins[1]].

C- Speaking about the faith of Abraham, St Paul presents a summary of our faith. Probably there was a written church statement which the Apostles had received and were handing down, and this declared that the Lord Jesus Christ **"was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification", (25).**

He was handed over to be crucified by the will of the Father, (Rom 8: 32; Gal 1: 3); as well as by His own will, (Gal 2: 20; Eph 5: 2; Titus 2: 14). He was crucified to redeem our sins, (Rom 3: 25; Isa 53: 5, 6; Heb 9: 28; 1 Pet 2: 21,24). He was resurrected to grant us His righteousness, actively working within us as we receive the new and resurrected life.

[1] *Scorpiace 7*

CHAPTER 5
ALL ARE DESCENDENTS OF THE SAME ADAM

In addressing the issue of the lineage of the Jews from Adam according to the flesh, St Paul underlines that Abraham was righteous while he was uncircumcised as well as when he was circumcised. This was due to his faith which made him the spiritual father of every true believer. In this Chapter, the Apostle intends to reveal, without any abuse, that this man Abraham, who had the greatest faith, was Adam's son. Therefore he was one of those who had fallen under the rule of death due to Adam's rebellion, and who needed the One who would redeem him…In other words, Abraham himself had to be justified through the Lord's righteousness; and without faith this would not have been possible. In this context, **St Jerome** says: [Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, Abraham existed in the lower places, whereas after His coming, the thief was taken to Paradise[1]].

The Apostle intentionally seeks to draw everyone's attention- both Jew and Gentile- to the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and whom Abraham himself desired, (Jn 8: 56). That is of greater importance than boasting to be a physical descendent of Abraham.

The Chapter begins by revealing the fruit of God's righteousness. St Paul speaks about our condition as Adam's children, and that includes Abraham too. He then goes on to speak about our condition through the second Adam or the new Adam.

1- The Fruit of the Lord's Righteousness 1-11
2- Adam and his Children under the Rule of Death 12-14
3- The Second Adam and Grace 15-21

1- The Fruit of the Lord's Righteousness:

It is typical of St Paul to underline the positive points before addressing negative matters. In this Chapter, before speaking about the negative condition of Adam and his descendents under the rule of death due to insubordination- and including Abraham among them; he begins by revealing the positive results of righteousness. These are the fruits which all the spiritual children of Abraham enjoy, and they can be summarized in the following points:

First- Enjoying peace with God (1)

Second-Enjoying grace in the present and hoping in eternal glory (2)

Third- Transcending all tribulation (3, 4)

Fourth- Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of love (5)

Fifth-Experiencing God's love in the Cross (6-11)

Note the following aspects in these sublime fruits:

a. We enjoy meeting the Holy Trinity and experience His love and work in us: (Peace with God the Father, pouring of love by the Holy Spirit who lives in us, experiencing the divine love through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ).

b. Fruit on an eternal scale, for we are eternally reconciled and glorified…however, we do receive a warranty in our present life: "this grace wherein we stand', (2).

Let us now elaborate on these fruits:

[1] *Ep.60:3*

First: Enjoying peace with God

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"(1).

It seems to us that the "peace with God' that is mentioned in this verse has a different meaning than the "peace from God' mentioned in (Romans 1: 7); or "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding' mentioned in Phil 4: 7. The divine peace which we enjoy is "an inner peace' which God grants as a spiritual blessing that leads a person to exist in harmony with his aims and behavior. As a result, that person lives and works spiritually and physically with the peace of God and to the glory of His kingdom. God also grants such a person to have peace with others, and to desire to sacrifice his whole life for them through the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning the "peace with God', this implies a total change in our condition as we move from a state of animosity- in which we were, to a state of being adopted children, of love, and of friendship…or it could indicate a liberation from a condition of decline due to sin and rebellion into a condition of reconciliation with the Father, achieved through the Blood. As a result, we are counted by the Lord Jesus Christ the only Son as His children, and as the object of His joy and pleasure. This is the first fruit of the "righteousness of God'. We disappear in Him and become counted righteous and reconciled in Him while we live in true peace with the Father. In agreement with this thought, St Peter the Apostle says: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit,' (1 Peter 3: 18).

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [what does the Apostle intend when he says **that "we have peace'**? Some explain it as an outcome of not being in contradiction through rebellion against the Law. Personally, we consider that this is relevant specifically to this present discussion; for having debated at length on the subject of faith, and having given faith the first place before justification through deeds, no one should imagine that what he has said could serve as a basis of degradation. That is why the Apostle says: "May we have peace'; with the implication of "may we not sin again', "may we not go back to our old condition'. Indeed, this would lead to waging war with God. How can we attain such peace? Through the Lord Jesus Christ we can secure this condition now more than ever. When we were burdened with sin, we were liberated from them all through Him; therefore we can retain that peace now even more than before. There is a difference between accepting peace where it was not there before, and between retaining it once we possess it. Surely, receiving it is harder than retaining it; yet what is hard has become possible and has been fulfilled. Therefore, we should strive to attain what is easier by holding on to the Lord Jesus Christ who has granted us the blessing that is harder to get…He has reconciled us while we were at war with God, therefore it is conceivable that we remain in a state of reconciliation [1] ……].

In other words we, who were in a state of animosity with the Father, have entered into peace with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. How much greater that peace will be when we maintain this condition now that we have been reconciled to Him. However, this will be achieved by the Lord Himself as well as through our own personal effort. Let us maintain "peace' as a divine gift while at the same time entering into a close relationship with Him! **St John Chrysostom** says: [When we were estranged, He has

[1] *In Rom. hom 9*

brought us to Him in order to draw us close to Him. How much more will He protect us-now that we are close?![1]].

Second: Enjoying grace in the present and hoping in eternal glory

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (2)

Time does not terrify us any longer. For many, the past has gone by and is lost, the present is painful, and the future is unknown. As for us who have entered with faith into "the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ', the past represents a blessing to us. We see the events of the redemption, which have transpired as history, to be still alive and affecting our depths and our behavior. The present is joyful for us as we live by the "divine grace' for we enjoy peace with God. Concerning the future, it has been uncovered since we live "in the hope of the glory of God'. In this manner, time is neither terrifying nor lost any longer: the past is active in the present, and the present is a warranty to the future, and the future is coming up through the warranty of the present…

Faith in the Crucified has opened to us "this grace wherein we stand'. The grace of being adopted children which we have received through the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism (Jn 3: 5). Through baptism, we experience the events of the Cross and the resurrection as an actual and present reality. Consequently, we hold dear the grace of enjoying the eternal glory of God as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ', (Rom 8: 17).

St John Chrysostom comments on these apostolic words (Rom5: 2) as follows:

[Allow me to ask you to meditate on how the Apostle underlines constantly these two points: God's role, and our role. Concerning God's role- in every way- there are many matters, numerous and various; for He died for us, reconciled and bought us for Himself, and granted us unspeakable grace. Concerning our role, we only offer a living faith. That is why he says: "**we have access by faith into this grace…"** Ask me: What is this grace? You have been counted worthy of knowing God, you have been snatched away from sin, introduced to the Truth, and received all the blessings of baptism!! The purpose of bringing us to Him is that we accept these gifts. Indeed, we have not been granted the forgiveness of sin only to be reconciled, but also in order to receive endless blessings.

God has not limited His gifts to the above blessings, for He has promised us other ones which transcend expression as they transcend our comprehension and language. He therefore does not speak about them to us. However, as he speaks about grace, the Apostles explain those we have received in our present life and reveals things to come as he says that we **"…rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (2).**

The Apostle rightly says "**this grace wherein we stand'** since this is the nature of God's grace: without end and without limits. Contrary to matters related to mankind, we enjoy greater gifts constantly through grace. To illustrate what we mean, we give this example: When a person receives glory or authority, he does not retain these eternally for they are ultimately withdrawn from him. If this does not happen by means of another person, death will certainly come and deprive him of all that. As for the gifts of God, they are not subject to such factors since no person, circumstances, catastrophes, or even the devil or death can steal them away. On the contrary, when death comes, we are all the more certain of our inheritance and entitlement to the divine gifts; and we enjoy them all

[1] *Ibid*

the more…that is why the Apostle says that we **"…rejoice in hope of the glory of God"** He wishes us to learn the conditions of having a believer's soul so that we might be confident that blessings have been provided. On this account, we rejoice that we have actually attained these gifts…which he has called "glory', for it is fellowship in the glory of God[1]…].

In this manner, **St John Chrysostom** focuses on the expression "**wherein we stand"** as it is an indication of the continuity of the work of divine grace in our lives. Once we have submitted to His grace, accepted it, and responded to it, it does not stop working. Indeed, its work becomes more powerful and brilliant with time. Moreover, when it is time for us to depart out of this world, we will enjoy fellowship in the divine glory.

Third: Transcending all tribulation

Some might wonder: Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ leads us to Him who grants us His righteous. Consequently we enjoy peace with God, and our hearts are filled with hope of the glory of God. But we ask: What is the role of this righteousness in our lives in moments when we are confronted with tribulation for these occur all the time?

St Paul answers this question as he proclaims that the Lord Jesus Christ, through His righteousness with which He divests us, tears away these difficulties and raises us above them. Consequently, we transcend them or go through them while we regard them as precious since they represent the mystery of our nomination for more and greater blessings. In this manner, our hope is not destroyed by despair. On the contrary, it becomes stronger due to our patience throughout our trials, and as St Paul states**: "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience; and patience, character; and character (or experience), hope…" (3, 4).**

Apparently, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ not only affects eternal glory but also touches our daily life. However, it does not do so by changing the circumstances all around us so that we might enjoy temporal peace. It affects us by changing our inner hearts and thoughts and consequently enables us to transcend pain. We get to consider that pain is the path to fellowship with the suffering Lord, and the means of being chosen due to our patience. In this context St Peter says: "**That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory" (1 Peter 1: 7);** and **St James** says: **"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (James 1: 12).**

St John Chrysostom comments as follows:

[Even as we go through hardships in our present life, (the grace of God) grants us the power to sparkle and to become more worthy of our reward…

Now, let us meditate on the forthcoming matters. Even as we consider the matters which cause grief, we are joyful. Great are the gifts of God! Nothing is despicable in them. Note that in order to attain superficial material benefits, struggle and pain and hardship go hand in hand. Nevertheless, the honors and the rewards bring along joy as well. But in the context of a believer's life, the situation is different since the taste of tribulation is not less than the taste of the rewards. In our present life, we find secondary trials but we find hope in the kingdom of God. We face terror now, but there is the expectation of blessings…He sets out the penalty first here on earth before rewarding the

[1] *Ibid*

crowns for he states that we should "glory (boast) in tribulation…and he mentions himself to his hearers as an example in order to encourage them. They should glory in tribulations not only on account of future expectations but also on account of the present since trials are inherently beneficial. How can that be? Because hardships give us the quality of patience. That is why, after having stated that we are glorified in tribulation, he explains why that is so: **"…knowing that tribulation produces patience and patience, character; and character (or experience), hope…"** Tribulations, which by nature reduce hope to a distant commodity, become a factor in promoting hope and confirming it. Before receiving the forthcoming blessings, tribulations produce a tremendous fruit which is the fruit of "patience'. This transforms the tested person into an experienced individual, while at the same time contributing- to a certain degree-in the forthcoming events by granting within us a passionate hope. Nothing could incline a person to hope to receive blessings more than a righteous conscience... indeed hope is granted, yet it is not hope in human or earthly matters which quickly vanishes and disappoints expectations…no, our share or reward is not of that kind. Our hope has a firm and definite quality since the Giver of the promise lives eternally. We, who rejoice in Him, even though we shall die, yet we shall arise again. Therefore our hope will not be disappointed…[1]].

The saints recognize the blessing of facing tribulation in this world, for it glorifies them inwardly before God. This glory will be more evident in the life to come. This has led **St Jerome** to say the following: [A saint does prays for tribulation rather than for comfort][2].

When we turn to the words of **St John Chrysostom,** we note his amazing evangelical concept of the word "patience'. He considers patience to be a "reward' and not just some human endeavor or ability to tolerate hardships…How could that be? It is because "patience' is a feature that marked the life of the Lord Jesus Christ of whom we are told: "…endured the cross, despising the shame…For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls…" (Heb 12: 2,3). In another passage, the Apostle says: "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thes 3: 5), Therefore patience is a divine blessing or a fellowship and sharing in "the patience of the Lord'. This provides the soul with sweetness even while struggling with tribulations. This is what the Beloved John confirms in these words: "…your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1: 9).

Therefore tribulations produce patience, and this constitutes fellowship and sharing in the patience of the Lord Jesus Christ!!!

Fourth: The gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of love

The Lord Jesus Christ proclaims His righteousness within us and so elevates us above pain. He transforms hardship into a source of glory even while we live on this earth. Therefore let us endure these hardships armed with His patience, and hold on to the hope for eternal glory. Besides, through His Holy Spirit, He grants us "the love of God' which He pours within our hearts to support and save us from disappointment. In other words, our patience during tribulations and our tolerance of pain does not depend on our own strong determination or on our human capacity; but they are the result of God's work

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *On Ps. Hom 39*

within us. He generously pours His love upon all who struggle spiritually for the sake of His name and through the power of His grace.

The Apostle says: **"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (5).** The mystery of having power during hardship and the blooming of hope in our hearts is a gift of the Holy Spirit who lives within us and who grants the unchanging love of God generously. St Paul uses the words "has been poured out' as though this is done without limits and as something that is poured out from heaven to fill the heart.

❖ The Apostle does not use the expression "has been given'. Rather, he says "has been poured into our hearts' to indicate its richness. This is the greatest gift: He has not granted the heavens, the earth, or the sea. He has granted us what is more precious than all that, for He has made us human beings into angels. Indeed, He has even made us children of God and brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, what is this gift? It is the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Had He not desired to reward us with great crowns for our struggle, He would not have granted us such gifts which are capable of supporting us in our struggle. It is in this manner that He proclaims His warm love with which He honors us. Rather than granting us this gift gradually, or little by little, He does so by pouring generously His Holy Spirit who is the Source of divine gifts; and He does so before the struggle begins.

Even though you may not deserve in any way, He has not despised you. Indeed, He has granted you the love of your Debtor as a powerful and supportive Helper. That explains the words of the Apostle: **"…hope does not disappoint…"** for all things are granted in the light of God's love and not due to our own good deeds.

Having indicated the gift of the Holy Spirit, St Paul goes back to the theme of the Cross.

St John Chrysostom[1]

❖ The Apostle desires to proclaim that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us…this holy love is so utterly sublime and St John the Beloved informs us that this love not only comes from God but it is God Himself: "**God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 Jn 4: 16).**

Fr Youssef[2]

❖ By these apostolic words, we understand that the Holy Spirit is not the performer but He is the provider and source of the abundant divine love.

St Ambrose[3]

❖ Just as your body is considered dead when it is stripped of its spirit, that is when the soul has departed from it, similarly your soul is dead without the Holy Spirit. In other words, your soul without love is considered dead.

❖ God's love, which is poured into our hearts and granted through the Holy Spirit, unifies the many souls into one soul; and the many hearts into one heart. How much

[1] *In Rom. hom 9*
[2] *Cassian: Conf 16:13*
[3] *Of the Holy Spirit 1:8 (94)*

more are the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit united in the one God, the one Light, and the one Beginning?!

❖ Being members united as one entity together, what is it that establishes this unity other than love which brings us together?!

❖ May you have loved in order to gain everything. Indeed, without love all that you might have would be useless. What you do need to know is that the love we are speaking about refers to the Holy Spirit. Listen to the words of the Apostle: **"…love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Ghost who was given to us'.**

St Augustine[1]

❖ [On the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of martyrs by the pouring of the divine love within them].

He has made them martyrs through the active role of the Holy Spirit within them. This enabled them to tolerate the hardship of all kinds of persecution, and to shine brilliantly with the divine fire. In this manner, the warmth of their love to spread the Word did not diminish.

St Augustine[2]

❖ St Paul says: "**…love of God has been poured out into our hearts";** and so that no one would imagine that the love of God is due to his own credit, the apostle adds: "**by the Holy Ghost who was given to us".** Therefore in order to love God, receive Him to live within you; and so "Love' Him will reside in you. This means that His love will direct, energize, and enlighten you.

❖ Angels and human beings receive wisdom only when they enjoy fellowship in this wisdom. Through the Holy Spirit, who pours love into our hearts, we become united and attain wisdom.

St Augustine[3]

❖ [The love of God, which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, enables us not only to fulfill the commandments of the Law, but also to delight in fulfilling the biblical commandments which seem difficult and impossible:]

"**…because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Ghost who was given to us", (Rom 5: 5).**

Such love enables a believer to be free of all other concerns and of any desire to do what is forbidden, while he never neglects matters he has been ordered to fulfill. He constantly yearns for God's love as he strives towards his goal without giving in to trivial pleasures. Indeed, a believer does not seek even such matters that are permissible to him.

The Law permits having a legal wife, and this places a restraint on pleasures and crudeness since it indicates that having one wife should be enough. However, this does not cancel stirrings of physical desires and the difficulty of quenching the fire which is constantly being provided with fuel; even though it is not allowed to run loosely outside…As for those who are filled, through the grace of the Savior, with the holy love of purity, they demolish all the thorns of physical passions by the fire of divine love…

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[1] *In Ioan, tr 9:8; 39:5; 27:9; 32:8*
[2] *Ibid 94:2*
[3] *Ser. On N.T. lessons 78:4; Harm. Of the Gospel 1:34*

The same applies to those who are satisfied with paying the tithes and firstlings they definitely go wrong in the manner of distribution or quantification…As for those who have not rejected the Lord's advice, but have abandoned all their possessions to the poor, and have carried their Cross and followed the Grantor of grace, sin has no authority over them. Indeed, they have no anxiety concerning their daily food A person who pays tithes and firstlings definitely struggles to be free from the power of sin. As for the one who has followed the grace of the Savior, he has become liberated of the love of possessions…

Fr Theonas[1]

Fifth: Experiencing God's love in the Cross

The Apostle speaks about "the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ' and relates the work of the second Icon, who is the incarnate Word of God (the Lord Jesus Christ), to the work of the first and third Icons. It is through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ that the Father grants us His Holy Spirit (the third Icon) to dwell in us and to pour His divine love within us. In other words, "man' is the object of pleasure of the one God having three icons or manifestations. God works incessantly to raise man to His glory for "man' is His son, his darling, and friend who will live eternally with Him.

The Holy Trinity works within us by pouring God's love within our hearts. This love has been revealed in the fullness of its depth in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, St Paul says: **For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation, (6-11).**

This is what the Holy Spirit proclaims in us: God's sublime love to be reconciled with us through the Cross. In this proclamation, note the following:

(a) St Paul names this proclamation as "the love of God poured out in our hearts'. There is a difference between having intellectual knowledge about the Cross and having empirical, practical knowledge. Intellectual knowledge can be enjoyed through the study of the Holy Bible, namely through the testimony of the Law, and the prophecies. These have paved the way to our comprehension of the mystery of redemption or the mystery of God's love through the Cross. Empirical knowledge, on the other hand, is granted by the Holy Spirit to our innermost depths. He carries the soul and soars with it towards the Cross where she meets with her crucified Bridegroom and realizes His love for her, As a result, she is ignited by the flames of true love, and yearns to reciprocate that love.

(b) This love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts is nothing new for God. It has been in His plan since eternity, but He has carried it out for our redemption at the convenient time, or "at the set time', or "in the fullness of time'. We are told : "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, (Gal 4: 4,5).

[1] *Cassian: Conf 21:33*

(c) God has offered this love for our sake while we are, as St Paul states, **"weak'** and **"sinners**. We are "weak' for we are overcome by sin and fall under its power and slavery. Besides, we are "sinners' as we have not only submitted to sin due to our weakness, but we also have fanned its fire and indulged in it violently and completely with our own free will. Indeed, we indulge in sin knowingly and recklessly.

As sinners, we feel that we are weak, and in need of a physician to treat our weakness and to grant us power instead. We also feel we are sinners, in need of the Holy One to grant us unity with Him, and so strip away our corruption and heal us by experiencing His holiness within us.

(d) St Paul intends to underline God's immense love for us. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ has offered His life for us while we were weak and sinners. According to human logic, through struggle and hardship, it is possible for someone to die on behalf of a righteous person. Besides, one might imperil his life for a good person. However, it appears impossible that someone would die on behalf of a wicked sinner!!

What is the difference between a righteous and a good person? In the rabbinic literature, we are told that a righteous person is someone who tells his neighbor that all what I have belongs to me, and all what you have belongs to you. In contrast, the good person is someone who tells his neighbor that all what you have belongs to you and all what I have belongs to you as well[1]. In other words, a righteous person acts according to what is fair and gives everyone his due while holding on to his rights as well. As for the good man, he acts in love and desires to give to others what belongs to him. In the Christian understanding, the righteous person is someone who carries the Lord's righteousness within him; and a good person is someone who carries the Lord's goodness. It is as though righteousness and goodness are the two features of the Lord shinning in and through our lives.

The Lord Jesus Christ has not died for the good and the just. He has died for the sake of sinners rebelling against Him and nursing hostility towards Him.

❖ Meditate upon the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who has been crucified for the sake of sinners and enemies; while no one would run to die even for the sake of a good person.

St John Chrysostom[2]

❖ He has loved us while we were His enemies and indulging in sin. In spite of that, the full truth is reported in these words: **"You hate all workers of iniquity" (Ps 5: 5).** On this account, it becomes truly amazing and divine that even when He despises what is in us yet He loves us. Actually, what He despises in us is the picture of things He has not created in us …He despises what He has not made in us, and loves what He has created in us (He despises wickedness and He loves the soul that yearns for her salvation).

St Augustine[3]

(e).St Paul speaks about the "righteousness' of our Lord Jesus Christ which proclaims its full reward in the forthcoming eternal life. **St John Chrysostom**[4] considers that the Apostle intended to underline, in this chapter, the joy of the divine promises concerning eternal glory. He does so through the following provisions:

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[1] *The Honorable Treasure In Gospel Interpretation-Epistle to the Romans, p72 (Arabic)*
[2] *In Rom. hom 9*
[3] *In Ioan. Tr 110:6*
[4] *In Rom. hom 9*

* **Faith** in God who has promised and is able to keep His promise (1).

* **Grace** that has been granted to us and we stand enjoying it right now (2).

* **Tribulation** which presents us with hope (3,4).

* The **Holy Spirit** that has been granted and pours love into our hearts (5).

* The **Lord's death** in a manner filled with love, for He died for the sake of sinners and not for the righteous. He died to reconcile and justify us and so making us eternally His sons and heirs…and without the need for Him to die again.

The Apostle uses this method to lead us on from one provision to the next. At times, he uses the evidence of our faith in God who has granted us peace with Him and so we have come closer to Him. At other times, he speaks of His grace actively working within us and opening our vision of hope in heavenly matters. A third evidence is His work with us as we go through trials which He transforms into glory, making us have a foretaste of it. A fourth provision is that of His Holy Spirit who dwells in us and declares God's infinite love. Finally, he calls us to meditate on the Lord's wounds and crucifixion! All these are evidence that drive us to fully trust His divine promises and to enjoy fellowship in His glory.

(f) The matter does not end with certainty that we will receive eternal glory, for the Apostle states: **"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (11)…**What are the implications of these words?

St John Chrysostom considers that we not only enjoy the blessing of redemption here on earth and have hope in eternal glory; but God Himself becomes our glory, honor and joy (pride)…He treats us as a friend deals with his friends, as a lover with his beloved. Therefore we rejoice with Him even more than we rejoice for His kingdom, (although the Kingdom is a separate matter) for we seek to enjoy being with God Himself.

In other words, we have been granted reconciliation so that we might enjoy the greatest gift which is being God's beloved ones. We do not only stand by His side like the heavenly hosts who love Him, but we carry Him dwelling within us seated on His throne!

(g) **St Caprianus** meditates on God's love as it is expressed in these apostolic words and says: [As we reflect on God's love and mercy, it is appropriate that we should not be harsh, violent, or severe in reprimanding our brothers. Rather, we need to be sad with those who grieve, cry with those who weep, and lift them up as best we can through assistance and provision of love. We should neither be too harsh in repelling their repentance nor be too lenient and compulsive as they seek fellowship[1]].

2. Adam and His Children under the Rule of Death:

The discourse of St Paul on the physical fatherhood of Abraham leads us to the topic of the need for Abraham to qualify himself-through his faith and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the evidence of the fruit of Christ's righteousness in a believer's life…In the next part, the Apostle explains the submission of all Adam's children –and that surely includes Abraham- to death. Consequently, there is the need for all to receive the grace and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is clear in the following verses:

[1] *Ep.51:19*

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come...).(12-14).

In this section of the discourse, the Apostle clarifies the following points:

First: He reveals the reason why death has come and reigns over mankind. He intends to underline later on the power of the Lord's righteousness which He has granted us. **St John Chrysostom** comments: [Just as the best doctors do their utmost to diagnose the source of disease and conclude the remedy for it, so does the good St Paul too. He begins by stating that we have been justified, and confirms that this has been achieved through the patriarch Abraham, the (Holy) Spirit, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (who would not have died had there been no need for justification). Then he confirms and elaborates on his earlier statements by referring to other elements, and achieves his aim by presenting an opposing factor and that is death and sin[1]].

It is as though the Apostle is questioning: When has death been introduced? How has it conquered? He then answers: "**Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"**, (12). He indicates that sin was introduced by the first man and death seized and reigned over him. Then all men became sinners even though they did not fall into the same sin yet sin invaded human nature yet remained unrevealed. With the delivery of the Law, man's rebellion against certain Laws was revealed: "**for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (13).**

The seeds of death were sown with sin since Adam, yet death was not the fruit of rebellion against the Law but it was the fruit of rebellion of our father Adam…death reigned over those who did not rebel against the Law but **"even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come', (14).**

❖ Through Adam, I have fallen, I have been expelled from Paradise, and I have died. How would God retrieve me except by finding me guilty through Adam since that is my condition, Now, however, I am justified through the Lord Jesus Christ

St Ambrose[2]

❖ Consequently the Lord tells us to: "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world', (Jn 16: 33).

He said these words as a fit wrestler, and not only for being God but also to reveal that our body- (which He had taken upon Him)- is a conqueror over pain, death, and corruption.

Sin entered into the world through the flesh, and death reigned through sin over all mankind. Yet sin was demolished through the likeness of the same flesh (the likeness of sinful flesh).Through the burial of the flesh and the revelation of the First Born of the resurrection, sin has been conquered, and death has been dismantled of his authority. That

[1] *In Rom. hom. 10*
[2] *On Belief of Resur. 2:6*

has laid the foundation of righteousness that has spread throughout the world through faith, as well as through the preaching of the kingdom of heaven among mankind, and the building of friendship between God and men.

St Gregory, the Miracle Maker[1]

❖ Even children who do not sin in their own lives yet according to the human race they do break God's covenant, for all have sinned through one man.

St Augustine[2]

Second: St Iraneous[3] considers that through sin **"death reigned from Adam to Moses" (14).** However, when the Law was delivered in the time of Moses, sin was revealed and considered wrong; and death was denounced as a usurper who had seized the kingdom, and a criminal who burdens mankind.

Third: What does the Apostle intend to convey by these words: **"Adam who is a type of Him who was to come**", (14)? **St John Chrysostom** answers and says: Just as through one all have been condemned, so through one, righteousness has been granted to all believers. Just as all have been subject to death even though they have not eaten with Adam of the tree, similarly salvation has been granted without it being a reward for anyone's virtue. It is thanks to the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ who has granted us salvation through the tree of the Cross.

St John Chrysostom underlines that this does not mean that sin and grace are alike, or that death and life are related, for God and the devil are not comparable!

Fourth: If death has reigned over mankind due to Adam, then the Word of God has come, incarnated as the second Adam, to tear away the power of death over mankind.

❖ Sin reigned from Adam to Moses, but the coming of the Word has destroyed death (2 Tim 1: 10). No longer will we all die through Adam (1 Cor 15: 22), but we all have become alive through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Pope Saint Athanasius[4]

❖ Since old times "death reigned from Adam to Moses'; but now the divine Voice declares: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise', (Lk23: 43). The holy saint felt this grace when he said: "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence', (Ps 94: 17).

The Holy Pope Saint Athanasius[5]

❖ By committing sin, man became fallen and everything was disturbed by his fall: death reigned from Adam to Moses, the earth became cursed, hell was opened up, Paradise was closed, the heavens became clouded, and man ultimately became corrupt and beastly, (Ps 49: 12). At the same time, the devil gained grandeur and arrogance towards us. Therefore God, in His merciful love did not desire man- whom He had created in His image – to be destroyed, and He asked "Whom shall I send and who shall go for Us?', (Isa. 6: 8), When all were silent, the Son replied: "Here I am, send Me'. He was therefore told: "Go, and man was delivered to Him as the Word became incarnated. By putting on the flesh, man became wholly good; for man was delivered

[1] *12 Topics of Faith 12*
[2] *City of God 16:27*
[3] *Adv Haer 3:18:7*
[4] *Against Arians, Dise 1:59*
[5] *Pasch.Ep.5:3*

to Him as to a physician who would heal him from the sting of the snake. Consequently, He would grant life to man, resurrecting him from death, illuminating him and dispelling the darkness. By being incarnated, the Lord renewed the reasoning nature He recovered and restored all things back to goodness and perfection.

The Holy Pope Saint Athanasius[1]

3-The Second Adam and Grace:

In the previous sections, St Paul has exposed the effects of the first sin which was committed by Adam, and which resulted in the rule of death over everyone. It ruled even over those who had no written Law and where, therefore, there could be no rebellion against any specific and known sin. Now, the Apostle exposes the effects of divine grace which the second Adam has offered in order to redeem the world from the death of sin, and to grant believers eternal life. In this manner, he reveals the difference between the influence and fruit of sin and the influence and fruit of grace.

"But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (15).

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [We could paraphrase the Apostle's words in this manner: If sin has such far reaching effects though it has been committed by a single person, then how much greater would the effect of grace be- the grace of God, which belongs to the Father and to His Son as well- would it not overflow?!...It might seem unreasonable to punish a person due to the sin committed by another one; but what is more acceptable and reasonable is that one person is saved by another one[2]…].

"And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification" (16).

St John Chrysostom writes the following: [Sin is powerful as it produces death and condemnation; whereas grace not only redeems one sin but all the sins that follow. In order to avoid misunderstanding the words "as' and "so' used in the above verse as an indication that blessings and misfortunes are equated; and in order to avoid thinking – every time you hear the name "Adam'- that the sin he committed is the only one that is forgiven, therefore the Apostle says: **"the free gift is of many offences unto justification'…**for justification took place after countless sins were committed after the one that took place in Paradise.

Where there is justification, life is essentially present in all its aspects and this is coupled with endless blessings. On the other hand, where there is sin, there is death. Justification is more than life. It is the essence of life…

The Apostle has stated earlier that if by one man's sin all have died, then how much is the grace of One more powerful to grant salvation… he now underlines that grace has power not only to strip away sin but it also grants justification. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ has offered goodness not just as much as Adam has caused harm, for He has offered immeasurably ever so much more[3]].

We have inherited Adam's rebellion and have carried this feature within us. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ has come, bringing His grace, to offer us His "**obedience'** as a living blessing. By receiving the Lord's feature of obedience within us,

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[1] *On Luke 10:22*
[2] *In Rom. hom 10*
[3] *Ibid*

we possess it as an element that is natural to us, and which affects our whole being, and not just a superficial and outward virtue. St Paul explains: **"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (19)**. This new justified nature, a nature of obedience to the Father by the Son, is reflected in all our behavior. As a result, we desire that it would be possible for everyone to be blessed with obedience. **St Ambrose** reflects on this point and says: [We pray that they would accept the path of obedience as the Lord showed Himself obedient; and as we adhere to Him, and as we tell those who stir trouble for us before the emperor: "We give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God'. We pay taxes to Caesar and do not withhold it; and we are members of the Church that is no concern of Caesar's. Indeed, Caesar can never be entitled to enter into the Temple of God[1]].

Once more, St Paul underlines that there is no point of comparison between the harm inflicted upon us by sin- however great- and the benefits we enjoy through the Lord's grace and righteousness. He proclaims: **"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (17).**

St John Chrysostom explains this statement to clarify that the Apostle has not used "grace', but he has used "abundance of grace' in his discourse. Indeed, by His grace we have not just received cleansing from sin, but we have received greater things:

A. we have been liberated from punishment
B. We have been liberated from evil
C. We have received a new birth from above
D. We have received the gift of resurrection or the resurrected life

The Lord Jesus Christ has granted us salvation, adoption, and holiness. Consequently, we have become brothers of the Only Begotten Son, and have a share in His inheritance. We are considered His Body and He is the Head, and consequently, we have become united with Him.

All these blessings have led St Paul to use the expression **"abundance of grace"** He seeks to underline that what we have received is not merely a medication to heal wounds. These are blessings that enable us to enjoy health, peace, perfection, honor, and glory- matters that surpass our nature. Each one of these blessings is sufficient to tear death away from us, Yet He has granted us all these gifts, and this indicates that death no longer has any effect whatsoever and holds not even a shadow of a threat.

St John Chrysostom believes that in this manner we are like a person in debt who owes ten coins or talents. Since he could not repay he was put in prison, as well as his wife and children. Then a Person came and gave him not only enough to pay his debt, but also gave him ten thousand gold coins, led him out of prison to the Throne, granted him great authority, and made him His partner in the sublime glory and majesty. Naturally, this person no longer remembers the subject of his debt! In that same manner, the Lord Jesus Christ pays for us more that what we owe…endless blessings more than can be contained by the oceans compared to a small little pit.

God's blessings have wiped away the subjects of sin and death…we have become preoccupied with the great abundance of His special blessing of eternal life.

[1] *Ser against auxentius 36*

St Jerome writes about the abundance of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ or the work of His message and gospel which destroys the death of sin. He says: [Through the Lord Jesus Christ- that is, through His gospel- He has opened for us the door of Paradise and death now brings joy and not sadness[1]].

St Paul presents a comparison between the effect of sin and the effect of divine grace. We therefore find that, as a result of the abundance of grace that the Lord Jesus Christ has granted us, we no longer fear sin or dread the death resulting from it. Rather, we become preoccupied with the glories that His sublime grace has prepared for us. Then the Apostle goes on to compare between the Laws and grace and says: **"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (20,21).**

St John Chrysostom (Rom5: 20-21) states that actually the Law had been given to reduce rebellion and demolish it. However, the result was just the opposite due to the carelessness of those who received it and not due to the nature or contents of the Law. So the Law revealed rebellion and condemned the rebels more severely. Yet we are not afraid because the Law has not been given in order to increase our punishment, but so that we might accept grace that has greatly increased. Indeed, grace has been offered to us not only to release us from punishment but to grant us life as well. We have become like a person who was very sick but who has become healed as well as beautified, strengthened, and honored. We are also like a person who was hungry and who has now received great wealth and authority, besides food, to nourish him.

Some might wonder: "How has sinned increased due to the Law?' That is because countless commandments were delivered and they were all disobeyed, leading to great rebellion.

The Law has also revealed the origin of sin and death. It has indicated that sin had become armed with death to demolish righteousness. However, grace has demolished the weapon of death and has granted us the sublime righteousness of everlasting eternal life.

St Augustine presents an explanation for the increase of sin as a consequence of the Law. He says: [The Law came so that rebellion increased since prohibition aroused desire and inflamed it (Romans 7: 7). That is how rebellion, which did not exist before the Law came about; even though sin did exist (even before the Law). Where there is no Law, there is no rebellion, (Romans 5: 20). It is through the Law that the power of sin increased. Besides, there was no assistance from grace, and there was prohibition from sin. That has lead the Apostle to state that **"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law', (1 Cor 15: 56).**

Therefore, it is not astonishing that the weakness of man has transformed the Law- which is good-into an element that increases evil, although it was entrusted to him to obey it.

Truly, they are "ignorant of God's righteousness" (Rom 10: 3) which He grants to the weak ones. The nation of Israel sought to establish its own self-righteousness, a matter that weak ones could avoid. They no longer submitted to the righteousness of God, and became corrupt and arrogant. Yet, the Law- as a teacher- led to grace those who had become criminals, and these sought **"the Physician"** as they suffered from many wounds. Therefore God grants joy to those who seek Him by doing good rather than by

[1] *Ep. 39:4*

submitting to the deadly pleasures of desire. Through virtue they attain a greater joy, and their land (or lives) produces fruit (Ps 135: 12). From these fruits, the soldier feeds (the spirit) that overcomes sin through the help of God[1]].

[1] *On Continence*

CHAPTER 6
BELIEVERS ARE GOD'S ADOPTED CHILDREN

St Paul the Apostle ends his refutation of the claim of the Jews to being Abraham's physical children by explaining that through faith Abraham was justified even while being uncircumcised. Through that same faith, he was justified when he became circumcised. Consequently, he is the father of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised- he is the father of all men. If we desire to claim to be Abraham's children, we need to be justified with him through faith. The Apostle moves on from underlining that we are the children of Abraham to lift us up to status of being the children of God Himself through the waters of baptism. This is what both converted Gentiles as well as converted Jews enjoy as they all seek to live as children of God, and as they struggle through life. They reflect the resurrected life of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives, and offer their bodies as instruments of God's righteousness after they had been corrupt instruments of sin. This is the meaning of the new found liberty: It is not the physical relationship with Abraham that matters; it is the practice of a holy life through divine grace and with the spirit of adoption that matters.

1-The New Life through Baptismv 1-14
2-Freedom through the Lord Jesus Christ 15-23

1- The New Life through Baptism :

In the previous chapter, St Paul spoke about the abundance of God's free grace. It does not end at washing us of sin and erasing all its traces, but it also floods us with God's innumerable blessings and offers us eternal life as we enjoy fellowship in the divine glory and sublime heavenly inheritance…In this manner, St Paul confirms how the work of grace surpasses sin. Besides, we have to lead a life that is sanctified and pleasing to God and as is fitting to those who have received and evaluate His blessings. The Apostle stresses this point and elaborates on it in this chapter as he explains our adoption through the grace of baptism. He says:

*"**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*** **(6:1-4).**

God, in His mercy, has covered us with the abundance of His grace in order to tear away all traces of sin, and so He has been glorified in us who are sinners. This should not drive us to be careless in our condemnation of sin or as we struggle against it. Indeed, we need to abandon sin, and to behave as is fitting for God's children. We have received this gift of being His adopted children on account of His grace. In this manner, St Paul speaks about 'baptism' to enable us to comprehend our new status due to grace; and to encourage us to struggle through life as God's children.

This is the service of the Church: to affirm to believers, like a mother towards her children, God's free gift of grace which should motivate us to struggle earnestly and constantly. She needs to remind them of their new status granted through baptism- and the power of resurrection- so that they can live the years of their estrangement on earth as God's children who constantly struggle.

St John Chrysostom [1] states that baptism has killed sin in us. In order for it to remain dead, we need to struggle constantly. In this manner, we would never surrender to sin and we would oppose it as rigidly as death.

What does the Apostle mean by the words '**baptized into his death'?**

❖ He means our dying just as he has died. Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross and burial did for the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism does for us even though the analogy is not perfect. He has died and has been physically buried; but we practice both (death and burial) as we confront sin.

The Apostle does not say 'united with Him in His death'; but he says: ***"united together in the likeness of His death"***, (v5). It is death in both instances, but the object of death differs: Christ died in the flesh; while we die to sin which we commit and bring upon ourselves.

St John Chrysostom[2]

❖ To give is more better than to take; It is clear that when a person is baptized, the Son of God becomes crucified within him. Our body would have been unable to chase out sin had it not been crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ.

St Ambrose[3]

❖ Let us get buried with the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism, so that we may be resurrected with Him!

Let us descend with Him so that we also may ascend with Him!

Let us ascend with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him!

St Gregory, Bishop of Nizanzy[4]

❖ Now that we have emulated His death, the sin within has certainly become a dead corpse wounded by the sword of baptism, just as Phinehas- the zealous- killed the adulterer with his javelin, (Numbers 25:6- 15)..

St Gregory, Bishop of Niceus[5]

The following points are noteworthy in the Apostle's discourse on baptism:

First: The Apostle associates the Cross with burial and with the resurrection, or between dying with the Lord Jesus Christ and living with Him through the power of the resurrection. Baptism is considered a burial, but it is-at the same time- a resurrection. That is why we comprehend that the path of the Lord is a tough one, but it is –at the same time-a joyful one. It is a walk with the Lord that brings pain as well as resurrection. The joy of the resurrection is not a mere futuristic vision for it is a reality that we actually experience in our daily lives.

St John Chrysostom says: [The Apostle here hints at our obligation to be particular in our conduct and ties it with the subject of the resurrection…we may paraphrase his words as follows: …Do you believe that the Lord has died and is risen? Believe that too about yourself. The resurrection, like the crucifixion and burial, are relevant to yourself: if you partake of the death and burial, then you are entitled to the resurrection and life. Concerning sin, which is a more difficult issue, it has been

[1] *In Rom. hom 10*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Conc. Repent. 2:3 (9)*
[4] *Oration of Holy Baptism 9*
[5] *On Baptism of Christ*

demolished and therefore death, which is a lesser issue, has been torn away definitely (therefore you are granted life)…Now that He has granted us resurrection, He requests us to make another change and that is to change (to renew) our habits and ways here on earth (as they reveal a living and active resurrection from within). Now when the adulterer becomes chaste, the greedy becomes merciful, and the violent becomes submissive; then the resurrection is effective here on earth and is a warranty for the other resurrection. How is this considered a resurrection? It is so because sin dies and righteousness arises, the old man has been crucified and the new angelic one lives[1]].

St John Chrysostom continues his discourse on dying with the Lord Jesus Christ, and rising up with Him through the font of baptism by underling our positive role as 'faithful' ones. The Lord has granted us to die with Him in baptism so as to provide us with the potential of being righteous and persevering in the faith all the days of our estrangement on earth. Our struggle should be continuous to ensure that we do not lose the grace of baptism and its fruit in us…in other words, so that we do not lose the joy of dying with our Lord Jesus Christ. **St John Chrysostom** says : [The Apostle speaks about two kinds of faithfulness and death: the first one is the action of the Lord (in us) through baptism, and the second is our fervent practice after baptism. He has granted us the burial of all our past sins; but it is up to us to maintain this gift and remain dead to sin- after baptism- and we will find God Himself supporting us in this struggle. Indeed, the power of baptism does not end at erasing our past sins, but it grants us protection against future rebellion. Regarding past sins, we participate with our faith so that they might be erased. The same applies to future sins, when we need to demonstrate our intention to change and confirm that we will not sin and be unclean again. This is what the Apostle is speaking about in these words: ***"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection".*** **(v5).** Do you notice how St Paul arouses his hearers in order to lead them to his Lord, and how he suffers untold pain in order to become in His likeness?! This explains why St Paul does not say: 'United us with Him in His death', so that you would not oppose him; but he says: 'In the likeness of His death'. Our essence does not die, but the 'sinful man' or 'evil' is the object which dies.

"If we have been united together" refers to our being planted in Him and the resulting fruit is that '**certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection'.** Just as the burial of the Lord's body in the earth has granted the world the fruit of salvation, the same applies to us as we are buried in the baptismal font. We receive the gift and fruits of righteousness, sanctification, adoption, and endless blessings. Besides, we look forward to the promised gift of the resurrection.

We have been buried in the baptismal waters, while He was buried in the earth. We have been buried away from sin, while He was buried in terms of the flesh. That is why the Apostle does not use the words: 'United us with Him in His death', but he uses the words '**the likeness of His death'** …and the focus is on the 'resurrection' itself…note that the Apostle does not say '…in the likeness of His resurrection'; but … 'we become like Him resurrected'[2]].

[1] *In Rom. hom 10*
[2] *In Rom. hom 11*

Second: The object of baptism is that when we are crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are granted the joy of the new resurrected life. Consequently, we live on earth with an uplifted heavenly mind and with the joy of the promise of an eternal inheritance.

- The Gnostic individual (who possesses true spiritual knowledge) will not have his principle goal in this (temporal) life, for he will always adhere to the royal God who always blesses him with gladness and countless gifts.

St Clement of Alexandria[1]

- Those baptized receive the inheritance for they are baptized by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, are buried with Him, to arise with Him. Therefore they are heirs of God and joint heirs with the Lord (Romans 8:17). They are heirs of God as the grace of the Lord is granted to them, and they are joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ because they are united together in His life. They are also joint heirs because He has granted them the inheritance by His death in the same manner in which heirs are named in a will.

St Ambrose[2]

Third: To confirm the fact of the resurrection, the Apostle focuses on the 'resurrection' itself. He reveals that the warranty of the forthcoming resurrection is granted in our present temporal life. He states: ***"Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him".*** **(v 6-8).** Here on earth, we die to sin and therefore live in righteousness…this is the first resurrection which the Apostle calls **"newness of life"** (v 4), as well as the warranty of the final resurrection.

"The body of sin" that is annulled refers to the evil and sin of man which he has embraced and so has died spiritually…however, through baptism, the old man dies with this body- that is with these sins-in order to live the resurrection as a powerful and new life marked by a new mind and a new song of praise.

St Jerome writes the following: [Even the song we sing is new (Rev 14:3), for we put off the old man (Eph 4:22), and we are no longer bound by the letter but by the newness of the Spirit (Rom 7:6)…Time limits a writer in his attempt to present all the words in the holy books concerning the efficiency of baptism, or to explain the mysteries related to this new birth which is the second birth. However, baptism is considered the first birth in the Lord Jesus Christ[3]].

Many holy fathers have attempted to confirm that what dies in the baptismal font is not 'the body' but the 'body of sin'. They reveal the error of some Gnostic thought that considers the flesh (the body) as an element of darkness that should be discarded and resisted. We believe that God has not created in us any element of darkness or evil; and that the body with its feelings, emotions, and potentials are created by a good God. It is we who have corrupted the body by distorting the feelings and emotions into the path of passionate lusts and impurity, and away from their goal which is love. Accordingly, the **Scholar Tertullian,** in his article entitled 'The Resurrection of the Body' writes the following: [The body does not oppose salvation but it is the (devious) acts of the body.

[1] *Strom 4 :7*
[2] *Ep.63:11*
[3] *Ep. 69:7*

When these acts that cause death are torn away, the body becomes secure and free of every cause of death[1]]. He goes on to elaborate extensively[2] to underline that what has been crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ is not the frame of the body or its actual existence, but it is the moral conduct (or the corrupted nature and the feelings of sin that have seized it). He supports this by quoting the words of the Apostle who uses the words 'that we should no longer be slaves of sin' rather than 'slaves of the body',(v 6). He also says 'reckon yourselves dead indeed to sin' rather than 'dead to the body', (v 11). We have also dealt with this topic previously in the introduction to the book entitled 'Chastity' by **St Augustine,** which has been translated and published from Arabic into English.

Fourth: If we accept to remain in a state of 'death to sin', what is the reward? **'Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him', (v 8). St John Chrysostom** writes that while the Apostle asks us to play the hero's role of dying to sin and becoming as one fallen motionless and stiff in its sphere of influence; he also asks us not to distort God's gift which has been granted to us through baptism besides the ultimate crown to 'live with the Lord Jesus Christ'. St Paul uses these words to affirm that 'we shall also live with Him'. [Indeed, even before receiving the crown, having fellowship with our Lord is in itself the greatest crown[3]].

Fifth: St Paul fears that the believer would find this path burdensome: 'death with the Lord Jesus Christ'; especially since we are required to struggle from the moment we have been buried with Him through baptism and throughout the days of our estrangement. Therefore, he clarifies two points: first, that this death is 'with the Lord' who accompanies us on the road. As the Lord is Himself the life and the resurrection, death cannot destroy us. The second point the Apostle makes is that the Lord died once for our sins and He arose, therefore He will not die another time. In this manner, the Lord grants us the power of the resurrection and the victory over sin. As a result, our death to sin does not constitute a deprivation or loss. Rather it constitutes the practice of the power of conquest and victory which we have acquired through our Lord who is the Conqueror of sin and death. This is the meaning of the Apostle's words in these verses: ***"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord".*** **(V 9 -11).**

The Apostle affirms that the Lord Jesus Christ did not die as a result of an inherent disease in Him. He died due to 'the sin', and in order to strike out and demolish our own sins. Consequently, sin no longer possesses dominion over us. This is valid as long as we are united with Him. It is true that sin is extremely bad and violent; and because of it the Lord died once on our behalf. However, by His death, He has destroyed the dominion of sin, and we no longer fear as we walk with Him along that path.

The Lord Jesus Christ has died once only, and this can never be repeated again. He did not die due to weakness, but due to the power of sacrificial love. Since He will not die a second time, He grants us – as we participate with Him in His death- to participate in His resurrection which death can never conquer.

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[1] *On Ressur. Of the Flesh 46*
[2] *Ibid 47*
[3] *In Rom. hom 11*

❖ This is the grace of God; and this is the way of God in correcting mankind: He has suffered in order to liberate those who suffer in Him,

He descended in order to raise us up,

He accepted to become incarnated so that we might love the One who is not (born as a normal being),

He descended where death is found in order to grant us immortality,

He became weak for our sakes so that we may be granted power…

Finally, He became a human being so that we may arise once more. Death has no longer dominion over us; even though we die as human beings. The words of the Apostle proclaims: ***"Death has no power over us now"*** (refer to v 9,14).

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic[1]

The Apostle underlines that the Lord Jesus Christ has died once to sin. Therefore, in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, as we receive the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified once on the Cross: we accept that same action of the Cross- which is not repeated- but which extends and is active throughout the life of the Church. This is the mystery of Her victory over sin and death; and it will continue to be Her constant song of praise even in eternal life.

The Lord Jesus Christ died once to sin. He has offered the sacrifice of love in our name. This is what He yearns to offer in the life of His people and ministers.. **St Ambrose**[2] recounts the story of the Lord's meeting with St Peter at the gates of Rome. He was leaving under the insistence of believers who wanted him to escape martyrdom. But St Peter had a vision of the Lord carrying His Cross. Therefore he knew that the Lord wanted to be crucified in the person of His minister and servant. Due to that, St Peter returned to Rome and surrendered to death for the sake of the Lord. In this manner, the Lord was glorified in the crucifixion of St Peter.

Sixth: Since the Lord Jesus Christ has died to 'sin' so that it no longer has dominion over us, then it is only appropriate that we surrender our hearts to be His throne after all the years when sin had reigned over it. Let us die to sin so that it no longer reigns over- us; and let us live for God through our Lord Jesus Christ who reigns within us and establishes His kingdom within our hearts. Let us offer all the members of our bodies, all our potentials, and all our emotions to serve His kingdom. Let them be instruments of the righteousness of God after they had been subjected to passions and were used as instruments of evil and sin. This is what St Paul the Apostle intends in his words: ***"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace"*** **(v 11-14).**

The Apostle clarifies that the Lord Jesus Christ grants us the power to die to sin, and to live as God's children. It is He who demolishes evil passions and not the body in itself. He transforms the members of the body from instruments of sin into instruments of divine righteousness. Consequently, it is vital that He- not sin- reigns within us.

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[1] *Pascal Ep. 10:8*

[2] *Ser against Auxentius 13*

St John Chrysostom considers the words of the Apostle "**do not let sin reign"** (Rom6: 12)to be a proclamation that sin has enslaved mankind and seeks, by it force and might, to control people…That is why those who return and sin- after having enjoyed the grace of the Lord- are like those who have thrown away the crown on their heads in order to bend their necks in submission to a mad and violent queen in tattered clothes. His words '**in your mortal body'** reveal the Apostle's intention to indicate that the struggle is temporary, and does have an end, as it is associated with our temporal body.

Below are excerpts taken from writings of the holy fathers concerning the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ within us, and the reign of sin over us:

'No one would dare say 'my King and my Lord'-(Psalm 5:1)-unless sin has no dominion over his mortal body…

You reign in me, but sin does not reign, for You are my God!

You are my God, for my insides are not a god, neither is gold nor passion!

You are virtue, I desire to possess you!

You are my God, You are my virtue!

St Jerome [1]

- It is a generous gift and great honor for man to be a slave to God and not to sin.
- 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord', **Prov.21:1**

Let us be kings, and control our bodies (away from sin), and subjugate them; so that our hearts are committed into the hands of God.

St Jerome[2]

- This is our present task: as long as our lives are temporary and uncertain, let us not allow sin or the passion of sin to dominate our mortal bodies. Indeed, if we submit to the passions of sin, it will reign over us.

The desire to sin is within us, yet we do not allow it to reign over us. By not allowing it to usurp our members, we allow virtue to demand them as her entitlement. In this manner, our members become instruments of God's righteousness and not instruments of sin. Sin does not dominate us for we are not subject to the Law which commands us to do what is good without granting goodness to us. By being subject to grace, we get to love what the Law commands us to do; and grace is able to dominate over the (will).

- As long as sin is basically present in your members, do not allow it to have dominion over you. You need to expel it and not conform to its demands.

Does anger get stirred within you? Do not yield your tongue to utter an evil word; and do not submit your hand or foot to be used to strike. It would have been impossible for unreasoning anger to stir within you if there was no sin in your members. Yet dispel its controlling power, so that it would have no instruments with which to fight you. Sin will then learn not to rage within you, for it will find itself without weapons…

That is how everyone seeking to be perfect needs to struggle. When lust finds no response from the members, it diminishes gradually, day by day, in its journey.

St Augustine[1]

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[1] *On Ps. Hom 5*

[2] *Ibid 40,55*

❖ ***"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts",*** (v12)...

The Apostle does not say: 'do not allow it to be there' because it is actually there.

❖ Sin will fight you as long as you have a body that is prone to death. However, may you never allow it to dominate you…in other words, cut off its passions; for if you begin to obey it, it will dominate you.

What does the word 'obey' convey? It conveys subjugating your members as evil instruments of sin.

St Augustine[2]

Seventh: Once more, the Apostle underlines that the call to die with the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean destroying the body but it means sanctifying it. We have noted in the discourse on baptism that the old man is crucified (v 6) in order to demolish the body of sin and not to demolish the members of the body themselves. Now, as St Paul speaks about the need to struggle after baptism, he indicates that we are enabled to do so through the blessings of baptism- that is through 'the action of grace' within us. He underlines that the call to die is not a negative one denoting loss and destruction. It is a positive invitation to win. Death here is a profit, for it involves living with the crucified Lord Jesus Christ who arose from the dead. He is able to destroy the members of the body working as evil instruments of sin and resurrecting them as instruments of divine righteousness. He grants them His own sanctification.

The Apostle says: ***"And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God",*** **(v13).**

It is amazing that the Apostle asks us to present ourselves to God 'as being alive from the dead' before asking us to present our members as instruments of righteousness to God. This indicates that our physical members will not be sanctified unless our whole being is sanctified; and unless we accept the resurrection to work actively in our hearts as well as in our minds and bodies …

❖ The same body members, which we are accustomed to use for sin and by which we gather the fruit of death, God desires us to use to submit to righteousness and so produce fruits of life.

St Irinaous[3]

St Gregory of Nicea considers that when a person becomes wholly sanctified, especially within his heart, his physical members become transformed from instruments of evil into instruments that glorify God. Indeed, the heart becomes like the heart of the woman who found the lost coin (Lk 15), and invited her neighbors to celebrate and share her joy for finding it. The physical members are similar to these neighbors as we invite them to practically participate in our joy in receiving the Lord's salvation!

Eighth: St Paul closes his discourse on the effect of baptism coupled with spiritual struggle in these words: ***"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace".*** **(v 14).** He closes by underlining the new potentials we have been granted through grace. Grace and the potentials that we have received in the

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[1] *On Continence 8; In Ioan .tr . 41:12*
[2] *Ser on N.T. 78:8,12*
[3] *Adv. Haer 5:14:4*

baptismal water continue to work as we struggle daily, enabling us to overcome and to conquer.

2- Freedom through the Lord Jesus Christ:

St Paul leads us to focus our eyes on baptism when we become children of God. We practice this adoption as we die with the Lord Jesus Christ and as we live with Him throughout our days of estrangement on earth. His aim throughout is to correct an erroneous understanding that had settled in the minds of the Jews as they had believed that they were free just because they were physical descendants of Abraham. This belief is revealed in their exchange with the Lord when He proclaimed: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," (Jn 8:31, 32). And they answered Him: "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed", (Jn 8: 33-36).

Note the following points that St Paul makes in his discourse on the freedom we have received through the Lord Jesus Christ:

First: The Apostle uses encouragement to drive his theme as he says: "***But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness*" (v 17,18)**. **St John Chrysostom** comments on the Apostle's style by stating that St Paul seeks to instill confidence in his audience after having disturbed them with feelings of shame and terrified them with the penalties. St Paul indicates that they have actually been liberated from many evils through the gift of divine grace. Therefore they need to offer thanks to God for this gift. In other words, the Apostle invites everyone to be liberated while he calls all to practice life under grace which would grow and glow in us progressively.

Second: His words'**…you obeyed from the heart'** are a reference to the freedom we practice and which is not achieved by power or obligation. Indeed, it is practiced through love, from the 'heart', and with our full willingness…for freedom in the Lord is slavery to righteousness (v 18). Yet it is the voluntary slavery of love and is not a slavery promoted by violent subjugation. It is a slavery rooted in maturity and commitment rather than negligence and wavering!

- A Christian should not say 'I am free' and 'I can do whatever I like…no one can bind me as long as I am free'. If enjoying this freedom leads you to commit sin, then you are a slave to sin.

Do not damage your freedom by feeling free to sin; but use it by not committing sin, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13)[1].

St Augustine

Third: What is the form of teaching that we have received and need to obey with all our heart? "**having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness…"** that is, abandoning the condition of harsh slavery to which sin has subjugated us and moving into the condition of slavery to righteousness that fills our hearts with inner joy.

[1] *In Ioan tr 41:8*

Fourth: ***"I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh"*** **(v 19).** **St John Chrysosotm** writes that the Apostle talks to his audience as a person who shares with them the same conditions. He does not consider that he is better than the crowds, or that he is speaking about something terribly hard. He advises them as a person who shares the same nature as their own, and who has had practical experience in that he had used his body members for evil purposes. At the time of his speech, he declares that his members have been liberated and have become members that worship righteousness.

Fifth: The Apostle draws a comparison between slavery to evil and slavery to righteousness. He finds that the first is harsh and shameful as he states: **"of which you are now ashamed"(v 21),** and '**the end of those things is death', (v 21).** The second kind of slavery is contrary to the first as it grants sanctification and it ends in eternal life (v 21). Therefore while the first produces the fruits of shame and death, the second produces the fruits of sanctification and eternal life. **Abba Moussa** considers that the second kind of slavery consists of two levels: the ultimate goal is eternal life, while the present one is 'holiness' which involves 'purity of heart' without which we cannot enjoy eternal life[1].

Sixth: St Paul speaks about '**eternal life' (v 24)** as a free gift of grace. **St Augustine** wonders: How can 'eternal life' be a reward for good works, (Matt 16:27), while it is at the same time a free gift of grace? He provides a lengthy answer in his book entitled 'Grace and Free Will'[2]. Following are some excerpts taken from his book:

[It seems impossible to provide a complete solution to this question unless we understand that even good works, for which we are rewarded in eternal life, are the result of God's grace. Is not this what the Lord was referring to when He said: '…for without Me you can do nothing', (Jn 15:5)?!

The Apostle states in (Ephesians 2:8-10) 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast'. He then realizes that people could interpret this to mean that good works are not important and that believers could be satisfied with just accepting the faith. At the same time, he recognizes that there are those who are boastful and who believe they could achieve good works through their own endeavors. Therefore he seeks to harmonize these two aspects by going on to state: 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them'…

Listen and comprehend that the words: **"not of works"** refer to works that you believe you are the sole source for them; and to consider and remember the works that God has formed within you. He says about these: 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them'…

In any case, eternal life is granted in this manner (as a reward for good works) because God does good works in good people of whom it is written: '…working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight'; and this echoes the words of the Psalmist: 'Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies', (Ps 103: 4). It is through His mercy that we do good works and consequently receive the crowns].

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[1] *Cassian:Conf 1:5*
[2] *P 38-42, pub 1969*

CHAPTER 7

THE LAW EXPOSES SIN

St Paul ends his confrontation with the Jews concerning their first claim and pretense to be the children of Abraham by speaking about true freedom which is obtained only by becoming adopted children of God. Then he tears down their second claim of being the chosen ones to receive the Law. He proclaims that the Law exposes sin and does not deal or treat it. That is why the Law does not justify sinners, but it leads them to the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enjoy His righteousness.

1-The need to be liberated from the Law 1-6
2-The Law Exposes sin 7-13
3-The Law of God and the law of sin 14-25

1. The Need to be Liberated from the Law :

The Law, of which the Jews boast, is like a man who judges a sinful woman and condemns her to death…he indicts her! It then becomes necessary to liberate her from his judgment by bringing in another man for her, after the death of the first. Consequently, she becomes liberated from the dominion of the first. In other words, it is necessary for man to be liberated from the literal application of the Law in order to accept the other Groom who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God" (1-4).

Note the following in the above words of the Apostle:

First: The Apostle seeks to deal with the subject of pride which the Jews use to daunt Gentiles. It arises from their claim to be chosen out of all other nations to receive the Law. While seeking to destroy their pride and to attack the way they use the Law, he does not wish to attack the Law itself as it is the holy Law of God. This is clear in his careful choice of words that accurately convey his thoughts on this very delicate issue:

a. He presents the example of a relationship between a woman and a man as an example of the ties between the Jewish nation and the Law. He says: "**for I speak to those who know the law"(1)…**as though the same example is relevant to the Law and is a subject that the Law itself is concerned with. In other words, the Apostle proclaims that he accepts the judgment of the Law itself on this matter, or that he appeals to the Law because it is fair and holy.

b. In the example of the woman who is tied in a relationship with a man, St Paul mentions only the death of the man as a sufficient reason that liberates the woman from his authority. As a result, she would not be accused of adultery if she were to marry another man. The woman here refers to the Church- as a whole congregation or as separate individuals (each one being a Church in himself). A believer cannot cling to the

letter of the Law and its ordinances while at the same time submitting to divine grace; otherwise he would be like a woman who is married to two bridegrooms.

Note the accuracy of St Paul as he speaks about the union of man with the Law. He does not speak about the death of the Law itself so that man can be liberated from it. Rather, with great precision, he says '… **you also have become dead to the Law..**.'. It is as though man is the one who dies to the Law in order to live for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle uses these words so that no one would think that he opposes the Law in itself or demands to put it away. He seeks the liberation from its judgment and the deadliness of the letter.

Once more, he says: "**the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives" (1**); but if he dies, he no longer submits to the literal ordinances and acts of the Law.

Second: In the passage we are studying, the Apostle presents to us one woman and two men. The woman obeys the laws of the first man as long as he lives. Once he dies, she is liberated from his dominion and joins the other man without her being considered an adulterous woman. The woman represents the body of believers, and the first man is the Law while the second is the Lord Jesus Christ. When believers follow the Law and practice its dictates they submit to its rulings and judgments…therefore it becomes necessary for believers to be liberated from such authority-that is from its literal acts and its pronouncement of death issued against us. Such liberation enables us to be joined to the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead. This death to the Law and the liberation from it has been achieved through the Lord's death on our behalf. In this manner, He has fulfilled the judgment of death that was issued against us by the Law! That is how the Lord did not break the Law. Indeed He has completed it, and has achieved its goal by coming as a Bridegroom to the holy congregation through His death on the Cross. He comes so that she would live as His Bride, never to be separated, but to be united with Him eternally.

Death in order to attain union with the Lord Jesus Christ does not constitute the destruction of the Law. Indeed, it indicates the fulfillment of its goal, as it leads us to the other Man, who has been raised from the dead, so that we might arise with Him.

The Apostle underlines our commitment to the second marriage in these words:

"…know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19).

"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men", (1 Cor 7:23).

"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again", (2 Cor 5:15).

Third: This marriage has conceived fruit for God. St Paul says: "**we should bear fruit to God**" **(4).** Contrary to the previous marriage, when believers were subject to the first man- that is subjected to the Mosaic Law- they were unable to bear fruit to God not because of the Law itself, but because of the nature of their rebellion. Therefore the resulting fruit was: 'the Law issued the sentence of death against us.

The Apostle compares between the two fruits: the fruit of being united with the fist man whose verdict has been cast upon us due to our evil nature; and the fruit of being united with the Second Man who liberates us from the Mosaic Law and offers us new potentials: "**Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the**

motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter', (4-6).

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [You see here what we have received from the earlier marriage. St Paul does not say 'When we were under the Law', for he tried in every word to give the chance to heretics (to despise the Law). Rather, the Apostle uses the words 'when we were in the flesh'-that is to say, when we were ruled by evil deeds and the life of the flesh. His words are not intended to convey that men were previously in the flesh and that now they no longer have bodies. His intention is to indicate that the Law is not the cause of sin and at the same time it does not liberate from its shame. This is because the Law plays the role of the harsh prosecutor who uncovers the sins of men. This is specifically relevant to those who adhere to it while they do not try to obey it in any way. Consequently, the Law reveals their rebellion in a most striking manner. This has led the Apostle to say: "**the passions of sins, which were aroused by the law**" (through the Law)**,** rather than 'the motions of sin resulting from the law'… to convey that through the Law, sin has become revealed and published. Moreover, St Paul does not accuse the body itself – for he does not say 'the passions committed by our members', but he says 'that were at work in our members'. By these words, the Apostle intends to reveal that the origin of harm arises from another source which is that of our thoughts. These affect us, and not our bodily members, and arouse passion within us. Indeed, it is the soul that plays the role of a player who plays on the violin which is the body, and affects its passions in this manner. The unharmonious tune is not caused by the latter (the violin) but more specifically by the former (the soul/thoughts)[1]].

That is how St Paul explains and proclaims the need to be liberated from the Law-the first man. Yet, he neither blames the Law nor the members of the flesh, but finds that the fault lies in the soul that arouses and leads the passions within us more than the flesh…even though the flesh bears responsibility with the soul, yet the flesh does not carry the primary burden of responsibility.

Now that the second marriage has been fulfilled, the Apostle says: "**But now we have been delivered from the Law…**" **(6).** The Greek word used here for 'delivered' means that 'there is no longer any trace from its effect'.

St John Chrysostom comments on this expression as follows: [Note how St Paul dismisses that the Law or the body is the origin of harm, for he does not say that the Law is no longer a factor, or that the body is no longer a player; but that we are no longer effective (for He has delivered us). How has He delivered us? He has delivered us through the death and burial of the old man who was caught by sin. This is what the Apostle means by his words: "**…having died to what we were held by…**" **(6).** It is similar to saying that the cords that held us have been torn and removed (have died), so that sin which had held us no longer binds us. Therefore, do not fall backwards and do not be negligent; for you have been liberated in order to become slaves. However, you have become slaves in a different manner for **'…we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter'.**

When Adam sinned and his body became subject to pain and death, he suffered many physical losses. The horse (the body) became less lively and obedient. However,

[1] *In Rom. hom 12*

with the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, He granted the body more grace through baptism, and raised it on the wings of the (Holy) Spirit. In this manner, the features of the race are no longer the same as the old ones. Indeed, the race was not as easy as it has become now (for the horse has become more graceful). That is why He not only commands believers to abandon killing as He did in the past, but He also commands them not to give in to anger. They are to abandon not only adultery, but also to abandon impure looks; to stop not only false swearing but even truthful swearing as well, (Matt 5: 21, 27, 33). Concerning friendships, He commands them to love even their enemies. In all matters, He has provided us with a bigger space to run on; and if we are disobedient, He threatens with hell. He intends to underline that we have an obligation to struggle through such matters as celibacy and poverty…and commands us to complete the task…therefore He says: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven,' (Matt 5: 20). Consequently, those who do not enter the kingdom of heaven surely are thrown into hell. That is why St Paul also says: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace', (14: 6). In this passage also, he says: **'that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter', (6);** for the letter no longer no longer indicts- that is the old Law- but it is the Spirit that helps and supports. For this reason, it was a completely astonishing matter to find among ancient people one celibate person. However, this has become widespread all over the world at the present time. Long ago very few despised death, but now (at the time of St John Chrysostom) there are countless thousands of martyrs in the villages and cities- not only men, but women as well[1]].

At the present time, we have been liberated from the letter, and enjoy the newness of the spirit. We are similar to Malchus, the slave of the high priest whose ear was cut off by the sword (Jn 18:10) and the Lord Himself caught his ear and healed Him. According to **St Augustine[2],** this was a symbol of the renewal of the ear: tearing away the old literal way of thinking and the enjoyment of the new spiritual mind.

2. The Law Exposes Sin:

St Paul is concerned that the readers would misunderstand his words: 'But now we have been delivered from the law' (6), and that they would think that he was attacking the Law or diminishing its sanctity. Therefore he puts forward a question: "**What shall I say? Is the Law sin?" (7).** and the answer comes clear and candid: "**Certainly not!"...**Then why is he happy to be liberated from the Law?

First: Because the Law exposes sin and does not treat it…it shows us the sins that we commit in case we are ignorant of them, (7).

Second: Because the Law has exposed the nature of rebellion when it delivered the commandments (8-11). Maybe we would not have been interested in committing a certain act if there had been no specific Law prohibiting it. Yet just the existence of that commandment arouses our nature (everything that is forbidden is desirable)…this is a defect in the nature of rebellion hidden within us, and it is not due to the commandment. This rebellious nature would not have appeared if there had been no commandment.

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *In Ioan tr 112:5*

St Paul underlines these two points clearly in this Chapter (7-13). **St John Chrysostom** comments on them as follows:

[St Paul states earlier: "For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sin which were aroused by the law were at work in our members…" (7:5); "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (6:14); "…for where there is no law there is no transgression" (4:15); "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound", (5:20); "…because the law brings about wrath…" (4:15). In order to ensure that all these words do not lead to misunderstanding the Law, and to correct any misconception as a result of them, St Paul presents an objection by saying: **'What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? Certainly not! (7).** Before presenting the evidence, he uses this oath **'God forbid'** to gently win his audience after the confusion arising from the question…

Note that he does not say: 'What shall I say' but rather, he says 'What shall we say?' It is as though they are all faced with a decision and an indictment; for they have met together, and an objection has been presented –not by him- but it arose from the discussion and on account of the current circumstances. Yet he does not deny that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6), for this is completely clear and unquestionable. Now, since this is an accepted truth, what shall we say about the Law? Is the Law sin? God forbid? Then it is clear to us that this is a difficult matter!....

He states that the Law is not sin, **"On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the Law"…For I would not have known covetousness unless the Law had said, "You shall not covet", (7).** Do you not note how he does has not indicate that the Law is the judge of sin, while at the same time he indicates that it is to a certain degree its origin – not due to an error in the Law of itself; (but due to our weakness and rebellion)…the Law is partly the source of sin due to our weakness, and not due to a defect in the Law. The reason is that when we desire something and are forbidden to attain it, our passion becomes greatly aroused. This does not stem from the Law, for it forbids us in order to protect us from sin; but sin is caused by our negligence and misdemeanor. We use what is good for contrary ends. The defect is not in the Physician, but in the patient who misuses the medicine. The Law has not been given to arouse passions but to abate them, whereas the result has been contrary to that. Therefore we are the ones to be blamed and not the Law…indeed, the task of the physician ends with the prohibition, but it is up to the patient to control himself.

What happens when sin has used the Law as an opportunity for it? There are definitely many wicked people who have used the good commandments as a chance to become more evil. This is the path that Satan used to destroy Judas as he immersed him in the passion of greed, and led him to steal what belonged to the poor. What happened was not the result of the confidence given him by entrusting him with the money box; it was the result of his evil spirit. The same applies to Eve who brought the fruit for Adam to eat, and consequently leading to exile from Paradise…the tree was not to blame, even though the tree was used as an opportunity to commit sin and wickedness…

If the Law were to be blamed because sin found in it an opportunity, then this would also apply to the New Testament. Indeed, we find in the New Testament hundreds of commandments that are far more important…

The Lord says (in the New Testament): **"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin"** (Jn 15:22).

Sin found an opportunity in the coming of the Lord and His words to His audience, and their punishment became harder in spite of that. Similarly, when St Paul speaks about grace, he says: "**Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God", (Heb 10:29)**[1]**…?!].**

- ❖ You have received the Law, and you desire to obey it yet you are unable to do so. In this manner, you abandon your pride, and realize your weakness. Therefore run to the physician and wash your face. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in Him. Have faith and depend on Him. By enjoying the Holy Spirit- after having followed the literal letter earlier, you are redeemed.
- ❖ We listen to the Law, but if there is no grace, we listen to the punishment that will be inflicted on us.

St Augustine[2]

St John Chrysostom continues his previous commentary by asking: If man has not known passion before the Law was instituted, then why did the flood take place? And why was Sodom burned? He answers these questions by stating that man knows sin (through natural law-instinctively). However, the Law was instituted to define and reveal sin and in this manner providing precise knowledge to mankind. So natural law and the written Law together confront mankind with a stronger indictment. This is what has led the Apostle to say: **"I was alive once without the Law" (9).** Indeed, there was no precise or definite knowledge or a candid indictment of death against me. In saying: 'I was alive once', he means 'I was not convicted by the precise and harsh Law and that condemned me to death'.

St John Chrysostom: [The Law has not produced the existence of sin for it was there before. However, the Law has indicated sin which had escaped our recognition. This is a compliment to the Law, for people were sinning before the Law came and without realizing it. When the Law was delivered, although they did not benefit by it, yet it revealed sin to them accurately in order to show them that they were sinning. This is not a simple matter for it would liberate them from evil. The Law cannot be blamed if they did not become liberated for it has defined everything necessary for the fulfillment of that goal. The whole blame falls on the spirit of man...

This explains the words of the Apostle: **"And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death"**, (10). He does not say: 'The Law came to issue death' or 'it led to death'; but he said: "I found…".

In other words, he intends to say: I wish you to know the aim of the Law, it is that it leads to life and was issued for that intention. If it has led to death, then the fault lies in the person who has received it and not in the commandment which leads to life.

This is an issue that the Apostle presents in a new light as he says: "**For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (11).** Note that on every occasion, the Apostle justifies the Law from blame and protects it.

"**Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good". (12)…**If the Jews were not pure through the Law, and were unjust and greedy, this does

[1] *In Rom. hom 12*
[2] *In Ioan tr 86:5; Ser. On N.T. lessons 95:3*

not corrupt the goodness of the Law. This is exactly applicable to their betrayal which does not cancel the loyalty of God[1]].

In this passage, the Apostle has underlined the sanctity of the Law and its justice. He has commended it, for even though sin has found in the commandments an opportunity to kill me, yet it has –more importantly- revealed its evil in its dead victims…this is how the Law leads us to the necessity of being saved from it. Accordingly, St Paul says: "**Has then what is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (13)**. By these words, the Apostle transfers the blame from the good Law to the very wicked sin. In other words, he focuses our eyes upon our inward depths, since by our own wickedness what is beneficial becomes transformed and causes our own harm. Accordingly, **St Augustine says:** [The focus and importance is the person who receives the object and not what he receives…for even good things can be harmful, and the harmful can be beneficial depending on the person receiving them. You see how evil has come through the good (Law) since the one who has received it has received it in a wrong manner[2]].

3. The Law of God and the Law of Sin

In the beginning of this Chapter, St Paul reveals the need to be liberated from the Law which has revealed my sins and has issued the sentence of death against me. He then underlines that this is not due to a defect in the Law, but it is the result of sin actively working within me. Having revealed the law of sin that exists in the members of my body, the Apostle moves on to praise the divine Law which, when I discover it, will make me turn to the Savior. He alone can save me from sin.

"For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (14). St John Chrysostom[3] considers that by saying this, the Apostle proclaims that there is no need to present evidence that the 'Law is spiritual'; for it is far removed from being a source of sin or a reason for ongoing wickedness. The Law is 'spiritual': it teaches virtue and opposes vice. It carries us far away from all forms of sin by threats, by advice, by punishment, and by correction, as well as by praising virtue. Then from where has sin come since the Law is such a teacher?! It arises from us: '…but I am carnal, sold under sin'. I have welcomed passions and become a slave to sin. I have become immersed in its depths, and fallen under its law, therefore have been counted as carnal.

- The original divine curse **(**due to the fall of our parents) has made us carnal, and we were condemned to thorns and hardship. Our father sold us with a miserable contract which has rendered us incapable to doing the good deeds we want to do. We often stop remembering the sublimity of God as we are obligated to be preoccupied with matters pertaining to human weakness. While we yearn to be pure, we usually become involuntarily disturbed by natural passions which we do not even wish to recognize. Consequently, we learn that there is nothing good dwelling within us (7: 18). In other words, we need to meditate here on the eternal constant peace that does not dwell in our flesh.

[1] *In Rom. hom 12*
[2] *In Ioan tr 62:1*
[3] *In Rom.hom 12*

Fr Theonas[1]

❖ **'…but I am carnal, sold under sin', (v 14).** This means: 'Being a carnal person, I am a free agent positioned between good and evil. I have authority to choose what I want. The Holy Word says: 'Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death', (Jer 21:8; Eccl 8:15; Ex 30:15). This indicates that death is the fruit of rebellion against the spiritual Law or the commandments, and of obeying the law of the flesh or the advice of the serpent. Having such a choice, I am sold to the devil and fallen to sin. This is how evil has taken hold of me, adheres to me and lives in me. By breaking the Law, justice had handed me over to the wicked one.

Fr Meithodius[2]

What has the law of sin done within me?

First: It has distorted my understanding. The Apostle therefore says: 'For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice: but what I hate, that I do', **(15).**

What does the Apostle intend by these words?

a. Has sin destroyed the inner vision, leading it to perceive sin inaccurately, and therefore he says 'what I am doing, I do not understand'? This does not mean that man does not know sin; otherwise he would not have been condemned. Rather, man was unable to recognize sin precisely before the delivery of the Law. St Paul mentions this in his words: **"I would not have known coveteousness unless the Law had said 'you shall not covet'," (7: 7). St John Chrysostom** also states that man did not know sin truly and specifically before the delivery of the Law. Consequently, the penalty was less harsh than the penalty pronounced on those who have received the Law and are informed about sin.

b. By saying here **'I do not understand',** the Apostle probably refers to the perception of a person capable of refusing and resisting sin in order to do good rather than evil. He is not speaking about mere theoretical knowledge of sin. Indeed, man knows sin through the law of nature. That explains his words: '**For what I will to do, that I do not practice: but what I hate, that I do',…**It is as though he is saying 'I have become as someone who has no understanding for I do what I hate…this is similar to someone who drinks while knowing that it is harmful to his health. He is so enslaved and this makes him equal to a person who is ignorant of its effect on him.

Second: Sin has made me lose the will to be actively good. The distortion of one's understanding does not end there. Indeed, besides the corruption of the inner vision or the incapacity of enjoying divine knowledge through experience, sin also subjugates my will. Consequently, sin corrupts the potential of doing good deeds in my life; and I become like a mechanical object that has no will since I have personally delivered myself to be its slave.

St John Chrysostom advises us not to understand the expressions used in this passage in a purely literal sense. The danger is that we could be led to think that man is driven and has no other alternative but to behave wickedly. If this were true, then his condemnation would be unfair. When the Apostle says: **"I do what I will not to do"** (15), he is not denying the freedom of human will as though he is a person forced and driven to sin. Otherwise, he would have gone on to conclude in the following manner: 'I

[1] *Cassian: Conf 23:13*
[2] *On Resurr*

do what I am forced and obliged to do'. However, he states: **'What I hate, that I do**'. He does not deny that the authority of sin has weakened his will power, yet at the same time he is not forced to act involuntarily.

Sin is deceiving, attractive, and cunningly leads him to indulge himself; even though he despises it due to the inborn nature active within him, as well as the teaching of the written Law. Therefore St Paul goes on to say: **"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the Law that it is good" (16).** This could be reworded as follows: If I hate the sin I do due to the natural law, then the written or Mosaic Law is in harmony with my inherent nature (natural law) which hates sin. Consequently, the Law is good.

Some may wonder: Before enjoying the gift of grace, man was subject to the written or Mosaic Law, and he could say that sin had distorted his knowledge and stripped him of the positive will to be good to the extent that he did not do what he wanted but did what he hated, (15). Does this apostolic saying apply to us though we live in the age of grace? Or to put it in a different way: does this saying apply to sinners who have not yet enjoyed the work of God in them or do all suffer on this account?

Fr Theonas responds in a long discourse found in the writings of **St John Cassian**[1]**.** He clarifies the following points:

1. St Theonas considers that the Apostle speaks these words about himself. What he says applies to himself even after having been converted and accepting the faith. This does not mean that things have not changed, but that his vision of eternal life has changed. He considers that all the many virtues he enjoys in this life- which are like precious stones and divine blessings- are trivial and minimal when compared to what he will earn in eternal life. Although he now leads a holy life with the Lord, yet he yearns to progress until he can see God face to face. Nothing else preoccupies him even though it could be something good and necessary for the needs of life.

2. When St Paul compares his goodness with the sublime goodness of God, he finds that 'No one is good but One, that is, God', (Lk 18:19). Therefore he considers himself subject to weakness.

3. The more a person enjoys spiritual progress, the more he increases in inner purity. At the same time, he becomes more sensitive to the most trivial sin- if such an expression can be used…the more a person progresses spiritually, the more his fear of falling increases. This is not the result of despair or fear, but due to his precaution against the bitterness of the fall.

This opinion does not constitute just the personal opinion of Fr Theonas. It represents the opinion of the universal Church. The Church considers the contents of this passage (Romans 7: 14-25) to apply not only to a person subject to the Law, but also-in one way or another- to every member of the Church who is still alive in the flesh. Nevertheless, the difference between the two is great: Being subject to the Law has acquainted man to goodness yet left him powerless of practicing it. But in the age of grace, man has received greater understanding, sublime potential and ability to act through divine grace and the work of the Holy Spirit within him. However, man is not immune from sin, yet he persists in rising upwards as with the wings of the Spirit, and progresses from glory to glory in the hope of attaining the full stature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although he feels the great work of God within him, man feels that he has not yet

[1] *Cassian: Conf 23*

fulfilled his yearning for God. Therefore he groans inwardly, offers constant repentance, and shares the feelings of the Apostle of being the foremost sinner …yet without despair.

❖ We are partially free and partially enslaved.

Freedom is still incomplete and is not wholly pure as we have not entered eternity yet.

We are still partially weak though we have received some freedom. The sins we have committed have been washed in baptism in the past, but have all mankind been redeemed and are no longer weak?!

St Augustine[1]

❖ There exists within us wicked passions, but by rejecting them we do not live as wicked persons.

There exists within us the desire to sin, by not complying to it we do not perpetuate evil. However, the presence of evil indicates that we have not fully achieved goodness. The Apostle reveals both conditions:

a. As long as we lust for evil, we have not fully achieved goodness.

b. We have also not fully achieved wickedness as long as we have not succumbed to such lust.

He reveals the first condition in these words: **"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelled no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"** (18). He reveals the second state in these words: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). In the first instance he does not deny the existence of goodness, but that we have not achieved it (…how to perform it…I find not). In the second instance he does not deny the lust of the flesh, but he says '…ye shall not fulfill'.

Evil passions find a place in us where illegal pleasures exist. However, we do not satisfy these passions when we resist them mentally and obey the Law of God.

Similarly, goodness finds a place in us when illegal pleasures do not find a place in us, and this occurs when good pleasures overcome the evil ones. Nevertheless, goodness is not fully achieved as long as this flesh- servile to the law of sin- attracts the wicked passions. Although we resist these, yet they stir. Indeed, our resistance indicates its stirrings within us.

For this reason, the perfection of goodness is fulfilled by the complete destruction of evil. Then the one will ascend and the other exterminated.

If we imagine that this would be achieved in this life, we are deceivers. This will be fulfilled when there is no more death but there is eternal life. In the heavenly kingdom there will be goodness in its highest degree. There will be no evil whatsoever…at that time, in that place, there will be no struggle for chastity and self control any longer.

Therefore the flesh is not evil as long as it evades evil. In other words, the sin that has made man a sinner has been provided by man. Both his aspects- of flesh and soul- have been created as good by the good God; but man has acted wickedly and has consequently become wicked.

St Augustine[2]

[1] *In Ioan. Tr 41:10*
[2] *On Continence 20*

❖ **"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (15).**

This statement should not be taken to refer to evil acts but to refer to thinking of evil. It is not in our power to think or not to think of inappropriate matters; yet it is in our power to carry out or prevent their execution. We cannot prevent thoughts from being introduced from the outside, but we are able to reject obeying and /or practicing them.

We have the power to want stop thinking about matters, but we cannot expel them in a manner that would prevent them from returning another time. That is the reason, as we have already said, why it is not in our power to think or to stop thinking, and this is the meaning of the words: "**that which I do I allow not"**. I do not want to think of what harms me…yet "**what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I".** Although I do not want to think (of evil), I think of maters I do not want to think about.

Contemplate: are not these matters exactly the same ones that drove David to mourn and supplicate God when his thought dwelled on things he did not want? He prayed to God saying: **"Cleanse thou me from secret faults. 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Ps 19: 12,13).** The Apostle also says in another passage: **"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (**2 Cor 10: 5).

Fr Meithodius[1]

Third: Sin has corrupted my body

The task of the law of sin has not ended at the distortion of spiritual understanding and destruction of the power of the will to do good. By its indwelling within me, the law of sin has become effective in the members of my body so that they have become a tool working for the account of sin. This is what drives the Apostle to shout out and pray. He desires to be liberated so that corruption would not destroy his members which had served sin, but that they might be sanctified to serve God…This is something which neither the law of nature nor the Mosaic Law can grant. Only the grace of God can sanctify the flesh together with the soul.

The Apostle complains of his condition as he says**:** "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" **(17,18).**

St John Chrysostom writes that the Apostle does not say that his body is the cause of his condition, but that it is 'sin that dwells in me'. Indeed, God has created the flesh as something good and not as something inherently evil. However when sin entered, nothing good dwells there any longer.

The same holy saint confirms that the flesh, although not as great as the soul, does not conflict with the soul and is not inherently evil, but it supports the soul. The flesh is like a violin in the hands of the player, and like a vessel controlled by a captain. These do not oppose those who use them. Similarly, the flesh and the soul carry equal responsibility.

The Apostle wishes to underline once more the concept that neither the flesh nor the soul are inherently evil, but it is man in his totality as he has accepted evil into his

[1] *On Resurr*

life. He has willingly corrupted his life and has destroyed the goodness of his will power. Consequently sin works within him and leads him according to its whims. This leads him to say**:**

"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (19, 20).

Besides, the problem is not the flesh, but it is sin that dwells in me and has corrupted both my soul and flesh. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ has come, and carried me with Him to crucify sin which dwelled in me; and to dwell Himself within me. So instead of moaning and screaming: 'Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me'; I say: 'I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me', (Gal 2: 20). If we have delivered our inner selves to sin in the past, let us die with the Conqueror of sin so that he would reign within us and we would hide in Him. This is what the Apostle intends when he says: 'For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory' (Col 3: 3, 4).

The church fathers confirm that as long as man lives in the age of struggle, he will not be immunized against sin. However he continues, by the grace of God, to struggle and to soar from victory to victory. He also continues to plead aloud asking God to support him in his weakness so that he would complete peacefully his days of estrangement. **St Benofious** tells us how the grace of God supports struggling believers: such support enables them to get rid of their past sins, which they should appropriately forget. However, the believer remains prey to weakness in some matters-such as those which the prophet calls secret faults and presumptuous sins (Ps 19: 12). Therefore the wise Solomon says: 'For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again', (Pr 24: 16); and repentance does not end. [For whether it is due to ignorance, or forgetfulness, or thought, or words, or just yearning, or due to necessity, or weakness of the flesh, or impure dream…these are matters which we most probably commit daily, voluntarily or involuntarily[1]].

Finally, having dismissed all accusations leveled against the Law and against the nature of his flesh (inborn nature), the Apostle accuses sin of having dominated, overpowered, and dwelled in him; making him rebel against the Law. He concludes by rejoicing in the Law, in spite of his being defeated by the law of sin, and offering thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ Who grants him the victory over the law of sin. He says: **"For I delight in the law of God after 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. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (22-25).**

What does he mean by these words: "…**with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin"?** He intends the following: 'With the help of divine grace, with which the Lord Jesus Christ has granted and blessed my life, and even though sin does not cease to fight me as long as I exist in the flesh…'. This is the meaning of victory through divine grace: the victory that is associated with constant

[1] *Cassian: Conf. 20:12*

struggle as long as we exist in the flesh (body) …for it is the struggle of the Lord dwelling in us.

❖ If the (Apostle) fears the temptations of the flesh, are we safe?!

❖ Do you wish to know if we have the same exact flesh as that of the saints…we are all committed to struggle so that each will receive his reward according to his own endeavor.

St Jerome[1]

❖ The Apostle had to rein and control his body so that he would not find himself rejected after having preached to others (1 Cor 9: 27). He realizes the violence of sensational whims and speaks on behalf of the human race as he says: "**O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?!"**

❖ The Apostle is considered a chosen vessel, separated to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 1: 15). Due to the prodding of the body and its evil temptations, he still has to subjugate and control his body so that he would not find himself rejected after having preached to others. In spite of that, we find him recognizing another law working in his members and against the law of his mind and captivating him into the law of sin (23). Even when he suffers nakedness, fasting, hunger, imprisonment, flogging, and much suffering, he blames himself and shouts out: '**O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?!'** So do you think it is appropriate for you to dispose of caution?!

St Jerome[2]

❖ We all feel that way, but we do not all get saved.

O, what a miserable man I would be if I do not ask for the medicine!...

We have a Physician, so let ask for the medicine. Our medicine is the grace of God. The body of death is our body if we remain strangers to the Lord Jesus Christ. May we not follow physical inclinations even though we live in the flesh…let us pray for the gifts of grace: 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you', (Phil 1: 23, 24).

St Ambrose[3]

❖ The Apostle says: **'I myself…' (**25), for in him there cannot be two different entities with two different natures(one that is good natured and the other evil), for they do not arise from two different sources. He states: "**So then, with the mind, I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin" (v25).** As long as I am careless, the law of sin will battle my redemption.

St Augustine[4]

❖ When saints feel disturbed by the burden of earthly thoughts, they stray away and are led involuntarily or unconsciously to the law of sin and death as they revert and move away from their sublime thoughts. Earthly concerns that seem useful and good,

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[1] *On Ps. Hom 41, 51*
[2] *Ep. 130:9; 22:5*
[3] *On Belief in Ressur.41*
[4] *In Ioan. Tr 41:11*

impedes them from perceiving God. They constantly groan to God, and repent humbly- not through words but by sincerely admitting that they are sinners. They pray to be granted forgiveness through the mercy of God - for what they commit day after day due to the weakness of the flesh. They constantly shed tears as they offer true repentance…

Besides, through experience, they comprehend that due to the burden of the flesh, they are unable to achieve the required goal by depending on their human power. They realize they will not be able to unite with the sublime and only good One – their heart's desire. While they are led away from seeing Him, and being captivated by worldly concerns, they seek the mercy of God who 'justifies the ungodly', (Rom 4: 5). They shout with the Apostle saying: "**O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?! I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7: 24,25).** They feel that they are constantly unable to achieve the goodness which they desire, and that they commit the evil which they reject and hate, such as vain thoughts and the preoccupation with physical matters.

Saints earnestly rejoice in the Law of God in response to their inner selves which transcend all tangible matters. They constantly seek to unite with God alone, yet they 'see another law in their members'- that is, they see a law embedded in their human nature which is 'warring against the law of (their) mind', (Rom 7: 22, 23); and which captivates their thoughts into the violent grip of sin**.** This is what obligates them to abandon that ultimate Goodness and succumb to earthly thoughts. Although these earthly thoughts could seem to be important and useful, and could assist us in our worship…yet they stand as an obstacle to our meditations on the One wholly good who enchants the eyes of the saints. With such a vision, they recognize that such thoughts are evil and they seek to avoid them…

We say that this law, which is embedded in the members of all human beings, fights and impedes the law of our minds from seeing God…

Fr Theonas[1]

❖ The saintly Apostle clearly states that his words apply to perfectly holy people and those who follow his way of service. He points to himself and eventually centers on his condition by saying: **'I myself'** (25). In other words, by saying this, he openly reveals his personal secrets, and not those of someone else. This is a style that the Apostle commonly uses without embarrassment on every occasion, and specifically whenever he refers to himself, (2 Cor 10:1; 12:13, 16; Gal 5: 2; Rom 9: 2).

Therefore, the words 'I myself' convey affirmation: I, the one you know to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one you honor with the greatest respect, and the one you consider as one of the best and most competent persons through whom Christ speaks – although I serve the Law of God with my mind, yet I confess that I serve the law of sin by my body. That is to say that my human condition sometimes attracts me from divine to earthly matters; and that sublimity of my mind descends to the concerns of trivial matters. At every moment, I find myself taken captive by this law of sin in spite of my patient and steadfast striving to conform to the Law of God. Nevertheless, I am unable to save myself in any way from the power of this captivity unless I keep escaping constantly to the mercy of the Savior.

[1] *Cassian: Conf. 23:10,11*

All saints grieve and sigh daily due to this weakness of their human nature. They attempt to isolate their roaming thoughts, the components of their conscience, and to seek the deep retreats as they intercede fervently and pray: 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified', (Ps 143: 2)…

This leads you to realize how all the saints admit that all mankind, including them, are sinners. However, they never despair of being saved; but rather seek to become wholly purified through the grace and mercy of God.

There is no one –however holy- who is without sin in this life. The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ conveys this also. This is clear when He granted His disciples the standard of the perfect prayer…as He teaches us to say: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us…" (Matt 6: 12).

The Lord has presented this prayer as a sincere one which saints dutifully offer, and which we therefore ought to wholly believe and embrace. Who can remain so obstinate, impudent, and filled with satanic pride as to imagine himself to be without sin…

Fr Theonas[1]

The Meaning of the Flesh as used in this Context

❖ We need to understand that the word 'flesh' does not refer to man or to the tangible entity, but it refers to the will to lust or to lustful passion.

Fr Daniel[2]

❖ Let us listen to the Apostle as he says**: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (18).** He refers here definitely to 'the blemish/sin of the flesh' which is found in the good nature of the flesh. If that sin is removed, then the flesh will not be corrupt or blemished.

The Apostle himself reveals that he intends by that (that is the flesh) to refer to our nature (that is our whole being). He begins teaching by saying: 'For I know that in me'; and then he clarifies the words 'in me' by saying: ('that is, in my flesh'). In this manner, he indicates that his 'flesh' is 'himself' and that it is impossible for man to be his own enemy.

When sin is reined and controlled, our flesh becomes beloved. Therefore the Apostle says: 'For no man ever yet hated his own flesh…', (Eph 5: 29); and we must be committed to look after it.

In another verse, the Apostle says: "**So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (25).** May those who have ears listen, for he says: 'So then …I myself'- while I am in the flesh…but how does he serve the law of sin with his flesh?! Does this happen by his acceptance and fulfillment of the passion of the flesh? God forbid! But it is because the stirring of passion which he rejects exists within him. As he rejects this passion, he serves the law of God with his mind, and he does not surrender his members to passion which would make them evil tools of sin.

St Augustine[3]

Rejoicing in the Law of God

[1] *Ibid 23: 16-18*
[2] *Ibid 4:11*
[3] *On Continence 19*

Through grace, we constantly struggle to fulfill our liberation from the law of sin. Therefore this law cannot destroy the joy of our salvation and our pleasure in the Law of God actively working within us. In this context, the apostle says: **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (22).** In this manner, man does not lose his joy and peace as he struggles against the law of sin.

- We possess a degree of peace as long as we find pleasure in the Law of God according to the inner man. However, it is not a perfect peace as we find another law in our members that is fighting the law in our minds.

St Augustine[1]

- By being liberated, we find pleasure in the Law of God, for freedom is joy……May your joy be in God, and may you be free….Do not fear punishment, but love righteousness……Are you unable to love righteousness? Then fear punishment and then you would progress to love righteousness.

St Augustine[2]

- Therefore we say, with good reason, that the sweetness of God is hidden within you. A law (of sin) exists and has found a place in your members. That law resists the law of your mind and enslaves you. This is why you are captivated and unable to taste the sweetness that is hidden for you, whereas the angelic saints drink of it….

St Augustine[3]

[1] *In Ioan . tr 77:4*
[2] *Ibid 41:10*
[3] *Ser. on N.T. lessons 95:3*

CHAPTER 8

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In the previous Chapter, the Apostle has underlined the role of the Law as the exposing agent of sin, but without providing a treatment for it. He has presented a very dark picture of the law of sin as a corrupting agent in all our lives, and as an instigator to physical passions which oppose all spiritual yearnings. In Chapter eight, he brings us to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only Conqueror of this law of sin. He shines on us with divine potentials that affect the life of a believer. For this reason, some scholars consider that this Epistle as a whole is "the cathedral of the Christian faith". Therefore some consider this Chapter as the "holy of holies" or the spiritual altar upon which the true believer presents the sacrificial offering of love, joy, and thanksgiving while struggling against evil and temporal tribulations.

This Chapter powerfully presents the potentials of living a sanctified life in God, and of enjoying the righteousness of our Lord who has conquered the law of sin. He has consequently opened before us the gates of hope in eternal glory and has fired our hearts with the sublime love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1-The Lord Jesus Christ and the Law of the Spirit	**1-17**
2-The Renewal of the Creation and the Work of the Spirit	**18- 27**
3-The Lord Jesus Christ, the Purifier	**28- 34**
4-Our Love for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Justification	**35- 39**

1-The Lord Jesus Christ and the Law of the Spirit:

Man has become carnal (7: 14) because sin has dominated, dwelled, and subjugated him to its law. He lives in humiliation as his body and soul are servile to the lusts of the flesh which is considered as sold property to sin. However, the Lord Jesus Christ has come not only to tear away the law of sin from our depths, but to establish **"the law of the Spirit" (8: 2)** as well. He grants the believer the potential **"not to walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit".** Consequently, man changes into a totally spiritual person- with his body and mind-and is considered spiritually inclined.

The Lord has demolished the law of sin that enslaves mankind in order to establish in him the law of the Spirit of life who grants freedom! He has granted us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us (11), and this grants life to both body and soul. This is a life of righteousness instead of the death of sin; a life of being God's adopted children instead of being slaves to sin! Truly, He has granted us the means to live and endure pain in order to rejoice spiritually in our inheritance with our Lord Jesus Christ

This is the summary of St Paul's message about "**The Lord Jesus Christ and the Law of the Spirit".** Now, let us study his apostolic words:

First: Liberation from Judgment: "**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". (1).**

Whereas the law of sin destroys and terrifies our being, the grace of the Lord lifts us up to bring us to the realization that we have been justified through our Lord Jesus

Christ. This is true only if we walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh…for the Lord's righteousness does not apply to those who are careless and who revert once more to a carnal life.

Fr Theonas comments on these words as follows: [The grace of the Lord liberates all saints, day after day, from the law of sin and death. Note that they are involuntarily subjugated to death even though they constantly pray God to forgive them their trespasses][1],

St John Chrysostom says: [It is a fact that many commit sin even after they are baptized. This creates a difficulty, and the Apostle quickly addresses this point not only by saying "in the Lord Jesus Christ" but also by adding the words "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. He intends to underline that such persons abandon carelessness. We have been empowered to walk "not according to the flesh", while it used to be a difficult endeavor. To prove his words, he says: **"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free" (2).** Besides, just as he identifies sin as "the law of sin", he identifies the Spirit as "the law of the Spirit".

He has described the Mosaic Law as being a spiritual one (7: 14), so what is the difference between them? The difference is great and endless, for one is spiritual while this one is the Law of the Spirit. So what is the distinction made between them? The first was just delivered through the Spirit, while this one grants the Spirit Himself without limits to those who accept Him. That is the reason why St Paul calls Him "the law of life" as opposed to the law of sin and not as opposed to the Mosaic Law. Therefore when we say that He has liberated us from the law of sin and death we are not referring to the Mosaic Law…

The grace of the Holy Spirit terminates the dangerous war by killing sin…therefore that which we have to resist becomes an easy task. From the very start, we are crowned by this grace and are led to fight after being provided with immense support[2]].

Therefore the law of the Lord Jesus Christ is the law of the Spirit. It is the enjoyment of the gift of the Spirit that destroys the violence of sin within us and that supports our struggle against it. Indeed, He grants us the Spirit of conquest and victory and we get crowned!

St John Chrysostom notes that the Apostle speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ who grants the law of the Spirit and that this is the work of the Holy Trinity, the Lover of mankind: The Father sent His Son to be a sacrifice for our sakes, the Son who offered Himself as a ransom to condemn the sins in our body, and the Holy Spirit to live and work according to His law within us. ..this is the work of the Holy Spirit which the Apostle proclaims in these words: "**For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (3).**

The following points are noteworthy:

a. **St John Chrysostom** considers that the Apostle does not diminish the importance of the Law when he says: "**what the law could not do"** for he has not said

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[1] *Cassian: Conf 23:13*
[2] *In Rom.hom 13*

that the Law is evil**.** Indeed**,** the Law is in harmony with the Lord Jesus Christ as it seeks to make us good. However, it is incapable of the achievement…this inability does not arise due to a deficiency in it but it is due to our own corruption as we have become carnal- for his words are **"it was weak through the flesh"**. By this he is not referring to "the human body" but to carnal life.

St Jerome finds that the disability attributed to the Law really arises from our own disability to obey it. He says: "The Law has been disabled because no one has been able to execute its commandments except the Lord Jesus Christ who stated: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt 5: 17)[1]].

❖ It is as though the Law was intended to make people righteous yet was unable to do so. Therefore (the Lord) came and opened the gates of hope through faith. In this manner He has achieved what the Law desired to do. Indeed, He has achieved through faith what the Law could not accomplish through the letter. That is why He said: "I have not come to destroy the Law".

St John Chrysostom[2]

b. Note that the Apostle does not say "He condemned the flesh" but he says: "He condemned sin". Therefore the flesh has become sanctified together with the soul, bearing the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit; and it has become enabled to conquer sin.

c. The Apostle says: "**God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh":** and **St John Chrysostom** explains that this is not because He has not taken a body like ours, but because He took our body without the sin.

❖ The Lord came in the flesh- that is in the likeness of sinful flesh, but not in sinful flesh. Indeed, He never committed sin, and being without sin, He became a true sacrifice for all sin.

❖ God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh but not in sinful flesh; and the Son has commissioned and sent those who were born in sinful flesh yet they have become sanctified from the impurity of sin through Him.

St Augustine[3]

❖ Note that the Apostle does not say "in the likeness of the body, for the Lord Jesus Christ took on a true body and not a likeness of the body. Moreover, he does not say "in the likeness of sin" for the Lord has not sinned. Rather, He carried sin on our behalf. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh…it is said "in the likeness" for it is written:

Considering the flesh, He is a man incarnated in order to be recognized; yet considering power, He is above man and beyond our conception. He put on our flesh yet He does not carry the weaknesses of the flesh.

St Ambrose[1]

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[1] *On Ps. Hom7*
[2] *In matt.hom 16*
[3] *In Ioan.tr 41:6; 108:4*

❖ He was born of the flesh, yet He is not like the rest of mankind. Indeed, the holy Virgin did not get pregnant with Him through any lust but through faith.

He who was before the holy Virgin, became conceived in her.

He who created her, chose her. He created her whom He had already chosen.

He granted her to be fruitful, and He did not strip off her chastity which remained untouched.

St Augustine[2]

D. In the commentaries by **St Athansius the Apostolic**, and by other saintly fathers, we find an explanation for the Apostle's words "in the likeness of sinful flesh". They agree and underline that the Lord Jesus Christ became incarnated and so united to our flesh in order to grant us unity with Him. In this manner, we can enjoy His work in us as we have become members of His holy Body.

❖ He became man in order to qualify us to live in Him.

He was born of a woman, of a virgin, in order to change our sinful generation and make us into a sanctified race: As such, we have become partakers of the divine nature as the saintly apostle Peter informs us, (2 Peter1: 4).

❖ The anointed Lord Jesus Christ has an unchanging nature. He is a lover of righteousness and despises evil. He was sent unchanged and without blemish to bear our body that is changeable. This has provided freedom and power to our flesh and has achieved the righteousness of the Law in us. Therefore we can say: we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in us, (Rom 8: 9).

St Athanasius the Apostolic[3]

Second: The Enjoyment of Righteousness

The result is more far reaching than simply releasing us from condemnation, for we now possess the righteousness which the Law desires us to enjoy but which it is unable to offer.

The Apostle says: **"…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", (4).**

What is the implication of "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us"? **St John Chrysostom** notes that "righteousness" here does not simply denote the absence of sin, but that [righteousness for us means the enjoyment of victory[4]], and that righteousness does not simply involve abstaining from sin but also involves being adorned with goodness. Therefore righteousness is not achieved by being negative but by a commitment to promote and practice positive aspects.

Once more, **St John Chrysostom** underlines that "righteousness" is a dynamic and constant way of life as well as an endless spiritual endeavor. That is why he writes:

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[1] *Conc. Repent. 1:3 (12)*
[2] *Ser. On N.T. 19:4*
[3] *Ep. 10 ad Adelphium; against Arians, dise.1:51*
[4] *In Rom. hom 13*

"In this expression, St Paul reveals that baptism is not enough for our salvation if we do not pursue a life that is fitting after we have received this blessing",[1]].

Third: The Preoccupation with the concerns of the Spirit rather than with the concerns of the Body:

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you…" (5- 9).

In St Paul's discourse about the preoccupation with the concerns of the Spirit and one's focus on the concerns of the body, we notice the following points:

A. In his discourse, the Apostle is not comparing between the essence of the body-that is the body and its members-and the Spirit. He is comparing between the concerns of the body and those of the Spirit. By the concerns of the body, he means the lusts of the body and its yearnings and concerns. By the concerns of the Spirit, he means its spiritual longings and concerns.

Once more, we stress that a human being-body and soul-represent one entity. If a person allows his body to act without restraints it will indulge in carnal passions, and the body would trespass its limits and so would be regarded as carnal. This is because the human being as a whole –mind, body, and soul- would be acting in a carnal manner. It is as though such a being has become a body without a Spirit. In contrast, if a human being submits his whole being to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, his human spirit would become sanctified, as well as his body with all its senses and emotions. In this manner, the totality of such a person would live as though he were a Spirit without a body, for even the body will conduct itself in a spiritual manner.

With this concept in mind, we can define the concerns of the body as a condition in which a person has given free reins to his body so that it crosses it limits and results in the submission- even of the spirit-to achieve the whims of the body. As for the concerns of the Spirit, this can be defined as a condition in which a person submits to the Spirit of God, therefore lives as a spiritual being fulfilling the ways of the Spirit. In the first case, the fruit is death both to the soul and the body on an eternal level. In the second case, the fruit is life and eternal peace (6). The first produces enmity to God (7), since a being seeks his pleasures to the detriment of his friendship with God, while the second creates pleasure in the sight of God.

Bearing this in mind, **St John Chrysostom** interprets the words: "**those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (8).** He says: "Shall we cut our bodies into pieces in order to please God and escape from our human nature?! Such an interpretation is inappropriate, for the apostle does not mean the human body or its essence, but he means the negligent universal animal kingdom that makes man carnal- even the soul becomes carnal- and so debases human nature and disfigures its nobility".

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[1] *Ibid*

Besides, when we hear the words: "…**But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit…",** we should not interpret that to mean that we have stripped off our human bodies. Rather; it means that while we have that body, we have abandoned the tide of carnal lusts, so that we have become as though we have no body as far as passions are concerned. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself used this expression when He spoke to the disciples and said: "You are not of this world", indicating that they do not have the earthly thought and temporal passions in spite of their existence in the world.

With that same concept, **St Iraneous** comments as follows: [With these words, St Paul does not condemn the entity of the body, but he reveals the need for the Holy Spirit to be poured into it. In this manner, the Spirit does not prevent mankind from being alive while they carry the body- for the Apostle himself still carried his body when he was writing these words to them. However, he had stripped himself from carnal passions as they bring death to a human being[1]]. He also comments: [This is not achieved by driving out the body, but by having fellowship with the Spirit, for those to whom the Apostle is writing have accepted the Spirit of God, even while having a body, and to whom we cry out saying: **"Abba, Father",** (8: 15),[2]].

St Clement of Alexandria considers that both expressions "**in the Spirit**" and "**not in the flesh"** are a reference to the Gnostics- that is to those who have real spiritual knowledge and have transcended carnal whims. He comments: [They are more sublime than pleasure, and transcend whims. They are aware of their actions, for Gnostics are greater than the world[3]].

B- Being preoccupied with the concerns of the Spirit is not the result of our own endeavors, but it is fruit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in us. By dwelling in us, He deadens the aimless carnal life. In this manner, a human being is wholly enabled- physically and spiritually- to live harmoniously, as a member of the Body of the Lord. That is why the Apostle says: **"And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (10).**

A person who lives according to the Spirit is someone who enjoys the Lord Jesus Christ who lives in him. The Apostle says: "And if Christ is in you…". **St John Chrysostom** also comments saying: [The (Apostle) says these words not to confirm that the Holy Spirit is the Lord Himself- God forbid- but to indicate that the person who has the Spirit of the Lord also has the Lord Himself; for it is impossible to have the Lord except where there is the Holy Spirit. Indeed, wherever one of the icons of the Holy Trinity is present, the Holy Trinity is present as well; for the Holy Trinity is indivisible and cannot be divided against itself, but possesses a most sublime unity…Now, meditate on the tremendous blessings we enjoy by receiving the Holy Spirit: Being the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive the Lord Himself, we also become equal to the angels. Besides, we enjoy life eternal, we hold the promise of the resurrection, and we participate easily in the race for virtue[4]]. **St John Chrysostom** goes on in his commentary on the Apostolic words to reveal that the body which was not only inactive due to sin but was

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[1] *Adv. Haer. 5:10:2*
[2] *Ibid 5:8:1*
[3] *Strom 2:22*
[4] *In Rom. hom 13*

also dead, now- by the dwelling of the Lord in us- has become active, graceful, and easily competes in the field of virtue to attain the promise…The body on its own is dead due to sin; but through God the Spirit, the body now enjoys life that never disintegrates, and has come to possess the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he speaks about the dwelling of the Lord in us, the Apostle proclaims "the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ" which does not only deaden the lusty carnal life, but also grants a life that is clearly obedient to the Holy Spirit, (10)…**St John Chrysostom** says that the Apostle encourages the hearer as he proclaims righteousness to be the source of life. He explains that where there is no sin, there is no death; and where there is no death, there is life that is impervious to disintegration.

Fourth: The Blessing of the Resurrection

Whereas the law of sin is cursed by eternal death, the law of the Spirit which the Lord Jesus Christ grants to us is blessed by the resurrection from the dead on the plane of eternity. The Lord grants us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us. This is the Spirit that has raised Him from the dead, and this same Spirit is able to resurrect our fallen nature and strip away from it the law of sin or the lustful carnal life. By doing so, the Holy Spirit grants us a new nature: a nature resurrected and rooted in the Lord, and dominated by the law of resurrection. This is what the Apostle proclaims as he says: "**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you", (11).**

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [Once more, St Paul deals with the topic of the resurrection as this is what inspires hope in each person most positively. It grants each a warranty of what will happen to him as he lives in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore do not be afraid on account of your being burdened by a dead body. May you accept the Spirit so that you will definitely be resurrected again…it is true that everyone will arise; but not everyone will arise to life. Indeed, some will arise to be punished, while others will arise to life, (Jn 5: 29)…He will not punish you if He finds His Spirit shinning within you, for He will then stop the punishment…and He will lead you into the bridal banquet where you will be in the company of the virgins, (Matt 25: 12). Therefore, may you not allow your body (carnal life) to live in this world, so that it may live in the other one up in the heavens. May it die so that it might live! If you preserve it alive here it will not live, and if it dies it will live. This is generally the state of the resurrection, for it is necessary for the body to die and be buried first and then it becomes immortal. This occurs in the font of baptism where the crucifixion, burial, and then the resurrection take place. This is also what happened to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ as He was crucified, buried and arose. May this occur to us too: let us be dead to the actions of our body. By this we are not referring to the death of the essence of the human being, for this is not our intention at all, but we are referring to the death of the human tendency to evil matters. At the same time, this is life as well, and what else can it be but life[1]].

St Ambrose[2] finds in the following apostolic words: "…**will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you", (11)** a confirmation of the unity

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Of the Holy Spirit 3:19 (149)*

of work among the Holy Trinity: the Father grants life to whom ever He chooses, and so does the Son, (Jn5: 21)**.** The same also applies to the Holy Spirit as we are told in (Ezekiel 37: 9, 10) "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army".

Fifth: Feeling Indebted to the Holy Spirit

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die: but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (8: 12,13).

St John Chrysostom comments on these verses as follows:

[The Apostle's words indicate how a spiritual life is greatly rewarding: by accepting the Lord to live within us, our dead bodies are brought to life and granted wings by which to soar into the heavens and the path of virtue becomes easy. He encourages us to pursue this goal and while he does not say "We ought to be committed to abstain from living according to the flesh", he says "we are indebted to the Spirit" to indicate that this is the path which is most powerful and motivating. That is the implication of his words "we are debtors not to the flesh".

At every point, the Apostle confirms that what God offers to us is not intended to be a debt for it is plainly a (free) gift. However, he restates that what we do should not be an option but a debt (in return for the dealings of God with us). He says: "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men", (1 Cor 7: 23). He also writes: "…ye are not your own", (1 Cor 6: 19). In another passage, he raises the same issue in the minds of his audience as he says: "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves…" (2 Cor 5: 15). The Apostle sought to underline this thought by stating that "we are debtors"….and when he says that "we are debtors-not to the flesh", he wants you to avoid thinking that he is speaking about the flesh and therefore adds: "…if you live according to the flesh"…

The Apostle presents here a teaching… he tells us that we should not live according to the flesh, that is we should not allow the flesh to be the master of our life. Rather the flesh should be a follower and not the leader. It should not plan our life, for the law of the Spirit is the One who plans it. By underlining this point, and by confirming that we are debtors to the Spirit, as well as by revealing the benefits of this debt to the Spirit, the Apostle speaks about things to come and not about past matters…the benefits of the Spirit do not end at the point where He has liberated us from past sins. Indeed, he grants us immunity against forthcoming sins, and considers us worthy of eternal life ("you will live")[1]].

❖ The Savior has granted you the Spirit through whom you deaden the acts of the flesh.

St Augustine[2]

Sixth: The Blessing of the Spirit of Adoption

The Apostle focuses in this chapter on our feelings as debtors to the Holy Spirit. He speaks about "the law of the spirit and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ";

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[1] *In Rom. hom 14*
[2] *Ser. On N.T. 78:9*

and he explains that we are indebted to the Holy Spirit who delivers us from condemnation as long as we walk according to the Spirit. The Spirit also grants us the spirit of victory and conquest so that we are enabled to face the war against sin with power while we compete in the field of virtue and soar towards heaven as with the wings of the Spirit…Finally, he reveals to us the work of this divine Spirit who dwells in us providing not only divine potentials but also renewing our status in relation to God. In this manner, the Spirit pulls us out of the status of slavery so that we may occupy the sublime status of adopted children, and as children we cry out to the Father saying "Abba, Father". Truly, we have become counted as children of God and entitled to be heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father". The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (14-16).

St John Chrysostom comments on this blessing as follows**:**

[Now this gift is more honorable than the first one. For this reason he does not say "for many live with the Spirit of God" but he says "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God" to indicate that He exercises authority over their lives (and guides them) as a captain guides his ship, or a horseman on two horses- for He guides not only the body, but the soul as well…He rules over them…However, the apostle fears that they might be negligent after being baptized and becoming confident in the gift granted them in the holy font. Therefore he tells them that even though they have received baptism but are not led by the Holy Spirit, they would lose the honor they had received as well as their sublime adoption… [1]].

The same writer considers that the words of the Apostle: "**For you did not receive the spirit of bondage"** area reference to the period covered by the Old Testament when the Jews had not received the spirit of adoption. By receiving the Law only, they lived under the threat of punishment and in fear similar to that of slaves. However in the New Testament, the reward of the Law does not consist of temporal matters or penalties, but the Law is presented to the children and God Himself is our reward. We enjoy Him as our Father forever, and we call Him "Abba" .This is an Aramaic word used to call a father.

St Augustine comments on the words "**the spirit of bondage again to fear"** and says: [There are two kinds of fear that produce two kinds of fearful persons, and this creates two kinds of ministries. There is a kind of fear that is driven out by complete love (1 Jn 4: 18). There is also another kind of fear that is pure and is constant for ever (Ps 19: 9). The Apostle refers in this passage to the fear that is not due to love…he also refers in another passage to pure love where he says: "Do not be haughty, but fear", (Rom 11: 20)[2]].

In this spirit, we use the language of children in our conversation with God our Father. We cry out to Him with the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and who grants us to be adopted children so that we say "Abba". According to **St Jerome, t**his voice which we

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[1] *In Rom. hom 14*
[2] *In Ioan. Tr 85:3*

use to cry out [does not come out of the lips but out of the heart. Indeed, God tells Moses: "Why do you cry to me?!"(Ex 14: 15). Evidently, Moses had not uttered one word[1]].

- ❖ Believers need to understand that by being children of God they should be led by God's Spirit to act appropriately. Having done so, they then should thank God as they have acted through His help…this does not mean that they have done nothing (that is, they are not denied to claim these acts as their own).
- ❖ By stating that when you deaden the deeds of the flesh through the Spirit you will live (13), he intends them to glorify and thank God. Offer thanksgiving to Him who guides you by His Spirit so that you are enabled to go through trials and appear as children of God …

St Augustine[2]

St Caprianus informs us of our obligations as children of God. He says: [If we are His children, if we have actually begun to be His temple, if we have received His Holy Spirit, we need to live in a spiritual and holy manner. When we lift up our eyes towards heaven, when we lift up our hearts and are filled with God (the Father) and with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with the divine and sublime matters, may we not act in a manner that is inappropriate of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle also urges us and says: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col 3: 1-4). We who have died in the baptismal font, and have been buried to rid us of the carnal sin of the old man, and have risen with the Lord Jesus Christ in heavenly renewal, should think and practice matters that are related to Him][3].

St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea[4] states that the gift of adoption that we receive through the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He carried what was ours in order to grant us what is His. Therefore He bore our death, our language, our sins, and our slavery. He has done so in order to strip away from us all these and so that we are no longer considered slaves but children and beloved.

St Augustine[5] comments on the words "Abba, Father" and says that the word "Abba" "is the same as the Latin word "Pater" which also means "Father". Therefore the Church seems to repeat this word as it cries out in the language of the Jews who say "Abba" and in the language of the Gentiles who say "Father" for it is one Church that embraces members who are Jews and Gentiles- all feel the non-discriminatory fatherhood of God to all of them.

The Holy Spirit Himself, who lives in us and grants us this adoption, testifies to the "honor of adoption"; for the Apostle says: **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (16)**.

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[1] *On Ps. Hom 59*
[2] *Reproach & Grace 4; Grace & Free will 23*
[3] *On Jealousy & Envy 14*
[4] *Adv. Eunomius 10:4*
[5] *Harm. Of Gospel 3:4*

Seventh: The Blessing of the Inheritance

We are counted as children of God when we receive the spirit of adoption, and as such become entitled to the eternal heritage. St Paul states: **"…and if children, then heirs-heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**…" (17).

The Jews believed that since they possessed the Law they were the sole heirs of the promise and others were excluded. However, the Apostle gently reveals to them that the Gentiles- having received the spirit of adoption through baptism-have become heirs of God. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself has said: "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers…" (Matt 21: 41). He also has said: "And I say unto you, "That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness" (Matt 8: 11, 12).

St John Chrysostom writes the following: [The Apostle has added to his statement that we are heirs of God the words "and joint heirs with Christ". Note his ambition as he seeks to draw us to the Lord**.** Since not all children are heirs, the Apostle reveals that we are heirs too. Besides, since not all heirs receive a great heritage, he underlines this point as we are heirs of God. Once more, since we could be heirs of God but not joint heirs with the only Son, he indicates that we are blessed with both at the same time[1]].

Eighth: Fellowship with the Suffering and Glorified Jesus Christ

The Holy Spirit grants us a heritage as we are children of God: we inherit God with the Lord Jesus Christ…this heritage is a free gift for which we have not worked. However, it is offered to the serious minded, who seek fellowship with the Savior, and it is not offered to the lethargic. It is offered to those who have fellowship in His sufferings and so are blessed with the fellowship of His glories… "…if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (17).

2- The Renewal of Creation and the Work of the Spirit :

We have spoken earlier about the "law of the Spirit" and have underlined the work of God in us. He liberates us from condemnation if we walk according to the Holy Spirit and not according to the lusts of our bodies. He grants us to be concerned with the Spirit who is life and peace. Therefore we enjoy the dwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ in us, the promise of the resurrection works within us, and we feel indebted towards the Spirit as He grants us to be adopted children of God and joint heirs with the Lord, having fellowship with Him. In the next segment, the Apostle speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit within us, and His influence even on the unreasoning creation. He underlines how the world, which has been created for our sake, anticipates our return to the divine Embrace as children of God. We had abandoned Him for so long and had been exiled to the earth making it cursed and bringing corruption to the creation. This is one aspect. On the other hand, we return now to experience the promise of the Spirit through the resurrection of our souls from the death of sin. Our bodies also enjoy this resurrection as we anticipate patiently the Great Day of the Lord when man will live in his totality-body and soul- in the perfection of the eternal and powerful resurrection…for the believer not

[1] *In Rom. hom 14*

to feel the difficulty of that, the Apostle underlines the role of the Holy Spirit Himself: and His concern for us by helping us to achieve this work.

First: The Apostle begins his discourse by saying: **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (18).**

He uses these words as a closing statement for the previous discourse as well as an introduction to the new one. Speaking about "the righteousness of Christ" and its association with the law of the Spirit, he has revealed the work of the Spirit in us. He specifically spoke about our adoption by God and the blessedness of being heirs. His purpose is to indicate clearly that our life with God does not constitute an escape from present hardships and pains. Rather, this involves rising above the present pains by opening our heart to the vision of eternal glory. After having acquainted us with the incomprehensible gifts of God, the Apostle seems to confidently guide us into the middle of the pains and dangers of this age, and proclaims that our union with God, through His Holy Spirit who is in the Son, does not change circumstances surrounding us. Rather, He grants us a larger capacity in the heart, thoughts, and strengthens the soul to enable us to go through these conditions with nobility for the sake of eternal glory.

St John Chrysostom comments on these words by saying: [Note how he soothes the spirits of the wrestlers and elevates them at the same time. Having indicated that the reward is greater than the hardships, he urges them to endure many more without becoming haughty. They need to bear in mind that they have to continue to win in order to receive crowns as their reward. In another passage, he says: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory", (2 Cor 4: 17). He does not say here that the hardships are light, but he associates them with rest by proclaiming the reward of eternal goodness: **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"…**He does not say "the glory that will be ours" but he says "which shall be revealed in us". It is as though the glory is already within us but has not yet been revealed…St Paul clarifies this even more in another passage where he says: "your life is hid with Christ in God.", (Col 3: 3)….These hardships- whatever they might be- are related to our present life, whereas the coming blessing span infinite generations[1]].

This apostolic discourse on the eternal glory that will be revealed in us through the hardships of the temporal times has ignited the hearts of believers to soar with the divine love on a heavenly plane. It elevates the souls above all pain, hardship, or search for any temporal benefit or blessing:

- Love finds that nothing is burdensome. Contemplate what Jacob tolerated for the sake of Rachel, the woman who was promised to him. The Holy Bible says: "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her", (Gen 29: 20). Later on he tells us himself what he went through: "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Gen 31: 40).

[1] *Ibid*

We should love the Lord Jesus Christ in this same manner. We need to pray constantly, to embrace and kiss Him. Then all that seems difficult will appear to be easy, and what seems lengthy will appear to be short.

Let us be kindled with the arrows of His love and cry every moment with the words: "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! ... My soul has dwelt too long…, (Ps 120: 5).

❖ If you seek to inherit the fruits of this world, you cannot become a joint heir with the Lord in His inheritance.

❖ You are so greedy, my brother! You desire to enjoy the world here, and reign with the Lord above!

St Jerome[1]

❖ [To those about to be martyred in the coal mines:]

You await each day joyfully for the moment of your liberating departure

See how you have actually left the world and are rushing towards the rewards of martyrdom and towards the heavenly mansions. After having seen the darkness of the world, you rush to see the worthy Light and receive a glory that surpasses all pain and sadness.

Fr Caprianus[2]

❖ The chosen vessel (St Paul) did not randomly state with great joy these words: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom 8: 18). Consider that the yolk is easy and the burden light, (Matt 11: 29). Though the burden could be hard for the few He has chosen, it is light for those who love Him. The Psalmist says:

St Augustine[3]

Second: The Apostle states that the Spirit does not remove pain and hardships from a believer. However, He grants him a hidden glory within even though he experiences external pains. St Paul proclaims that this glory will be revealed in the great Day of the Lord, and it will be projected from the believer's inner life to the whole of the creation. He says: **"…for the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God", (19).**

What does the Apostle mean by saying that the creation waits eagerly for the proclamation of our adoption by God?

St John Chrysostom considers that the Apostle's use of the word "creation" is intended as a reference to the whole world including inanimate matter. God has created the whole world for the sake of mankind and so that he might reign as master of it while he bears the likeness and image of God. However, the corruption of mankind has had an adverse effect on all things created. Indeed, when Adam sinned, the verdict was: "Cursed is the ground for your sake: In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns

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[1] *Ep.22:40; 14:16,10*
[2] *Ep. 76:7*
[3] *Ser. On N.T. 20:3*

and thistles it shall bring for you…," (Gen 3: 17,18). Man has resisted his God and this has produced the resistance of the whole creation to mankind. Nevertheless, in spite of this resistance, the creation seems to still pray for man's return to God's embrace. That would be like the return of a son, and the creation- which has been created for the sake of mankind- would rejoice for mankind.

St Paul the Apostle portrays the creation as a person moaning and suffering as he prays for the goodness of all life…this should not be taken literally or materially, otherwise we would expect mankind to revert to the status of Adam in the first earthly paradise where he would live eternally. This would be a contradiction to the mind of the Lord and the Spirit of the Gospels. In fact, the Apostle seeks to underline the effective work of the Lord Jesus Christ in man's life. This effect is so great that it seems to drive even the inanimate creation to speak and rejoice on account of man's reconciliation with God and his return into the fatherly Embrace.

In exceptional instances, God has allowed violent nature to submit to a believer- such as the docility of the savage hungry beasts in the presence of martyrs in the Roman amphitheatres, the ineffectiveness of poison on some, the existence of some anchorites and ascetics with the desert animals, and the feeding of some desert fathers by crows. All these were not a general rule, but they occurred so very often in the ages of great oppression in order to provide tangible support for the faith. Moreover, it underlined the inner intangible divine blessings and pointed to the heavenly glories to come.

St John Chrysostom writes: [St Paul presents the whole world more like a person. The prophets had done so previously when they presented the rivers as clapping with their hands (Ps 98: 8), the hills jumping, and the mountains moving. They do that to enable us to comprehend the greatness of the blessings and how they could shake and stir even the inanimate creation. They do not do so in order to lead us to imagine that these objects were alive and so attribute to them brain power. They also use the same style in painful conditions where they spoke of the vine lamenting, the wine weeping, and the pillars of the Temple shouting out in order to make us realize the viciousness of mankind. St Paul adopts that same style as the prophets and presents all the creation as a human being moaning and suffering to indicate the greatness of things to come…

What do these words mean: **"…the creation was subjected to futility" (20)?**

Why has it become corrupt? What is the reason?

This is because of you, O man. Since you carry a dead body that is exposed to suffering, the earth has been cursed, and has produced thorns and thistles.

Even the heavens, which have been plagued with the earth, will be transformed into a better state. Hear the words of the prophet who says:"Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed", (Ps 102: 25,26). Isaiah the prophet proclaims the same issue and says: "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner", (Isa 51: 6).

These verses reveal the meaning of the words: "the creation was subjected to futility"; and how it will be liberated from the state of corruption?!...

The creation has become encircled with evil and has become corrupt because of you and in spite of the fact that it has not sinned itself. For your sake too, incorruption will occur, and this is the implication of the words: "**in hope" (20).**

When the Apostle states that this occurred **"not willingly"** he is not referring to what has happened to the creation, but he seeks to instruct us about the Lord's care and how it is all-inclusive, and that the healing of the creation cannot spring from itself[1]].

[Now, what is the hope of the creation?

"…because the creation itself will also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God", (21).

Now, what is this creation? It does not involve you alone, but it involves all the smallest things which do not share your mind or sensations. These share your blessings.

St Paul says: "…will also be delivered from the bondage…" in the sense that the creation will no longer be corrupt but will be in harmony with the beauty which will be granted to your body. Just as it became corrupt when your body became corrupt, so now when your body is incorrupt, the creation will follow too and be incorrupt. By this proclamation, the Apostle pronounces the result: "**into the glorious liberty of the children of God"** and so the liberation of the creation is fulfilled.

He uses the analogy of a teacher raising a king's son. When the son inherits the authority of his father, the teacher enjoys and shares in his blessings. The same applies to the relationship between us and the creation.

As you see, man occupies the status of leadership in all matters since it is for his sake that all things have been created.

Note how gently (the Apostle) coaxes the wrestler, revealing to him God's unspeakable love towards man. He wishes to ask: Why are you agitated when faced with trials? If you are suffering on account of yourself, then even the creation is suffering due to your acts. The Apostle is dealing not only gently, but with great focus on the importance of the subject he is addressing. Indeed, if the creation- that has been brought into existence for your sake- **"is in hope"**, then how much more relevant it is for you to be in hope-you, through whose fault, the whole of creation could be deprived of such blessings?!

When parents have children that are on their way to a ceremony in their honor, they dress their servants in shining robes for the sake of their children's honor. In the same manner, God dresses the creation in incorruption on account of the glory of the liberated sons[2]].

St Gregory of Nicea[3] considers that the creation that moans in hope refers to the heavenly hosts who moan on account of man and as they desire to rejoice when man enjoys being God's adopted child. In that context, the Lord Himself declared that heaven rejoices for the return of one repentant sinner (Lk 15).

St Iraneous interprets the word "creation", as used here, to mean "the body". He writes the following: ["It is fair that in the same creation in which they toiled and suffered while armed by all means of endurance, to be worthy of reward for their endurance.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 14*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Adv, Eunomius 4:3*

Moreover; in the creation in which they were slaughtered due to their love for God- in that same creation, they are revived once more. In the creation in which they endured slavery, they reign, for God is rich in everything, and everything belongs to Him. Therefore it is appropriate that the creation itself is transformed back to its first condition, submitting without any resistance to the authority of righteousness. This is what St Paul clarifies in his Epistle to the Romans[1]].

Third: The Creation Reprimands Us by its Hope as well as by its Moans

Having fallen into corruption due to our sins, the creation- which was blessed for our sakes- pleads for our glory as Gods" children so that she would be clothed in incorruption. In that context, her wait is like someone in constant labor and expecting "a new born". The Apostle says: **"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now", (22).** Such is the condition of the creation that has been brought into existence for our sakes. How much more should we moan and labor too in order to enjoy the fullness of the glory of God's adopted children?!

Fourth: The creation, which has not been granted anything**,** has been filled with hope. It finds itself as someone giving birth-moaning and having birth pangs. How much more should we look forward, as we actually enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls and have received the first born glory within us, for the fullness of His work in us. At such a time, our bodies will also be liberated by its resurrection on the great Day of God and will enjoy the same glory as that of our souls?! The Apostle states: **"And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body", (23).**

St John Chrysostom writes that the first fruits of the Spirit which we have received urge us to this inner moaning which is filled with hope. These first fruits are tremendously great and do not end with the Spirit forgiving our sins, for they also grant us righteousness and sanctification. These first fruits appeared in the age of the Apostle when the apostles could exorcise demons and raise the death through the casting of their shadow (Acts 5: 15), and their clothes (Acts 19: 12). These are the first fruits, so what would the fullness of the Spirit be?

Therefore let us expect adoption, according to the words of the Apostle…How does this happen while we, in fact, have been granted to be God's adopted children? We expect the fullness of the glory of adoption by the resurrection of the body from the dead. Accordingly, the Apostle says: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself", (Phil 3: 21); and "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality," (1 Cor 15: 53).

Therefore what we have received as the firs fruits of the Spirit opens up the door of hope. In this manner man is motivated to patiently struggle until he attains the fullness of the Spirit. It is He who glorifies the whole of man-soul and body- on an eternal level. That is why the Apostle continues his discourse on hope and on attaining fullness of the Spirit in these words:

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[1] *Adv. Haer 5:32:1*

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it", (24, 25).

a. What does he mean by the words "**we are saved by hope"?**

St John Chrysostom explains as follows: [This means that we do not need to ask for all things we have in this life, and that we should have hope too…believing that what God has promised, He will fulfill for us. In this manner we are saved; for if we lose hope, we lose all that we have been granted…

He wishes to say the following: I wonder, had you not submitted to countless sins? Had you not been despairing? Had you not been convicted?…So what has saved you? Hope in God alone has saved you; as well as your trust in His promises and blessings. There is nothing else that you have and that you could offer to Him. If that is what has saved you, hold on to Him too. He who has offered you such great blessings would never deceive or rob you of the blessings to come. He has found you dead, broken, imprisoned, and hostile; and He has made you a friend, a son, liberated, righteous and an heir with Him. He has offered you great matters such as these and which no one expected. Having enjoyed such generous gifts and love, would He betray you in the matters that are to come?!...

This path (of hope) has saved you from the very start: hope is the only warranty you have brought to the bridegroom. Therefore we should hold on to it and preserve it. If you demand anything from this world, you would lose your righteousness which has made you shine. It is for this reason that the Apostle goes on to say: **"…but hope that is seen is not hope: for why does one still hope for what he sees?!**[1]**]**

St Augustine writes: [We look forward to the immortality of the body and the redemption of our souls in the future. At such a time, we will receive the promise and we will be informed that we have been saved[2]].

St Augustine makes an analogy between this hope and an egg which carries within it life. Through trials and pain, the egg- like hope- supports life. He explains: [It is an egg – and not yet (a chicken), it is enveloped in a shell but do not consider it as such and just wait patiently. As you leave it in the warmth, it will provide life, hold onto that…[3]].

b. The first fruit of the Spirit motivates us to hold on to hope in order to attain the full glory which the Spirit grants to the children of God. However, this hope does not take root through negative behavior … in other words, a believer needs to play a positive role by tolerating many hardships and pain on account of his hope in intangible matters. That is why the Apostle says: "**…we eagerly wait for it with perseverance", (25).**

The Apostle constantly confirms this: he underlines the work of the free and divine grace, yet there should be no negativity displayed by the believer!

c. Through patience, the believer maintains his hope to enjoy the fullness of the work of the Spirit, and awaits the proclamation of eternal glory for God's children. This same patience is a divine gift which we receive through the presence of God Himself.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 14*
[2] *In Ioan . tr 86 :1*
[3] *Ser. On N.T. 55:7*

The Holy Spirit Himself supports us in our struggle- even in the simple issues and moments of weakness. The Apostle states: "**Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses…" (25).**

St John Chrysostom writes: [So that you may know that you do not stand alone facing the struggles and dangers, but that divine grace stands beside you. Even in matters that are completely easy, He works with you, and He plays a role in His union with you under all circumstances[1]].

d. The Apostle Paul addresses the subject of the assistance of the Holy Spirit to us in our struggles even in moments of simple weaknesses. He intends to arouse our hope and our perseverance as we struggle patiently. He underlines a principal role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as he says: **"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God, (26, 27).**

St John Chrysostom[2]considers that "the Holy Spirit", who intercedes on our behalf, refers-in these verses- to the hearts inflamed by the Holy Spirit through the "gift of prayer". The Holy Spirit does give to some-more than others- the gift of prayer…for the Spirit suggests to the holy souls what to pray for on behalf of their fellowmen and sisters. That is because they do not know what matters are appropriate and need to be prayed for. St Paul prayed and asked to see Rome; and Moses prayed as he yearned to see Palestine (Deut 3: 26); Jeremiah prayed on behalf of the Jews (Jer 15: 1); and Abraham interceded for the people of Sodom (Gen 18: 23). Although these prayers were valuable as they revealed how these saintly hearts were filled with love towards others, yet **St John Chrysostom** finds that these saintly people neither knew the appropriate manner nor the things for which to pray...for a person needs the Spirit to assist and guide him when he prays even on behalf of others.

The Spirit offers assistance not only in prayers made on behalf of others, but also assists the person himself. According to **Fr Ishak**, the disciple of St Anthony, [Sometimes we pray for matters that oppose our salvation. Through His divine care, He rejects our requests, for He sees far more than we do what is truly beneficial for us. This is what took place with the teacher of the Gentiles (St Paul) when he prayed that God would remove the thorn and messenger of Satan which He had allowed for his own benefit: "For this thing I be sought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"" (2 Cor 12: 8, 9), [3]].

St Augustine comments on the Holy Spirit who groans within us as follows: [The Holy Spirit does not groan in and within Himself in the Holy Trinity and in His eternal essence…but He groans in us- that is, he makes us groan. That the Holy Spirit makes us groan is not to be considered a simple matter, for He brings us to the realization that we

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[1] *In Rom. hom 14*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *Cassian: Conf 9:34*

are strangers living in the land of our estrangement. Moreover, He teaches us to look forward to our homeland and therefore we groan as we greatly yearn for it[1]].

3-Justification through the Lord Jesus Christ :

First: Comprehending God's Plan for those who Love Him

The Apostle underlines the necessity of the believer to comprehend God's redeeming plan in his own personal life. He states: **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose", (28).**

God's plan for us is sublime: He does not change the flow of events and circumstances according to our personal whims. He transforms all matters- without exceptions- to build up the soul of the true believer. The result is that all things, even opposing conditions, work for the glory of the believer.

St John Chrysostom comments on these words and says that it is appropriate for believers to accept what the Holy Spirit suggests to them, rather than chose for themselves a way of life based on their way of thinking and which they think is beneficial to them. There are many issues which seem to be beneficial in man's eyes but which cause much harm. For example, a person assumes that a quiet life that holds no dangers or troubles is good for him. That is why the Apostle prayed God three times to lift away his troubles and temptations; and the answer came to him: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness", (2 Corinthians 12: 8, 9). In other words, Let us leave all matters in the hands of the Holy Spirit so that they may be transformed for the edification of our souls.

Once more, **St John Chrysostom** confirms that all things which seem painful work for the good of those who love God. As for those who do not love Him, then even things that seem good and holy work against them if they do not return lovingly to Him. Some of St John Chrysostom's words in this context are:

- Even certain hardships, poverty, imprisonment, starvations, deaths, or any other disaster we encounter, God can transform all things to have opposing results
- Just as all things that seem harmful become beneficial for those who love God, so even beneficial matters become harmful to those who do not love Him.

[He cites examples of the Jews who did not benefit from the good Law, but they stumbled even in the Lord Jesus Christ].

St John Chrysostom[2]

- Addressing the righteous and the wise, the message is: "all things work for the good to those who love God". As for the weak and the foolish, the message is that all things oppose a foolish person (Prov 14: 7) for he does not benefit from success nor does he improve through disasters…for a person is more easily overcome due to success than due to failure. Indeed, failure sometimes forces a man to stand up involuntarily, to attain modesty, and through his sadness gains beneficially as he despises sin and

[1] *In Ioan. Tr 6:1*
[2] *In Rom. hom 15*

improves himself. In contrast, success might propel a person to delusions of pride and vain glory.

Fr Tadros[1]

❖ What does St Paul intend to convey by his words: "**all things"** other than a reference to these severe and horrific pains that happen to us?! It is true that the heavy burden of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes light in spite of our weak love.

St Augustine[2]

St Jerome[3]mentions Job as a living example of someone for whom damages were transformed into benefits. The enemy left nothing unharmed in Job except his tongue so that he might blaspheme. However, all these turned to his benefit, and God came and spoke to him as a friend would speak to a friend.

Many of the fathers comment on the description of those who love God which reads as follows: **"to those who are called according to His will" (28).** We quote some of these comments:

❖ If the invitation and message alone were sufficient, why has everyone not been saved?..

The invitation alone does not achieve salvation. The intention of the invited is essential. The invitation does not obligate nor force them, for all have been invited, but not all respond to the invitation.

St John Chrysostom[4]

❖ **The Savior Himself says: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed", (Jn 8: 31).**

Is Judas counted as one of his disciples since he did not remain steadfast in the Lord's teachings?

Are they counted as His disciples of whom it is reported: "When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?!..(Jn 6: 59-66).

Has not the Bible called them "disciples" although they were not true disciples since they were not steadfast in His teachings in the way He indicated: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed", (Jn 8: 31). They did not persevere because they were not true disciples. They were not true children even though they seemed or were considered to be so.

Therefore we call people as "the chosen" and "the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ" since they have been given that name when they became renewed (through Baptism) and when we find that they live in purity. However, this becomes a reality if they remain constant in the path to which they have been called…

St Augustine[5]

Second: God is Concerned with our Glory

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[1] *Cassian: Conf. 6:8*
[2] *Grace & Free will 33*
[3] *On Ps. Hom 6*
[4] *In Rom. hom 15*
[5] *Reproach & Grace 22*

The divine Spirit transforms even the events that seem harmful into ones that will be beneficial for us since we are called according to His will. We may then wonder "What is that divine will?

The will of God is to raise man to glory. God does not need man to worship or serve Him, for He loves mankind as His children and desires them to have fellowship in His glory. This is the matter that preoccupies God concerning His chosen ones, and which He has previously declared, and St Paul repeats in these words: **"…to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren," (29).**

❖ Note the sublimity of this honor! For we receive by grace that which the only Son possesses naturally. He did not find it sufficient to have us conform to Him, but He added another point: "that they might be firstborn among many brethren…".(29) St Paul uses all available means to establish this relationship with utmost clarity.

St John Chrysosotom[1]

❖ The inspired Apostle has used the expression "firstborn" on four occasions: once, in (Col 1: 15) "…the firstborn over all creation"; again in (Rom 8: 29) "…the firstborn among many brethren; also in (Col 1: 18) "…the firstborn from the dead…"; and another time as an absolute expression- without attaching another word to it- he says: "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let al the angels of God worship Him",(Heb 1: 6) In what sense does the Lord become firstborn among many brethren? It definitely becomes clear that for our sake-who are body and flesh by birth- He was born among us and shared as well our body and flesh (Heb 2: 14). He did so in order to transform us from corruption to incorruption, and that through occurs by our being born again from above by the water and Holy Spirit. He Himself opened the path to this birth as the Holy Spirit descended upon the waters during His baptism. In this manner, everything becomes firstborn for those who are born spiritually. He has designated as "brethren" all those who share with Him this birth, and follow in His footsteps by being baptized with water and the Holy Spirit.

St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea[2]

❖ Let us understand the words **"…conformed to the image of His Son" (29)** This applies to our inner person. That is why the Apostle says in another quote: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…", (Rom 12: 2). Inasmuch as we shall change from the image of this world, so we shall conform to be children of God.

We could also comprehend these words as follows: Just as He became conformed to our image and so appeared to be dead, so we too become conformed to Him by being immortal. This fact is related to the resurrection of the body.

St Augustine[3]

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[1] *In Rom. hom 15*
[2] *Adv.Eunomius 2:8*
[3] *City of God 22:16*

❖ In the flesh, the Lord became our leader (our firstborn) into the kingdom of heaven and into the presence of His Father, telling us: this is the path, and the door; and through me all will have to come in, (Jn 14: 6; 10: 9).

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic[1]

Saint Paul the Apostle treats the subject of God's choice or His appointment of His chosen ones by confirming that there is no forceful pressure or obligation to accept the grace of God. Indeed, God appoints those whom He knows would accept His grace with their total freedom, and as St Paul explains: **"For whom he did foreknow, he also predestinated…Moreover whom he predestinated, these He also called; whom he called, these he also justified: and whom he justified, these he also glorified" (29, 30).**

Note that in this passage God "foreknew that they were His", and therefore He chose them. Indeed, His designation and appointment was not based on any prejudice or favoritism, but on His foreknowledge of them. This does not imply that they were to be credited for anything except for their acceptance to His call, and their response to His work in them through perseverance and struggle. God is the One who calls, who justifies, and who glorifies, yet there should not be any negativity in our response!

St John Chrysostom comments on the justification and glorification that God bestows on us as follows: [He has justified us by renewing the font of baptism, and those He justified He glorified by the blessing which is by the adoption[2]].

❖ Many have actually been called and justified (by baptism through faith), and those who continue to the end, these are the ones "He also glorified" and this has not yet been fulfilled.

Although these two matters- His invitation and justification- have not been fulfilled concerning those spoken about previously, yet until the end of the world there are still many who will be invited and justified. The Apostle has used the past tense- even concerning future events- and as though God has prearranged and prepared these matters from the beginning of time.

St Augustine[3]

Third: God Accompanies Us in Our Spiritual Struggle

God's gift to us is that He has designated us based on His foreknowledge concerning our positive reception to His work within us. Based on that, He has also called us, justified us through baptism, and glorified us by adoption so that we may become similar to the image of His Son. Moreover, He stands with us throughout the days of our struggle so that we could say with the Apostle: **"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?!" (31).**

St Jerome comments and says: **[** If God Himself has come (to the believer), then even those matters that seem to be against him are transformed to be assets for him…a believer who cherishes God's laws is not hindered by any person or by Satan or anything else! If you were to strip him of his money, it would be more reason to reward him; if you were to badmouth him as an evil person, then this evil would be counted as a source of

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[1] *Against Arians 2:61*
[2] *In Rom. hom 15*
[3] *Reproach & Grace 23*

new brilliance before God. If you were to deprive him of food, he would be glorified all the more and his reward would be greater. If you were to lead him to his death – which is the worst thing that could happen to anyone- then you would be binding him with the wreaths of martyrdom. What path of life is like that? It is a way kind of life that nothing can stand before it, and even those who plan to inflict harm do not constitute a baser member than those who serve him?! That is why he says: "**If God is for us, who can be against us?!"**[1]**].**

Fourth: Redemption is the Greatest Gift

There is no doubt that God's sublime love, revealed in sacrificing His only Son for our sake, draws all our emotions and absorbs all our feelings as we stand in awe and wonder "what can we ask after that"?! The Apostle says: **"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?!" (32).**

He has offered His Son as a sacrifice, though we were still enemies, in order to be reconciled with us. So what can He withhold from us after the reconciliation?! Or, as **St John Chrysostom** says: [The One who has granted great things to His enemies, would He not grant the lesser matters to His friends?![2]].

The Apostle says: **"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (32)** so that the Father appears to be the One who presents the cup to the Son. However, the Son also, due to His love, wished to drink of the cup so that the sacrifice is shared: "The Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son offered Himself. Accordingly **St Augustine** says: [The One who presented the cup is the same as the One who drank of it. The Apostle himself states that: "…as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour," (Eph 5: 2)[3]]. **St Ambrose** comments as follows: [The chosen vessel alone clearly reveals the divine love, for each of the Father and Son have sacrificed: The Father sacrificed by not having pity towards His Son for our sake, (Rom 8: 32); and the Son was sacrificed for "He gave himself for me", (Gal 2: 20)[4]].

Fifth: Watching Over us to the Very End

The Divine Redemption is undoubtedly the most sublime gift that God has given to mankind. Indeed, this has revealed His perfect love- not through words and emotions- but through the sacrifice made on the Cross. Moreover, the Cross remains to be an event that transcends time; and the Crucified continues to shepherd mankind even after His ascension into the heavens. He seeks to draw all and bring them into His eternal glory…from His heavenly home, His care is constant and uninterrupted as He seeks to bring us into the place where He lives.

This divine care leads the Apostle to courageously say:

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justified.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 15*
[2] *Ibid*
[3] *In Ioan tr 112: 5*
[4] *Of the Holy Spirit 1:12(129)*

Who is he that condemned? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also make intercession for us", (33, 34).

- ❖ He does not abandon shepherding us; and He continues to intercede for us as He holds on to that same love for us.

- ❖ The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (26). The Lord Jesus Christ has died and intercedes for us; and the Father did not show pity for His Son for your sake. He has chosen and justified you, so why are you still afraid?!

St John Chrysostom[1]

- ❖ He intercedes for us daily and washes our feet. We too need to wash our feet daily as we take spiritual steps and walk in truth. In this manner we will be conforming to the Lord's prayer and saying: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors", (Matt 6: 12).

St Augustine[2]

- ❖ May we continue in prayer for one another just as the Lord intercedes on our behalf.

St Augustine[3]

St Ambrose[4] finds in these apostolic words that the doors of God are open to every soul that turns to Him. He himself has used them in his response to the followers of Novetianus who had shut the door in the face of those who had returned and repented after having denied the Lord Jesus Christ, or after they had committed atrocious sins. In this manner their burden had become multiplied by despair.

4. Our Love for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Justification :

The Spiritual Law and the Lord's Love: St Paul moves from the topic of the Mosaic Law which exposes sin and provides no solution for it (Chapter 7) to the topic of the spiritual Law which is the spiritual life in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle reveals the work of the Hoy Spirit within us through the Lord's redeeming act. He lifts us up from being preoccupied with the body to concerns of the spirit; and instead of slavery, He grants us the spirit of adoption as God's children. He sanctifies our souls and bodies, granting us inner resurrection as well as the hope of the resurrection of the body. The Lord supports all our struggles despite our weaknesses, and transforms all things to our benefit so as to achieve His ultimate goal for us which is to lead us to "our heavenly glory"… in view of this amazing divine task, which is the fruit of the Lord's incarnation and sacrificial offering of His life on our behalf, the Apostle could find no other way but to respond to this love with love. Therefore he sings of his love of the Lord Jesus Christ by praising and saying:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

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[1] *In Rom.hom 15*
[2] *In Ioan. tr 56:4*
[3] *Ibid 58:5*
[4] *Conc. Repent. 1:3 (14)*

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter".

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", (35- 39).

This song of praise has touched the heart of the Church and drawn all her children to yearn for suffering each day for the sake of the beloved Lord. They wish to offer their lives as a sacrifice of love to the One slain who first loved us by offering His life as a sacrifice on our behalf.

Pain and tribulations no longer destroy the soul. Indeed, they have become the reason for joining the procession of conquest and victory under the leadership of the suffering and crucified Lord Jesus Christ.

- **"For your sake we are killed all day long"…**Clearly, we shall depart carrying many wreaths for we live for many days. In other words, we gain many more wreaths than the number of days we live for it is possible to die during a day more than once, and not just once or twice. Whoever is prepared to do so continue to receive full reward constantly.

- The Apostle also reveals that our bodies have become a sacrifice. Therefore we should not be disturbed or confused when God asks us to offer them.

- It is truly an amazing matter, for we are not only conquerors; but we are conquerors due to the same matters that have been placed to harm us. We are not just conquerors, but we are "more than conquerors" as we achieve victory easily and without fatigue or strain…for God wrestles on our side. Therefore have no doubt, for even when we are struck we are considered better than the strikers. If we are banished, we conquer our oppressors, and if we die, the ones who are alive (who killed us) continue in strife…they do not fight mankind but oppose the Almighty who is invincible!

  St John Chrysostom[1]

- The expression in (Proverbs 9: 2) "She hath killed her beasts" refers to the martyrs in every city where they are killed daily by unbelievers for the sake of the Truth. They shout with a loud voice saying: "*For your sake we are killed all day long: We are counted as sheep for the slaughter"*.

  St Hippolytus[2]

- Nothing of these hardships can separate the believers, or tear away those who adhere to His Body and Blood…

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[1] *In Rom. hom 15*
[2] *Frag. From Comm on Prov 9:1*

Persecution is the choice and concern of the heart. God permits it to happen in order to test and justify us. He wishes to justify His people constantly, yet His help does not abandon believers in the midst of hardships and at all times.

Caprianus the Martyr[1]

❖ The words **"all day long"** in this passage refer to all the ages when we suffer persecution and are killed as sheep. The day does not refer to a day made up of twenty four hours but to every period during which believers suffer pain and die for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St Iraneous[2]

We might wonder: Is it possible for the angels or powers to separate us from the love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ?

❖ He does not say that intending to indicate that the angels or the others powers try to do so-God forbid! Rather, he is trying to underline his great love towards the Lord. Indeed, he does not love the Lord for the sake of the things pertaining to Him (even if they were the heavenly ones), but it is for the sake of the Lord that he loves the things that pertain to him. His only focus is on the Lord and the one thing he fears is to fall short in His love for the Lord. This matter in itself is more terrifying than hell; whereas the joy of love is a yearning that he cherishes more than the thought of His kingdom.

St John Chrysostom[3]

St Ambrose[4] notes that in this apostolic discourse the Apostle makes no distinction between the love of the Father and the love of the Son, (35, 39). This is a sign of the unity of the Divinity, as we sacrifice all things for the sake of our love towards God.

[1] *Ep. 7:5*
[2] *Adv. Haer 2:22:2*
[3] *In Rom. hom 15*
[4] *Of the Christian Faith 5:16 (187)*

PART 2

II- GOD'S ELECTION OF HIS PEOPLE

CHAPTERS 9-11

We have stated that the Jews generally felt they were especially privileged above all other nations based on three principal claims: they were descendents of Abraham to whom divine promises had been made; they were the recipients of the Mosaic Law; and they were God's chosen people.

Concerning their claim to be Abraham's descendents, St Paul raises them from being children in a purely physical sense to being spiritual children if they accepted to carry faith in their hearts. He then raises them to the status of being children of God Himself and this would be a matter which they would share together with the victorious (converted) Gentiles,(Ch 4 -6). Concerning the Law (Ch 7-8), St Paul underlines the need to attain the goal of the Law and that is the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the literal interpretation of the Law. Indeed the Law cannot solve the issue of sin and stops at merely exposing it; whereas faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the mystery behind the justification of all mankind. Now, in Chapters 9 and 10, he speaks about their privilege as God's chosen people. This is a very sensitive and difficult issue to discuss with the Jews. They reject to consider any dialogue or discussion bearing on this subject. Therefore the Apostle addresses them as though he were walking on thorns: he wishes to win them over but without relinquishing the truth or denying the open door invitation for all nations. As a result, he combines his great love for his own people with his big heart opened up to the Gentiles. He also devotes all Chapter Eleven to speak about the victorious /converted Gentile who should not boast or challenge his Jewish victorious brother due to the invitation and the opening of the door to the Gentile. Indeed, God's redeeming plan towards His people will definitely be fulfilled towards the end of time when the Jews will accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ after having denied Him over such a long period St Paul requests the victorious Gentiles to behave humbly or they could be cut off due to pride. They need to remember that they are a branch from a wild tree that has been grafted into the original olive tree.

Note that as he presents his discourse on this subject, St Paul underlines three points:

1. God's love proclaimed through His promises, His choice of His people-yet these are not all the Jews according to their physical ancestry- but of all those who accept to be His adopted children through faith.

2. The cruelty of man who responds to God's love by rebellion and ingratitude. The outcome and fruit of that has been the rejection of the ungrateful Jew.

3. Blessing is comprehensive, even though the rejection is partial, and God yearns to gather all the Gentiles and all the nations through their common acceptance of the faith. This includes the Jews when they get to accept the One whom they obstinately denied.

CHAPTER 9
THE ELECTION OF THE GENTILES AS WELL

The main problem in the life of the Jews is their pride in being God's sole chosen people. On account of that, St Paul deals with this issue after having confronted them with their misinterpretation of the two other issues: concerning their being descendents of Abraham, and their being recipients of the Law.

He handles this issue with amazing wisdom for he does not deny that they are God's chosen people. However, he confirms that this is not due to any personal distinction or entitlement they possess. Rather, it is due to God's love who 'shows mercy to whoever He chooses'…in this sense, God also has proclaimed His love to the Gentiles and He has chosen them as well.

1-The Apostle's Esteem of the Jewsv 1 - 5
2- God's Election of the Fathersv 6 -13
3 – God's Election of the Gentiles As Wellv 14-29
4-The Failings of Israelv 30-33

1-The Apostle's Esteem of the Jews:

The Apostle concludes his previous discourse by confirming that nothing- neither angels nor any kind of creature- could ever separate him from loving the Lord Jesus Christ. So that the converted Jews would not suppose that he was about to renounce the people of his own nationality due to his belief in the Lord; he wishes to clarify most emphatically that his faith in the Lord has fired his heart up all the more towards his own nation. His heart is big enough to embrace them within the faith, even if that could lead to his deprivation! That explains St Paul's reason for opening his discourse in this passage by these words: ***"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh".*** **(1-3).**

His sincere desire that his people receive salvation underlines most emphatically his love for the Lord Jesus Christ. His yearning to see them saved reinforces his strong relationship with his people. His words here are intended to underline the extent of his love for them in the Lord Jesus Christ, and how much he cares and would sacrifice himself on their behalf.

St Paul could be likened to Abraham, the father of fathers, who offered his son – through whom God's promise would be fulfilled- upon the altar of love. Abraham had carried the knife, as a Cross, to kill the boy, for he had faith that God would be able to resurrect him and fulfill His promises through him...Similarly, St Paul offers himself as Isaac, upon the altar of love for the sake of his kindred brothers according to the flesh. He holds the Cross as he believes that his love for them will not deprive him of the Lord nor hinder his salvation. Indeed, his love for his fellow citizens fills his soul with joy and wins him glory before God. This is the result of living in God's love and accepting the work of His Holy Spirit in his being. Therefore the Apostle proclaims his readiness to serve his people to the end, and even if that would cost him his own life. Such sincere feelings could only become increasingly costly to himself.

As St Paul writes those words, he probably had in mind the words of Moses who proclaimed his love for God's people and shouted out to Him: ' if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written, (Ex 32:32).**St John Chrysostom** comments that this prayer was the most precious offering that Moses presented for it revealed him to be even more awesome than when he performed miracles. Indeed love is greater than the performance of miracles. Therefore no one can blame St Paul for saying these words which fulfill the command: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren', (1 Jn 3:16).

St Paul has been accused of betrayal to his people, their customs, and laws, (Acts 21:33, 22:22, 25:24). That is why he stresses his deep love for them whatever the cost might be. He underlines the sincerity of his words by his commitment to speak 'truthfully' and not 'falsely' due to his union with the Lord Jesus Christ. He states that the Holy Spirit, who lives within him, is witness to his conscience which no person can comprehend!

Fr Isaac, the disciple of St Anthony, comments as follows: [When the chosen vessel is finally filled with these feelings, he desires to be deprived of the Lord-if the need should arise-for the sake of the progress of his own people, as well as for the salvation of all Israel so that God might be glorified… they would progress by rejecting all fanatic thought and accept the Christian faith rather than be ungrateful)…He also says: ' For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection, (2Cor 13:9)[1]].

He proclaims his strong desire to see them accept salvation and deals with the subject of their being God's chosen people. He seeks to underline two points:

First: He does not address them as an outsider or as an enemy who resist him. He addresses them as *"**…my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" 3,*** in other words 'my brothers through blood ties'…for he also has new brothers through the ties of the new faith and the Spirit. Actually, he is addressing all his well beloved brothers.

Second: He does not ignore their privilege, for he says**: *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; covenants: or, testaments; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen"* 4,5)…**It is as though he is telling them: 'I know that you are God's people and He has designated special privileges for you out of all peoples, and He has offered us all these privileges which are to be fulfilled in God's new people. He states:

(a) They are Israelites: Jacob earned this title 'Israel' by a divine command for he had wrestled 'with God and with men, and had prevailed', (Gen 32: 28). The word 'Israel' means 'to reign as God'[2], yet Israel reigned only for a while. However, the new Israel presents real kings who do not reign over temporal matters. Rather, they enjoy divine glory with the King of kings and Lord of lords. They sing praises and say: 'And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father', (Rev 1: 6).

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[1] *Cassian: Conf. 9:18*
[2] *Strong: Hebrew & Chaldean Dict., article 3478*

(b) And they have been offered adoption: in the sense that God yearned to adopt them so that they would be His own and as his family. When God called Abraham to work among His people, He told him: 'And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn', (Ex 4: 22, 23). Besides, when God gave His people commandments which would distinguish them from the heathen, He said: 'Ye are the children of the Lord your God', (Deut 14: 1). When He proclaimed His redemption to them upon their return to Him, God said: 'for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn', (Jer 31: 9)…However, Israel did not live as God's adopted children but they resisted Him, (Isa 1: 2) and have not shown honor to His Fatherhood, (Mal 1: 6)...Therefore Israel needed a whole change of heart and nature through the dwelling of the Spirit of adoption within them. In this manner, they would live as God's children and become entitled to be heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son in the flesh, (Rom 8: 14-17).

(c) They have been offered glory (4): The indication for that was the appearance of the column of cloud and fire in the desert, as well as in the tabernacle and in the altar. And as the Bible says: 'Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle', (Ex 40: 34). The presence of the Ark was an indication of the presence of Divine glory, which is why Phinehas' wife said these words when she heard that the Philistines had taken hold of the Ark: 'The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken', (1 Sam 4: 21). However, the new Israel has become the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His glory. He lives in the midst of His people and comes into their hearts while filling them with His Holy Spirit.

(d) They have been offered the promises (4): As God desired to lift up his believers; He constantly made covenants with them. He sought to raise a people for Himself out of them, yet these people did not keep His covenants and broke them (Hos 8: 1), and disobeyed them (Ezk 17: 18). Therefore they were considered opponents and traitors to Him Consequently; it became necessary for believers to come to God based on a new covenant. This time it would not be written on stone, as in the Old Testament, but it would have to be written within the heart and through the Holy Spirit. In this manner God's sacrificial love would be proclaimed through the shedding of the Blood of the Son of God on the Cross.

(e) They have been handed the Law (4): They were privileged as they received the Law. However, they did not apply the Law in their daily lives. Therefore they were considered rebellious breakers of the Law.

(f) They have been shown the way to worship (4): The Law contained many instructions and rituals specific to worship. These actually foreshadowed and indicated spiritual worship.

(g) They have been given promises (4): Namely they received the promises that pointed to the coming of the Messiah. The prophets were especially engaged and committed to delivering these promises.

(h) They are descendants of the fathers: They are descendants of the patriarch fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

(i) According to the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ descended from them (5)…This is enough to make them proud: that the Lord Jesus Christ- the Word of God,

the Creator of all things, the everlasting blessed God – has descended in the flesh from them.

St John Chrysostom comments on this apostolic discourse as follows: [The words of the Apostle do not reveal directly what he intends to say. Everyone was speaking and blaming God for having considered Israel worthy to be called His 'children', and now they were being dismissed and disliked, as well as substituted by people who had never known Him at all. God had given the people of Israel the Law so that they would know Him more than all other mankind. Through the Law, they would enjoy great glory and would serve Him more than all the rest of the world. From them came the fathers who were friends of God. Above all, the Lord Jesus Christ descended from them. People had said all these things and blasphemed against God for turning against His people. St Paul had heard these things and was greatly disturbed. His heart was torn and he was jealously concerned for the glory of God. If required, he would strive and even yearn to be deprived so that his own people might be saved. He sought to stop this blasphemy which portrayed God as a deceiver before the descendents of those He had formerly promised with blessings. St Paul tells the Jews *"**But it is not that the word of God takes no effect…"*** **(6) s**o that they would not consider that God's promise failed, and that they should not look sadly on the promise God made to Abraham 'I will give you the land and to your descendents[1]].

The rest of the discourse therefore goes on as a defense by St Paul to underline that the word of God and His promises to the fathers have not fallen. His promises will be fulfilled but not according to a narrow and literal interpretation which the Jews have been committed to expect and observe. God's promises will be fulfilled according to a deep spiritual interpretation.

St Paul proclaims their privileges, yet he does not flatter them to the detriment of the truth. He underlines that the One who descended from them is the One **"who is over all, the eternally blessed God" 5.** Accordingly, **St Hyppolites** comments: [These words reveal clearly and righteously the mystery of Truth. Indeed, this One who reigns over all is God; and He Himself has indicated that in His words: "A**ll things are delivered unto me of my Father" (Matt 11: 27).** The One who is over all is the blessed God, and He was born and became incarnated yet He is God forever. In this context, St John also says: **"The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1: 8).** It is good that the Lord has been called the Almighty, for this reflects what the Lord has testified concerning Himself[2]].

2- God's Election of the Fathers:

The Jews believe that they had received, through their fathers, a divine and eternal promise that they are God's people. They believe that this divine promise would never be erased throughout the ages. As a believer in God's word, St Paul too realizes that God's promise will never change. However, the problem arose from the understanding of the Jews to God's word: When God promised 'Israel', He gave His promise to the true spiritual Israel and not to a specific race regardless of their behavior. When He promises

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[1] *In Rom. hom 16*
[2] *Against Heresy of Noetius 6*

Abraham to bear descendants through Isaac, He requires a spiritual offspring who possesses the faith of Abraham and Isaac and who not a mere offspring of the flesh…moreover, God who has elected Israel as His people is entitled to open His arms to the rest of the nations and to accept all of them as His people. This has occurred especially when Israel- Abraham's descendents in the flesh- failed due to their ingratitude and unbelief.

St Paul says: ***"Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel"* (6).**

The Apostle underlines his belief in the word of God and that it never fails. He believes that His promises to Abraham the father of fathers, endures forever. What the Apostle rejects is the interpretation of the Jews and their claim of being descendants of Israel. He explains that not every person of the nation of Israel is a true Israelite. In other words, they are not all members of the people of God; and as St Paul states in an earlier discourse: 'For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh,' (Rom 2: 28).

The Apostle provides a biblical interpretation concerning the descendants of Abraham in whom the promises will be fulfilled. He says: ***"Nor, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called". That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son". And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, "The elder shall serve the younger". As it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated",* (7-13).**

Note the following points in this passage:

First: The wisdom of St Paul and the distinctions which he makes. **St John Chrysostom** comments that the Apostle presents 'Isaac' as an example of a child of Abraham. Although he was Abraham's true son, yet he was not born according to the strength of the body or according to the laws of nature: the father was old and the mother was barren. Indeed, the child was born according to the power of the divine promise. Therefore, the descendants of Abraham are those who are blessed with birth according to their faith and who spiritually hold on to the promises of God, and not those who have been born according to the flesh.

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [It is this promise and the word of God that have formed and given birth to Isaac. Of what importance is it that the womb is the instrument or the woman's inner parts are the means? Yet it is not through the power of her organs that the child was born, but through the power of the promise. The same applies to us as we are born by means of the word of God. In the baptismal font, the word of God forms and gives birth to us. We are born anew in baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This birth does not take place through the power of nature but through the power of God's promise, (Jn 3: 3; Eph 5: 26; James1: 18; 1Pet.3: 21).

In the same manner in which the birth of Isaac was foretold and then fulfilled, so our own birth has been foretold and fulfilled many generations ago through the prophets.

You know how the promise has been given and how it has been fulfilled as a great matter, and He has fulfilled it with immense simplicity, (Hosea 2: 1).

However, the Jews claim that the words: **'…for in Isaac your seed shall be called'** indicate that all who are born of Isaac are necessarily considered his descendants. This would lead to the conclusion that the children of Adam would be Isaac's children since their father Esau (Edom) was also Isaac's son so you see that not all who are born of the flesh are children of God. Indeed, the new birth from above and which takes place through baptism has been foretold in some way in this manner. (St Chrysostom considers that the promise to the seed of Isaac indicates the promise given to the baptized whose birth is neither an act of nature nor of the flesh).

Just as we consider that birth takes place through the womb (from Sarah), we consider that it takes place here in baptism and it is achieved by the Spirit; and it is fulfilled just as it was fulfilled in the past through the promise. The womb is harder than water due to the bareness (of Sarah) and her old age.

Therefore let us be assured of our sublimity. Let us focus and may our lives be appropriate with this sublimity. No part of it is physical or earthly; therefore may we never allow any temporal matters to take hold of us.

God has not created us as His children through sleep or through the physical will (Jn 1: 13); nor through the madness of desire...but He has created us through His divine love towards man, (Titus 3: 5).

Hope had been lost due to the passage of time, but it has become reinstated by the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly, we had become conquered by the senility of sin, then hope was reinstated by the birth of Isaac who came as a child. Consequently, we have become children of God and descendents of Abraham, (Is 60: 31)[1]

Therefore the promise of God stands and His words do not fail but are standing and effective. Isaac continues to be born until today, and like Sarah who did not possess the power of birth according to the flesh, he possesses the power of the divine promise. Similarly, the people of God continue to come out of the womb-which is baptism- of the Church. That is where Isaac is continuously born through the Holy Spirit and the power of the holy word, and not through the flesh or the whim of man.

St Augustine considers that the promise made to the descendents of Abraham through Isaac, who was born to Sarah, has become fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ was raised on the Cross. He proclaims His reign over this seed for His crime was recorded and written on the Cross as 'King of the Jews'. The Lord reigns by the Cross over the Jews from the 'seed of Isaac'…however, He does not reign over the seeds born according to the flesh but over those born according to the Spirit. St Augustine explains as follows: [The Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Jews (according to the wording over the Cross) refers to the Jews with a circumcised heart by the Spirit and not by the letter. These are the ones who receive praise from God and not from men. They belong to the free Jerusalem- our eternal heavenly mother, the spiritual Sarah who drives away the concubine and her children from the house of freedom. What Caesar wrote has been written, for what the Lord has said, he has said.[2]]

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[1] *In Rom. hom16*
[2] *In Ioan. tr 117:5*

St Augustine comments and says: [In order to consider the children of Abraham to be the children of the covenant, there was a need to call them through Isaac. This was carried out by gathering all in the Lord Jesus Christ through the call of grace[1]].

St Augustine[2] considers that the physical children born to Keturah are a symbol of the herectics who came from his second wife from Midian.

Second: St Paul is not satisfied with presenting one example to explain the promise of God in a spiritual manner rather than in a rigid literal interpretation. He provides another example which illustrates God's election of Jacob over Esau while they were in the womb of Rebecca.

In the case of Isaac, it could be said that the promise would be fulfilled in Isaac and his seed and to the exclusion of his brothers since Ishmael was the son of the handmaid. Now Isaac was the son of the free woman, and older than his brothers who were born of Keturah; therefore he was the heir to the promise and to the exclusion of others. That is why the Apostle presents "Jacob and Esau' for they came from one father and one mother. Indeed, they were twins in one womb, and in spite of that they did not get the same share. Considering the flesh, Jacob was no different than Esau in any manner. However, Esau had the advantage of being the firstborn physically…in spite of that, 'the older would serve the younger".

In other words, if the Jews represent the 'older' as they had come to know God before the Gentiles, yet they renounced Him while the Gentiles accepted the faith. The Gentiles became liberated whereas the Jews fell into bondage.

St John Chrysostom comments on the election of Jacob rather than Esau, and says: [Note how this has happened not only in the case of Abraham, but also in the case of his son. Faith and virtue in all cases are vital and they provide the true relationship of being God's children. Therefore we learn that it is not just through birth alone but through being qualified to be as virtuous as their father which denotes that they are his children. If being children is ascribed based on physical birth (only) then Esau would have been entitled to the same share as that which Jacob received…It is clear that the honor of physical birth is significant. Nevertheless, we need to pray for a virtuous soul which is recognized by the Lord even before it lives…election takes place based on the foreknowledge of God, for He knows who is righteous[3] and who is not].

Third: Some may wonder: Why this has been said: **(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him who calls). It was said unto her: "The older shall serve the younger", (11, 12).** Does God show favoritism? Why does He love Jacob and hate Esau?

In other words: Is it because God chose Jacob before he acted rightly or wrongly that Jacob became good and Esau came to be wicked? And why is it that Esau is accountable for his wickedness while Jacob is rewarded for his goodness?

The answer is as follows:

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[1] *City of God 16:32*
[2] *Ibid 16:34*
[3] *In Rom. hom 16*

1. In the same message, St Paul underlines that God shows no favoritism as he clearly confirms: **"Is there any unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!"** (14). The Apostle has previously explained that God's choice is based on His infinite foreknowledge, and he states: 'For whom he foreknow, He also predestined….these He also called', (Rom 8: 29, 30)…If He has loved Jacob and elected and called him, it is because He foreknew that Jacob would accept and respond to God's love. Even though Jacob would be exposed to weakness and failures by his acceptance, yet God loved him due to his good intentions and earnestness throughout his life. Concerning God's rejection of Esau, it is based upon Esau's rejection of God and his insistence to resist and rebel against God.

2. His words: '**For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil',** are used to confirm that Jacob was not justified due to the effect of the Law or due to his own personal good deeds. The mystery of God's love to him was based on God's free grace. However, there was no negativity on Jacob's part. In other words, had God waited for Jacob to grow and develop as a good man and then called him, Jacob would have been exposed to vanity and he could have believed that God had rewarded and called him because of his personal merits. Moreover, he would have thought that he first walked uprightly and therefore became personally entitled to be called. Therefore God proclaimed His love to Jacob while he was still in his mother's womb in order to underline that He is the Initiator of love towards His believers since He knows that they will accept His free invitation and His divine work within them.

3. St Paul desires to clarify to the Jews that if they were unable to explain why God had chosen Jacob 'Israel', then how could they comprehend God's plan towards the whole world?! God, who had loved Jacob before he was born and while he was still in his mother's womb and unable to understand anything, was also entitled to elect the Gentiles and love them. This is a fact, even though the Jews and the Gentiles could not comprehend the mystery of God's choice and love for the Gentiles! In other words, the Jewish nation and Jacob himself would be unable to present an explanation for accepting Him. In the same manner, everyone would be unable to comprehend the mystery of the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles as well.

4. The Apostle's discourse does not minimize the role of faith in the struggle. However, it emphasizes that man's salvation is not achieved by good works outside the sphere of faith. Indeed, it would have been impossible to accept Jacob had he not displayed first his love to God. …Therefore we will not be amazed to hear that God will reward each one according to his deeds, (Matt 16: 27).

5. St Iraneous[1] provides an explanation for these divine words: **'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'.** He says: God uses even the fetus in the mother's womb as a prediction. He proclaims in this instance the appearance of two nations: one in bondage and the other free. However, both have one father who is the one God…just as Isaac is the father of Jacob as well as Esau, so is God the Father of the Jews as well as of the Gentiles.

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[1] *Adv. Haer 4:21:2*

6. St Augustine considers that this is a prediction of what happens in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is like Rebecca as She carries within her both the good and the wicked. It is written that [they struggled inside the mother's womb, and when they struggled, Rebecca was told 'Two nations are in your womb': two men, two peoples, one good and the other wicked. They struggled together inside one womb. There are so many wicked within the Church! Indeed, one womb carries both until they would be separated at the end of time. The good will shout against the wicked, and the wicked against the good, each will struggle with the other inside the womb of one Mother[1]].

We have quoted earlier some of the comments of the holy fathers on this subject in our study of the Book of Genesis[2].

We conclude our study about the election of Jacob rather than Esau as void of any unfairness by quoting the words of **St Augustine:** [Concerning original sin, both were similar. However, they were different in the context of actual sin…the older would serve the younger is interpreted in terms of the Holy Book as a reference to the Jews who would serve the younger nation- who are the Christians (since they will provide the prophecies and the symbols to them)[3]].

3- God's Election of the Gentiles as well:

In the previous discourse, St Paul reveals his deep love for his people, and expresses his sadness due to their rejection of God's faithful promises. He confirms that God's word will never fail, and will be fulfilled in the new spiritual Israel. In the next part of his discourse, he sets out to speak about God's election of the Gentiles to be His people. He states that no one is entitled to oppose God's plans and judgments. Besides, he affirms that such an election is nothing new as God had revealed it earlier to the prophets.

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!" (14).

It appears that the statement made about God having loved Jacob and hated Esau had aroused objection. Could God be unfair? Both were still in the womb and both had neither done good nor evil. The answer is swiftly provided and needs no proof: 'Certainly not'; for we cannot comprehend all the mystery behind God's decisions or plans in any way. Indeed, our judgment on matters differs completely from God's judgment. Here the Apostle wishes to underline a most important principle, and that is that God does not favor or misjudge anyone even though this might appear to be the case in our human minds…In this manner, the Apostle prepares the way so that the people would not judge God's plan of salvation which involves the calling of the Gentiles.

"For He says to Moses: 'I will have mercy on whom ever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" **(15).**

This divine dialogue with Moses took place when Moses desired to enjoy the divine glory, (Ex 33: 19 –Septuagint Translation). This divine saying was told to Moses to reveal to him that, although God appreciated all his struggle, yet all the blessings granted to him – namely his vision of the divine glory- has been granted to him as a free

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[1] *In Ioan . tr 11:10*

[2] طبعة 1984، ص 242، 243

[3] *City of God 16: 35*

gift and not as the price of his struggle or due to his personal deeds…moreover, these blessing are not granted to slack or lazy people. Having a vision of God is a free gift to those who possess a living faith and who struggle spiritually.

St JohnChrysostom considers that the conversation of God with Moses indicates that although Moses had found great favor in God's eyes, yet he was unable to comprehend the depth of God's wisdom and judgments. God seems to be telling him: ['Moses, it is not given to you to know who is entitled to my love out of all men, leave this to Me'. If Moses has no right to know, then how does this work for us?! [1]].

Note that God does not say: 'I show mercy to those I want, and destroy those I want'. Rather he says**:** 'I will have mercy on whom ever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion' in order to indicate God's authority to show love, mercy, and compassion to mankind. He does not wish the destruction of the sinner but rather that he returns and repents. God initiated love towards Jacob, whereas His hate for Esau was the fruit of Esau's ingratitude and stubborn insistence to reject God's mercy… God is love, yet He does not obligate others to accept Him.

"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (16).

Does this oppose the apostolic advice: **'…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling', (Phil 2: 12),** and other similar advice?

If God's mercy is not available to whoever wants or seeks, then why does He present His Commandments to us, and asks us to voluntarily accept Him with our own free will? Why does He urge us in both Old and New Testaments to struggle to the end by telling us: '…he who endures to the end will be saved', (Matt 10: 22; 24: 13; Mk 13: 12)? In the book of the Revelation, God confirms: **"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life", (Rev 2:10).** Moreover, He tells the angel of the Church of Thyatira: "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience…" (Rev 2: 19)?!

Anyone who reads the Holy Bible with spiritual understanding cannot ignore the positive role of people in order to enjoy free salvation; and that God requires us to exercise our free will or voluntary election coupled with serious striving. God does regard highly human freedom and does not ignore our effective role…. We wish to underline here that **the Holy Bible cannot be understood as separate parts independent of one another, for the Bible is one whole integrated text, that addresses many and disparate matters …therefore the reader needs to enjoy the spirit of wisdom and distinction in order to avoid words out of context and to quote them within the appropriate situations and within the total spiritual framework of the Holy Bible.**

In this passage, St Paul the Apostle is not addressing the issue of human free will or election and obligation. If that was the case, he would have proclaimed that clearly in this Epistle as well as in his other letters: how God evaluates human will, and the absence of tyranny or obligation in the context of accepting divine mercy or the work of grace as a free gift. However, he addresses here an issue that does not concern individuals as single

[1] *In Rom. hom 16*

persons for he is speaking about the invitation to the Gentiles. That is why he does not speak about the will of man and whether it is independent or not, but he speaks about the plan of God for all mankind…It is God who had started by electing Israel as His people. They were to be the yeast that would sanctify the world through the coming of the Savior, descending from them according to the flesh. It is His right to have mercy on whomever He wills, and to have compassion on whomever He wills. He does so by opening the door of hope to all peoples, and without having weak creatures facing and judging Him.

St Jerome comments as follows: [According to us, we gladly welcome the concept of free will. However, we should never forget to give thanks to the Giver as we comprehend that we would be powerless unless God preserves His gifts within us constantly…the willingness arises from us, and the endeavor arises from us too; yet we would neither have the will nor the effort and endeavor without the constant help from God. The Lord and Savior tells us in the Holy Bible: 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working', (Jn 5: 17). He constantly gives and He constantly grants. He is not satisfied with having granted grace once, for He continues to grant it constantly. We pray in order that we might receive, and when we receive we come back and pray again. We do so as we do not feel guilty of greed as we seek to obtain of God's richness. As He does not retain or refrain from granting to us, we do not stop from taking. Indeed, the more we drink the more we become thirsty. Listen to the Psalmist's song of praise as he says: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good', (Ps 34: 8). Every good blessing we receive provides us with a taste of God[1]]. **St Jerome** also says: [Where there is grace, it is present as a free gift from the Giver and does not come as a reward for actions…Nevertheless; it is up to us to be willing or unwilling to receive it. As for freedom itself, which we possess, it has been granted to us through God's mercy[2]].

This is one way of viewing God's mercy. Taking another approach, St Paul wishes to apply their viewpoint to disturb his Jewish listeners. **St John Chrysostom** explains that the Jews had accepted God's merciful acts, but they did not object when Pharaoh was severely beaten by Him. So why do they protest when He opens the door of mercy to others? This is what leads the Apostle to go on and say**: *"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth'. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory. Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"* (17-24).**

Note the following points in the above passage:

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[1] *Ep. 133: 6*
[2] *Ep. 130:12*

First: The aim of this discourse is to affirm the role of God in our salvation. The Apostle has no intention to speak about, or to ignore, the topic of the free will of man. God works within us due to His love and abundant mercy as free gifts and not due to something we have earn or deserve.

❖ This clearly indicates that God's grace and mercy constantly seek our benefit. If God's grace abandons us, all our strivings would be fruitless. However much a person works with all his/her might, it is impossible for man to reach his original condition without God's help.

Fr Daniel[1]

❖ As we progress in any virtue, we need to say these words of the Apostle: '…not I, but the grace of God which was with me, I am what I am', (1 Cor 15: 10). 'For it is God which worked in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure', (Phil 2: 13). Our Savior Himself states: 'He that abided in me, and I in him, the same bring forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing', (Jn 15: 5). It is also written: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waked but in vain', (Ps 126: 1, 2).

St John Capian[2]

❖ Let us examine the implication of these words. The focus is not on the person who wants or who strives; but on God who shows mercy. If we do not want and do not strive, then God does not come to our assistance. We have to want and to strive so that God will consequently assist us; for if the wrestler sleeps, he loses the victory.

St Jerome[3].

St John Chrysostom considers that this apostolic discourse is an introductory step to the listeners. It is intended to soften their arrogance which has led them to be critical of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles. Before revealing the mystery of God's plan, St Paul intends to underline to his listeners that they have no right to take the position of a critic or a judge of God. The Apostle's words could be reworded as follows: [Our role is to submit to God's actions, and not to be imposing or questioning, even when we do not know the wisdom behind them. That is why he says: 'O man, who are you to reply against God?!' Who are you? Are you His partner in authority? No! Will you sit and judge God?!...He does not say: 'Who are you to reply to God? But he says: 'Who are you to reply against God?' Note how he frightens and terrorizes them so that they might become fearful rather than being imposing and inquisitive. This is how a skilful teacher operates, for he does not surrender to his students' false illusions whatever they might be. Rather, he leads them to an idea by tearing away the thorns and planting the seeds. He does not answer all the questions presented to him whatever the circumstances[4]].

An unbeliever adopts the position of a critic to every divine act. In contrast, a believer joins Jeremiah and says: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee:

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[1] *Cassian: Conf 4:5*
[2] *Insti. 12:9*
[3] *On Ps. hom 34*
[4] *In Rom. hom 16*

yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?!'(Jer 12: 1).

God is gladdened and finds pleasure in His children, and He is eager to engage with them in conversation. However, this needs to take place on the basis of purity and faith. It needs to be the dialogue between a child who rests his head on his Father's chest to feed from Him the mysteries of His decisions and to enjoy His divine wisdom; even though he might reproach, contradict, or argue with Him. But if the child adopts the attitude of an obstinate critic, as some of the vine workers did towards the owner of the vine when he showed mercy and love, (Matt 20:1-16); then the owner told them: 'Friend, I do thee no wrong… "Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own??!" The Lord addresses this same reproach to the Jews who resent that God shows mercy to the Gentiles, and who resent the blessings He grants to their fellow brothers and all mankind.

Second: Rather than stand as a critic to God's sublime dealings, a person needs to pray God to fill him with wisdom and knowledge in order to comprehend and discover amazing matters. In the Old Testament, in which the Jews believe and take pride, God tells Pharaoh: ***"Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth",(*** **17) –** (Ex 9:16 Septuagint translation). God had shown mercy towards Moses, yet He allowed Pharaoh to reign and gave him life so that through his cruel heart the glory of God would be declared. Due to Pharaoh's violent treatment of God's chosen people, the name of the Lord has been declared in all the earth, and as Moses praised God saying: 'The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away', (Ex 15: 14, 15). God chose Moses rather than Pharaoh, and the Apostle explain: *"**Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens"*** **(18)….**It is not for us to question and say: 'Why have God chosen Moses and hardened Pharaoh? For God's wisdom transcends ours. What we need to know is that God knew the heart and yearnings of Moses, and therefore supported and granted him with His grace. Through such mercy, God is glorified. As for Pharaoh, he had a cruel heart (Ex 8: 15, 32; 9: 34; 10: 6); and God did not deal with this cruelty due to any incapacity, but He lifted His hand and allowed him to continue in his hardness of heart. This means that God allowed Pharaoh to be violent against God's people because even through such violent wickedness, God is glorified…God who had strengthened Moses mercifully, did not hinder Pharaoh from the intentions of his wickedness. This allowed Moses to fill up his cup of glory, and for Pharaoh to fill up his cup of evil; while God is glorified in both cases.

Third: St Paul the Apostle also borrows from the Old Testament –which the Jews consider holy- the example of the potter- (Jer 18:1-10) to underline man's relationship with God. It is like the clay in the potter's hands and like the thing created in the creator's hands: man cannot oppose God's deeds and wisdom. Indeed, it is the potter's right to form from one lump of clay one pot for honor and one pot for dishonor, and he is glorified in both vessels.

St John Chrysostom comments on this example and says:

[He has not used this example to deny the gift of free will. Rather, he intends to reveal the extent to which we should obey God. By calling God as the Potter, we become

as a lump of clay before Him. Therefore it is appropriate that we not only cease from arguing and questioning Him, but we should stop speaking or thinking altogether…that is the only point which the Apostle wishes to apply from this example. He does not intend to use it as a declaration of a way of life (as the heretics interpret this to mean that God creates two natures: one good and the other evil). St Paul only intends to underline full obedience and silent compliance…

This is what we need to consider always when we use examples. We should never generalize or apply the example to all aspects of a subject. We need to choose what is relevant and appropriately fitting out of that example for our particular point and to leave the other aspects…

When St Paul says: ***"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"*** **(21)**, do not think that he says these words to refer to the creation, and that it is obligated and devoid of free will. His purpose is to reveal God's authority and His various plans...if we give a different interpretation other than that, we commit a number of errors. If the Apostle was speaking about man's will in this passage, and stating that God has created good and wicked will, then he would have absolved man from responsibility and he would have contradicted himself. Indeed, St Paul always expresses great appreciation for the gift of free will[1]].

In other words, **St John Chrysostom** wishes to confirm that St Paul intends to present one aspect of the example, and that is that God works with us and we can do nothing but obey Him…However, He does not strip us of our free will: if we wish to live with Him, He changes us in a manner that transcends our understanding and for the glory of His name.

Bearing this in mind, we can say that He is like the potter and He is able to shape us. However, He is not a mere potter, for He is the Almighty Potter, the Father and Wisdom itself. He works wisely, and He is eager- due to His fatherly nature- to form all the clay into pots of honor. Yet, He takes into consideration our free will. Therefore if we reject His work, we lose honor and the work of His holy hands in our soul, spirit, and body.

God is a Potter who adopts and loves His pots. He yearns to save everyone and as the Scripture says: 'Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2: 4); , '… him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out', (Jn 6: 37); 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live', (Ez 33: 11).

Fourth: God is glorified in the pots of honor as the free gift of grace is declared in the lives of His struggling believers. He yearns that all mankind are pots of honor. However, if some insist on being pots of dishonor, He will still be glorified as His anger and displeasure are revealed towards sinners. God is holy, and He will condemn sinners and deny them a share and fellowship in His holy glory (22). At the same time, God is glorified as He is longsuffering towards man (22). Indeed, God tolerates the wicked for long periods and does not punish them immediately for their blasphemy and their

[1] *Ibid*

resistance to His work…that is what the Apostle intends to express through his words: ***"What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction",* (22).**

St John Chrysostom comments on this verse as follows:

[This is what the Apostle intends to say: Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath. That is, he had ignited God's anger by his hardness of heart. Although God allowed him to enjoy His longsuffering for plenty time, he remained incorrigible. Therefore the Apostle describes Pharaoh not only as a vessel of wrath but also as one 'prepared for destruction'. In other words, Pharaoh prepared himself by his own will for total destruction. God did not leave him in need of the means by which to get healed, nor did He remove the things that would destroy him…therefore he had no excuse.

God knew Pharaoh had all the means and therefore tolerated him with longsuffering to allow let him to repent. Had God not wanted Pharaoh to repent, God would not have tolerated him so patiently and for so long. Since Pharaoh did not benefit from the many chances to repent but became all the more ready for destruction, God used him as an instrument to reform others. By punishing Pharaoh, others would reform themselves, and in this manner, God reveals His power. Nevertheless, God does not seek to reveal His power; but He desires to reveal His tender love in all possible ways. Consider how Paul does not seek to reveal his power as he says: '…not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honorable…", (2Cor 13: 7). Would not that be even more true about God ?! By being longsuffering, God seeks to lead a person to repentance. When that person does not repent, God patiently tolerates him for a long while, and so God reveals His goodness and power towards a person who shows no intention to benefit of God's tremendous patience. On the one hand, God's power is revealed in the punishment of such a person who does not accept to be healed. On the other hand, He reveals His love towards mankind by being merciful to those who have committed sin and have repented. The Scripture does not use the words ***"make known His love' but says 'make known His glory"*** (23), in order to underline that this love is the glory of God in a specific manner. And this is what makes God different more than anything else.

When St Paul says: *"**He had prepared beforehand for glory"* (23)**, he does not intend to say that everything is the work of God alone. If that were the case, there would be nothing to impede the salvation of all mankind…Pharaoh had become a vessel of wrath due to his own base tendencies on the one hand. On the other hand the others (the Jews) had become vessels of mercy as they were prepared to be obedient. Even though the greater work was done by God, yet they made a slight contribution. Therefore St Paul does not use the words 'vessels of good deeds…but says: 'vessels of mercy' to underline that God is the only One covering us all[1]].

Fifth: The Apostle has underlined that the Jews have no right to criticize God's plans for they are unable to comprehend His divine wisdom as well as they should have done. He also has underlined God's right to choose the Gentiles just as He had previously chosen the Jews. The door is closed not before each Jew but before the Jewish nation as a

[1] *Ibid*

whole, just as the door would be open to the Gentiles, yet this does not denote that every Gentile would be saved…therefore he says*: **"Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (24).***

Through this discourse, St Paul manages to appeal to the Gentiles without provoking the Jews and arousing them against him. Besides, he opens the door of God's love to every one-Jew as well as Gentile-even though the Jews as a nation had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ.

4-The Failings of the Jews:

The Apostle has already answered the criticism of the Jews concerning opening the door to the Gentiles, and he has done so without hurting their feelings. He ends his discourse by providing supporting testimonials by the prophets themselves. He chooses some passages that refer to the stumbling block of faith that the Jews face, and some that refer to the reception of the Gentiles. In the rest of his discourse, he borrows some prophetic passages which the Jews believe in, and this allows him to be comfortably candid. He says:

***"As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, 'You are not My people; there they will be called sons of the living God"* (25, 26).**

The Apostle has borrowed these quotes from (Hosea 1: 10; 2: 23) (Septuagint Translation). He presents Hosea as a witness to his words to the Gentiles who were neither God's people nor His beloved ones. They were outside the sanctified holies but now have become God's people, His beloved, and His sons!

It is as though what was happening in the apostolic age was nothing strange since God had already revealed it to His prophets. They had to prepare the way for the fulfillment of His plans concerning the salvation of the Gentiles and of all nations.

St Iranaeous comments: [The prophet gave his children the names Loruhamah : 'for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel'; and Loammi 'for you are not my people', (Hosea 1). and the apostle goes on to quote the Scriptures: 'I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God'. The Apostle confirms that what had taken place as symbolic, through the acts of the prophet, has actually been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church. Similarly, Moses had taken an Ethiopian to be his wife… this illustrates the wild olive which has been grafted into the original tree and joins in its blossoming. By marrying the Ethiopan, the appearance of the Church among the Gentiles has been proclaimed. Those who jest and ridicule her are covered with leprosy, they are impure, and are distanced from the Tabernacle of righteousness, (Numbers 12). The same incident occurred in the case of Rahab the harlot. She counted herself as one of the Gentiles –covered with all wickedness. Yet she received and hid the spies who had come to discover the land. When the whole city in which she lived was destroyed upon the sound of the seven trumpets, Rahab and all her family were saved as they had faith in the scarlet rope, (Joshua 6: 22). The Lord Jesus Christ spoke

about those who acknowledge His coming and says: "the tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you" (Matt 21: 31)[1]].

The Apostle is driven to reinforce his point and quotes Isaiah's prophetic words which are in harmony with Hosea, and says:

***"Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved: For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth".(*27- 28).**

These words are found in (Isaiah 10: 22, 23) (Septuagint translation), and they predict the very few who would be saved from among the huge numbers who had been captivated by conquerors…for God had allowed the captivity of the Jews to happen and intended it as a punishment and to execute righteousness. The Apostle applies this prophecy in a more generalized manner to the Messianic age when a large number of Jews would be captivated due to their ingratitude and rejection of the Messianic faith. Very few would be redeemed as they would accept the redeeming Messiah; and God would allow that to happen in order to execute justice and to open the door to the Gentiles.

St John Chrysostom comments on these apostolic words and says:

[These words can be paraphrased as follows: I am not interested in crowds (in large numbers), and I am not affected by race (the Jews); but I am come to save those who come and seek redemption. He mentions 'the sand of the sea' not without a purpose, for he uses them to remind the Jews of the old promise (Gen 22: 17; 32: 12) of which they have made themselves no longer worthy. Why do you therefore become disturbed when the promise is no longer fulfilled (for everyone), whereas all the prophets have indicated that not all will be saved? At this point, the Apostle also indicates the way to salvation… ***"For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work (quick) upon the earth"*** **(28)….**This work is the faith which brings redemption and is expressed in a few words: ***"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved",*** **(Rom 10: 9).** Do you see how God fulfills a short work on earth, and the amazing thing is that these few words do not only bring salvation, but righteousness as well.[2]].

In other words, though Israel has been abiding by the literal words of the Law and the formalities of worship for a long time, yet God –in the fullness of time –has made a short work or taken an urgent concentrated action revolving around faith in the Savior. He would save believers even if they were a few of the Jews, and Isaiah prophesied (Is 1:9) concerning these few and said: "***Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah"*** **(29).**

It is as though what happened during the Apostolic age had previously happened in the age of Isaiah, for only a few survived due to their faith and were saved from destruction. Without these, all Israel would have been destroyed by fire just as Sodom and Gomorrah, (Gen 19).

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[1] *Adv. Haer. 4:20,21*
[2] *In Rom. hom 17*

Finally, the Apostle reaches this conclusion:

"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" **(30-33).**

This is the final outcome: the Gentiles who had neither received the promise nor the Law, and who had no knowledge of the God before the Gospel had been preached, did not seek to walk in righteousness. However, when they heard the Gospel, they recognized the righteousness that is according to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As for Israel, who had received many privileges, they followed the Law of righteousness but they did so through the application of the literal dictates of the Law without its Spirit. In this manner, they lost faith and clashed with the Lord Jesus Christ 'the stumbling block', so that the words of the prophet were fulfilled, saying: 'And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem', (Isa 8: 14)...The prophet's words were also fulfilled concerning the Gentiles who would accept the faith: 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste', (Isa 28: 16).

CHAPTER 10
THE MYSTERY OF INGRATITUDE

St Paul the Apostle addresses the issue of being 'God's chosen people' which the Jews abused. Instead of feeling the sublime love of God for them and feeling committed to their responsibility of preaching among the Gentiles, their hearts were hardened with ingratitude. They stumbled in the Lord Jesus Christ, 'the cornerstone', who became for them 'a stumbling stone and a rock of offence' (9: 32,33). Whereas believers accepted Him as the elect and precious cornerstone (Ps 118:22; 1 Peter 2: 6, 7). In Chapter 10, St Paul writes to us about the issue of the ingratitude of the Jews so that we also might avoid falling into that in any manner.

1- Zeal of the Jews Tainted by Lack of Knowledge 1-5
a- Their Ignorance of God's Righteousness
b- Their Ignorance of the Objective of the Law
2- Their Rejection of the Simplicity of Faithv 6-11
3- Their Rejection of God's Comprehensive Love 12-13
4- Their Rejection of the Commitment to Preach 14-15
5- The Testimony of the Prophets Concerning their Ingratitude 19-21

1- The Zeal of the Jews for God Accompanied with Ignorance:

The Apostle addresses a most delicate issue, which could result in an accusation that he has betrayed his own people. He proclaims every now and then how much he loves his brothers according to the flesh; and his acknowledgement of the privileges they had been granted out of all other nations in the times of the fathers and of the prophets. Besides, he admits their religious zeal although this was not accompanied with true spiritual comprehension. He says:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (1, 2).

St John Chrysostom comments on this apostolic saying and explains that as the Apostle gets ready to reproach them severely, he wishes to tell them: Do not consider the words or the accusations as though they came from a hostile person for your 'salvation' is the object of my desire and my prayer to God.

What a great evangelical spirit driven by love! The continuous resistance of the Jews did not hurt his loving feelings since nothing could make him more happy than the salvation of others and even those who resisted him…he carries them in his heart and yearns for their salvation while he does not cease to pray for them. This tender fatherly attitude can only be found in God's true servants. They cry within their depths with Samuel the prophet and say: "…as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1Samuel 12: 23).

The sign of love is evident in lucidity and clarity. He testifies concerning their zeal for God. However, it is not accompanied with knowledge. St Paul had committed that error before, when his zeal breathed out "threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (acts 9: 1). **St Augustine** says: [They believed they were offering a service to God by killing His servants! What a dreadful mistake! When you wish to

please God by beating His loved ones and bringing them down, by destroying the living temple of God and bringing it down so that you might not abandon the temple made of stone! What cursed blindness! This is what happened to Israel, and it served to call the Gentiles. We believe this has partly happened though not for all; for not all the branches have been cut off – only some of them- so that the branches of the wild olive tree could be grafted, (Romans 11: 17,25)[1]].

The pitfall into which the Jews fell could also be a danger to some Christians if they have "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge". For instance, a person could adopt some fanatic thought without comprehending the upright spiritual faith or without an open loving heart towards others. In other cases, a person could strive on the path of virtue, yet without leaning on God's chest, but depending on his own human power, personal potentials and temporal knowledge.

The reason for the ingratitude of the Jews is due to their ignorance concerning two issues: First: Ignorance of God's righteousness; Second: Ignorance of the purpose of the Law. First, their ignorance of God's righteousness arises from their ignorance concerning God's work in the life of a believer. Therefore they seek their own righteousness rather than seeking God's righteousness; and consequently this becomes a barrier to their salvation. Second, their ignorance of the purpose and wisdom of the Law: this leads them to hold on to the deadly literal application that lacks the life giving Spirit.

First: Ignorance of God's righteousness

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (3).

St Paul tries to give them an excuse: "**being ignorant of God's righteousness"**. However, he turns that excuse into an accusation against them as it arises out of their pride and self conceit- "**their own righteousness".** Their ignorance is not due to urgent external circumstances, but due to inner corruption which settles in the soul.

When the 'ego' is enlarged, it occupies the heart and cannot accept having any one else within. Even if that ego becomes religious, it works within its own enclosed limits. Therefore it seeks to establish its own righteousness, rather than opening up to love in order to receive the grace of God. Righteousness through faith is granted only through the love and grace of God.

Isaiah the prophet speaks about self righteousness and says: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness's are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away", (Isa 64: 6).

- St Paul the Apostle states that the Lord Jesus Christ is our righteousness (1Cor 1: 30).Consequently, anyone who hungers for this righteousness actually hungers for the righteousness descending from heaven, and which God grants. This is not the righteousness that man makes for himself. If man did not manufacture righteousness for himself, the Apostle himself would not have told the Jews these words: "…**they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God"**

[1] *In Ioan. tr. 93: 4*

(3)…God's righteousness does not refer to the fact that God is righteous, but it refers to the righteousness which God grants to man and which makes him righteous through God. Once more, in what sense are these Jews righteous? It is a righteousness which they have gained and assumed by their power; and therefore came to claim themselves as upholders who have fulfilled the Law through their personal virtues.

St Augustine[1]

❖ God alone is righteous and He is the One who justifies and grants righteousness to man.

They seek to institute their self righteousness in the sense that they believe that goodness arises from their own selves and is not a gift from God. In this manner, they 'have not submitted to the righteousness of God'. This is due to their arrogance and their belief that they could please God by their own efforts and not through any God given assets.

St Augustine[2]

❖ St Paul addresses these words to the Jews who, due to their self conceit, have despised the grace of God and do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that they seek to establish their righteousness and claim that it comes from the Law. This does not mean that they obeyed the Law, but that they established their righteousness in the Law since they proclaimed it was within their power to carry it out. At the same time, they ignore God's righteousness- not the righteousness due to God- but the righteousness that God grants to man.

St Augustine[3]

Second: Ignorance of the purpose of the law:

The 'ego' had hindered them from recognizing God and His work within them. As a result their proclaimed self righteousness became an obstacle which prevented them from enjoying God's righteousness. Their tenacity in observing the literal and formal dictates of the Law made them miss the pleasure embedded in the true purpose of the Law and that is the ultimate meeting with the Savior. The Apostle states: **"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. For Moses described the righteousness which is of the law. That the man which doeth those things shall live by them"** (4, 5).

The Apostle borrows from Moses these words: "You shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them" (Lev 18: 5). **St John Chrysostom**[4] also comments that a person can neither live nor be justified if he does not fulfill all the rituals and dictates of the Law, and this is an impossible task. Therefore if the Jews wish to be justified through that same Law, the Apostle concludes that every human being would be totally unable to achieve righteousness and life.By these words, the Apostle urges us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only One who has not broken the Law and is indeed capable of justifying those who believe in

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[1] *Ibid 26:1*
[2] *City of God 17:4*
[3] *Grace & Freewill 24*
[4] *In Rom. hom 17*

Him. St Paul does not leave the Jews any chance to make excuses; for the Law itself proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ as the Only One where righteousness is seated and Who enjoys the righteousness indicated in the Law. Any person who rejects Him is actually rejecting righteousness; even if he is strongly convinced that he would be justified by the Law.

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ is the purpose of the Law for justification. Through the Law, He has been declared to all who believe.

St Clement of Alexandria[1]

2- Their Rejection of Simple Faith:

Some might wonder: If the Jews have failed in achieving righteousness through the Law and in obeying its commandments, then how will we perform in the light of the evangelical commandments which are harder than those of the Law? This is why the Apostle promptly clarifies the new assets that we have come to possess through the Lord Jesus Christ and which could be summed up in two essential points:

1-Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is simple and easily within our reach (6-8).

2- The Almighty Father has raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead in order to grant us the active power of the resurrection within us (9-11).

1-Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is simple and easily within our reach (6-8).

In this manner, St Paul not only destroys the excuses of the Jews, but he also opens the door of faith before us. He indicates we can live by faith which is easy to have through the risen life provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven? (That is, to bring Christ down from above) or, who will descend into the abyss? (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach" (6-8).

The Apostle has borrowed these words from Moses after giving them an evangelical basis. The following words occur in the Book of Deuteronomy: 'For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou should say, who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea that thou should say, who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou may do it (Deut 30: 11-14).

Moses was speaking to his people about the Law or the divine commandments or divine Word. He indicates how it has become in their hands and not out of their reach. It is a Law that is neither in the heights of heaven- and therefore difficult to reach or hard to get acquainted with- nor is it in the depths where no one can descend to bring out. Indeed, the Word has come to be with them, reproaching and urging them to return to God. This can be said about the Word of God that is proclaimed through transcribed letters and which has been delivered into the hands of the prophet Moses-who would put them in the

[1] *Strom 2:9*

tabernacle in the midst of the people. How much more applicable are these words to the incarnated Word of God, who became man and dwelled among us and as one of us….He is no longer a stranger and He does not live far away from us…but He is close by…He lives within us and fills our depths with His Spirit. Therefore we are enabled to live through Him in our words and deeds, and with all our feelings and sentiments.

In the old times, the Jews boasted that they were God's people who had received the divine Law delivered by the angels to Moses (Heb 2: 2). Now, the Word Himself has come incarnated, granting us Himself and making us become the children of God in Him and by the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. **St Augustine says: [**He sent the Law through a servant, but He came Himself to grant grace[1]].

The righteousness ordained by the Law is difficult if not impossible. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ has come to give easy commandments. He has not come to be lenient with His believers, but He has offered Himself to come and live in them. Indeed, He came to live within them. His intention is to make them more righteous than the Scribes and the Pharisees rather than to make them fulfill the Law. These are His words: "…except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5: 20).

St Augustine recounts how he met God, and says that he foolishly sought God in nature and in the writings of philosophers. He went outside himself in his search whereas God was deep within his inner depths and elevated above all heights…therefore let us seek Him within us and find that he reigns in the heart, and let us celebrate His marriage there!

2- The Almighty Father has raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead in order to grant us the active power of the resurrection within us (9-11).

Enjoying the risen Lord within us

"that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (9-11).

Even though faith is not a difficult concept, yet **St John Chrysostom**[2] states that it requires a soul that is alert and accepts the Lord Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead. In an earlier discourse, St Paul says about Abraham 'who against hope believed in hope' (Rom 4:18). Similarly, a Christian accepts a life established in the Lord Jesus Christ and which contradicts natural hope…this is the seat of our faith!

Note the following in the above apostolic words:

a. The mouth and the heart join together in faith: "**that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (9).** The heart here refers to the inner man, while the mouth refers to the outer and apparent life. In essence, our faith is the meeting of the inner soul with her Groom, without excluding the body with all its members! In other words, our faith affects and touches our inner depths and our external deeds. Without the heart, our external testimony would be nothing but chatter, fanaticism, and formalities. At the same

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[1] *In Ioan. tr 3:2*
[2] *In Rom. hom 17*

time, without a demonstrated life and testimony we cannot enjoy the reward: "whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt 10: 32).

❖ This confession arises from the roots of the heart.

Sometimes we hear someone confessing his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we are unable to discern whether he is a believer or an unbeliever. We should not ask anyone to confess the Lord Jesus Christ if he is not a believer with his whole heart; for anyone who confesses in this way is giving words that do not match with what is in his heart.

St Augustine[1]

May we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all our hearts so that He reigns there as our God and delivers our depths from all darkness. Then we will respond to our Savior by leading a consecrated life in Him, and ultimately confess Him with our lips.

St Ambrose[2] considers that confession with the mouth represents one of the kisses which a believer presents to his/her Groom the Lord Jesus Christ while wooing Him and saying: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine' (Sg of Sol 1: 2). Since the Groom does not stop kissing us with the sacrificial and practical kisses of love; then it is appropriate to reciprocate these kisses with kisses, and love with love, so that we live in Him as the beloved and sanctified.

St Ambrose also considers that confession with the mouth coupled with faith in the heart are similar to the two silver trumpets (numbers 10: 2): [With these trumpets, a person will arrive to the holy land-that is the grace of the resurrection. Let them call you so that you may hear the voice of God. Then the words of the prophets and the angels will motivate you constantly and will promote you quickly to the heights[3]].

b. Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ with the mouth does not mean mere lip service. Rather, it means emphasizing a holy life for the glory of God and not for the glory of the confessor. The Lord says: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven', (Matt 5: 16).**St Augustine** says: [Those who desire to reveal their good deeds to people in order to glorify the One from whom they received these deeds and which have been revealed through them; then people will follow their example and adopt their faith. Truly, their light shines before men, for the rays of love shine out from them…note the Apostle when he also says: 'Even as I please all men in all things', (1Cor 10: 33). However he does not stop at this point, otherwise it would appear that pleasing people is his final goal and his words would be misleading. Therefore he says: '… or if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ' (Gal 1: 10). He also promptly goes on to explain why he pleases people and says: '…not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved', (1Cor 10: 33). Therefore he does not seek to please people for his own benefit, otherwise he would not be a servant of Christ. Indeed, he pleases people in order to save them and in order for him to become a faithful apostle of the Lord[4]].

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[1] *In Ioan tr 26:1*
[2] *Ep. 41: 15*
[3] *On Belief in Resurr 2:112*
[4] *Ser. On N.T. 4:4*

c. 'For the Scripture says: Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame' (11)…The Apostle Paul borrows these words from Isaiah (28: 16-Septuagint Translation) as he wishes to underline two ideas. The first idea is that a person could be put to shame due to the Law since he is unable to be justified by it, whereas he would not be put to shame through his living faith. The second ides is that he has not specified any group as he says: 'Whoever believes on Him…'.This confirms the comprehensive nature of salvation where there is no distinction between a Jew and a Gentile.

3- Their Rejection of God's Comprehensive Love :

The Apostle has already revealed the mystery of the ingratitude of the Jews: their rejection of the simple accessible faith. He used a prophetic expression from the prophet Isaiah (28: 16) which proclaims that 'whoever' believes will not be put to shame…He also borrows from Joel the words: 'whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered' (Joel 2: 32) these are the words St Peter also borrowed in his sermon on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:21).

In this manner, Paul the Apostle does not cease to affirm that the door of faith is open to all nations. St Peter accordingly proclaims in the house of Cornelius that God is the 'Lord of all' (Acts 10: 36).

"**For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (12, 13).**

4-Their Rejection of the Commitment to Preach the Word :

St Paul presents them with a new indictment, and that is their disregard of the principal role which they should have played as God's chosen people: to preach the Messiah of whom the Old Testament has witnessed with symbols and prophecies. In other words, it would have been more appropriate for them to preach the faith rather than to engage vainly in foolish arguments with the Gentiles. This is the implication of the Apostle's words: **"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (14, 15).**

St John Chrysostom provides a sweet analysis to this apostolic passage and says[1] that the Apostle disrobes them of every excuse. Having told them that they 'have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge', he uses questions as a way to clarify that they should have been the first believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophets had been sent as preachers to witness for Him among them through prophecies. However, they blocked their ears and rejected the faith. Salvation demands witnessing to His name as Joel the prophet states: 'that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered' (Rom 10:13;Joel 2:31). Witnessing to His name requires faith in Him, and faith requires hearing about Him, and hearing is only achieved through preachers, and preachers do not preach unless they are commissioned…God had actually commissioned preachers and

[1] *In Rom. hom 18*

they had preached ages before His coming. Accordingly, Isaiah, proclaims the mission of preachers who proclaim peace (Isa 52: 7). In spite of that, the Jews refuse to have faith…and they have no excuse.

It would have been appropriate for the Jews to surpass the nations and be the first to accept faith in the redeeming Messiah, and to play the role of the preachers. In this manner, they would have completed the mission of their prophets rather than resist the faith. That is how the Apostle reveals their dual indictment.

In any case, this rejection of faith has been foretold by Isaiah, and the Apostle says: **"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world" (16-18)**.

Isaiah had foretold that not all would obey the Gospel, since many of the Jews would reject the mission to preach that which the prophet himself had proclaimed (Isa 53:1)…He has presented the news so that they would believe in the Gospel. However, they did not hear even though the nations living in the extreme ends of the world have heard and have believed. Indeed, these became witnesses against the Jews.

The Apostle borrows a part of Psalm 19 in which the Psalmist sings: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world'…In this Psalm, the singer proclaims that witnessing for God is general and preaching about His deeds is presented to all mankind through nature herself (the heavens and the stars). Through the words of the preachers which reach the ends of the earth- and as though the singer envisions, with a prophetic spirit, the ministry of the apostles. It is a ministry that has widened its circle to embrace all the nations and Gentiles from the rising of the sun to its setting.

5- The Testimony of the Prophets Concerning the Ingratitude of the Jews :

In this discourse, St Paul exposes the mystery concerning the ingratitude of the Jews towards the righteousness of God, their lack of understanding the purpose of the Law, their rejection of the simple and easily attainable faith, their limited hearts incapable of accepting God's comprehensive love for all mankind, and their disregard of their mission as preachers proclaiming the Messiah and Savior of the world. The Apostle presents the witness of the two greatest prophets – Moses and Isaiah- which reveals the ingratitude of the Jews:

'But I say, Did not Israel know?

First Moses says, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you, (Deut 32: 21).

But Isaiah is very bold, and says, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me, (Isa 65: 1).

But to Israel he says, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people, (Isa 65: 2)'; (Rom 10: 19-21).

In these Apostolic words, which are borrowed from the sayings of the prophets Moses and Isaiah, we note the following points:

First: St Paul asks: '**…did Israel not know?'** According to **St John Chrysostom,** the Apostle is wondering if Israel has heard but has not understood? If the Gentiles and the heathen have heard and have accepted the faith; how much more appropriate would it have been for the Jews to whom [God had given all the signs ages ago]. These signs were intended to lift the mist from their eyes[1].

Second: The Apostle borrows the expression Moses uses in (Deut 32: 21) 'They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation'...and it is like God has accepted the heathen Gentiles as His people due to their faith in order to arouse the feelings of the Jews. Consequently, they would repent for their ingratitude and turn to God. In this manner, God has not closed the door in the face of anyone.

Third: St John Chrysostom finds a reference to the whole Old Testament in the words: 'All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people'. Throughout the years, God has stretched out His hands through the prophets who have constantly proclaimed Him; and through the revelation of His love to them in spite of their obstinacy and rejection. He is the tender Father who stretches out His hands towards His people as a father would towards his young child, even though the child rejects the loving embrace of his father. St Justin finds in these prophetic words (Isa 65: 2) a reference to the Cross upon which the Lord, at His death, stretched out His arms to embrace all mankind[2].

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Dial. With trypho 97*

CHAPTER 11

THE GENTILES AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

In the spirit of love, and as a true Jew, the Apostle St Paul addresses all the claims of the Jews in order to raise them above the spirit of fanaticism and narrow mindedness. He does not seek to minimize the privileges they enjoyed in the Old Testament, but wishes them to enjoy, together with all the other nations, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wishes them to feel their obligation to preach the Lord more than others. In that same spirit of love, and as an Apostle to the nations, St Paul also warns the converted Gentiles against pride or condescension towards their brothers, the Jews; and that this would make them lose the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He indicates God's sublime plan for all mankind.

1- God does not Reject His Peoplev 1-10
2- God Accepts the Jews through their Repentancev 11-16
3- The Gentiles are a Wild Olive Treev 17-24
4- Awaiting the Repentance of the Jews 25- 32
5- God's Sublime Planv 33- 36

1-God does not reject His People

Once more, we wish to underline that the discourse of the Apostle in this Chapter as well as in the previous ones are directed to all nations and not to specific individuals In Chapters 4 to 10, the Apostle addresses the Jewish nation with the object of dismissing their pride in claiming to be the physical children of Abraham, and therefore are the ones who have been handed the Mosaic Law, and who have been chosen as God's people. In this Chapter, St Paul addresses the Gentiles and warns them against misunderstanding his earlier speech directed to the Jews; and advises them not to harbor any pride or contempt towards the Jews. He explains that towards the end of time, the Jews will ultimately accept the Lord Jesus Christ and repent for the ingratitude they practice currently. In other words, when St Paul speaks to the Jews, he reproaches them in order to lead them to open their hearts with love towards the Gentiles. When he speaks to the Gentiles, he reproaches them in order to lead them to open their hearts to the Jews who repent and turn to God with faith. The Apostle yearns that all mankind support one another in the spirit of love and humility so that none would die guilty of pride and arrogance.

In this Chapter, the Apostle gives hope to the Jews so that they might abandon their ingratitude towards the Messiah and their terrible fanaticism. He also proposes humility to the Gentiles who have obtained access to the faith by being grafted into the original tree.

He begins his discourse by a question followed by a quick definite answer and an extended elaboration:

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.

For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they

seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (1- 5).

The Apostle is careful that his quote from Isaiah the Prophet would be misinterpreted*: 'But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people, (Isa 65: 2)'; (Rom 10: 21).* He does not want them to think that God had closed the door and rejected Israel…that is why he hastens to ask: '**Hath God cast away his people?'** And the answer is definite: **'God Forbid!'**

We observe the following points which reveal the degree of attention St Paul includes in his answer, and how it is filled with accurate details and evidence:

First: St John Chrysostom[1], notes that St Paul in his answer does not only use the word 'his people' but says: *"**his people which he foreknew"* (2)…**those Jews who had accepted the faith were few, yet God 'foreknew' them, and these are His people! Clearly, God's promise still stands and is being fulfilled even for the Jews though just a few have enjoyed it so far. God is not preoccupied with numbers for He seeks those who are faithful children even if they are a few.

God knows His people, He knows their number and He calls each by his/her name. They could be a hidden few, as in the days of Elijah, when His people deviated to idolatry, killed the prophets, and destroyed the altars of God. However, His real people were known and numbered by Him (7,000 men). These people had not bowed before idols and were faithful as they worshiped Him. Even Elijah did not know about these men, for he believed that all were corrupt and so prayed that he himself might die and said: 'I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away', (1Kings 19: 4, 14).

In every generation, there are 'His people whom He foreknew'-the seven thousand men who have never bowed to idols- known to God by their names. Being seven thousand is a reference to the number 7 which denotes perfection, and man is God's most perfect creation on earth. Man carries a soul in the image of the Holy Trinity and a body from this world (its four corners); so that the numbers (4 + 3) represent the whole complete man. As for the number 1,000, it refers to the heavenly or spiritual life for 'one day in the sight of the Lord is as a thousand years', (Ps 84: 10). So that the number 1,000 denotes the congregation of the spiritually perfect who have been sanctified spiritually and physically by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they exist with a spiritual mindset and on a heavenly level. Being men does not imply any sexual distinction as it simply denotes they live a mature life that is liberated of the fragility and playfulness of children and of female mannerisms and frivolity this has inspired the following apostolic recommendation: 'be brave, be strong', (1 Cor 16: 13).

Second: St Paul the Apostle presents three specifics to prove that God has not rejected His people:

(a) He presents himself as an example as he says: ***"I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin",(*1).** The word 'also' implies that there are

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[1] *In Rom . hom 18*

other Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether in the Church of Rome or in other Churches. He has clearly stated that God continues to fulfill His promise to His people. St Paul proclaims that he is a true Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin and a descendent of Abraham and not an outsider. He has attained the promise and has also become a preacher of it. As **St John Chrysostom** comments: [I am the teacher and preacher…if God had rejected them, He would not have chosen of their kind to carry the responsibility of this ministry, the concerns of the world, and all the mysteries and their comprehensive fulfillment[1]].

(b) The second proof is what the Scripture says in 1 Kings (Chapter 19) concerning Elijah the prophet who believed that none of God's chosen people where to be found, as he says: ***"Lord, they have killed your prophets, and torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"*** **(3).** The Church had disappeared even in the eyes of the zealous prophet Elijah, yet it had not disappeared from before the Lord. This prophecy is a symbol of the Jewish nation who resisted the Messiah, killed His disciples, and sought to destroy His living altars. They all appeared corrupt and destructive, yet from among them there were the disciples who were of Jewish origin, and who had accepted the Lord and witnessed for Him. Moreover, many believed even though they were few compared to those who rejected Him.

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [If you are not aware, this is not such an amazing matter. The great and good prophet did not know them, but God had planned everything for Himself even though the Prophet had no knowledge…now the Apostle reads to them the words: '…they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars…' to painfully reveal to them that what they have done to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the disciples is no strange incident. They were accustomed to behave in that manner…note how he addresses them with a strong accusation which involves the prophet whom they honor the most, and without mentioning St Paul, St Peter, St James, or St John. That prophet is the head of all prophets, the friend of God, the one who cares jealously for them (1 Kings 19: 14). He surrendered to hunger for their sake, and he continues to live until this day…in the same spirit, the Apostle expresses himself as he writes to the people of Thessalonica and says: '… for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men', (1 Thes.2: 14,15)[2]]. .

(c) The third evidence supporting the fulfillment of God's promises to His people, whom He foreknew, occurs in the previous chapter where the word of God is proclaimed through the lips of Moses the prophet: 'I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you', (10: 19). This is what St Paul elaborates on in this chapter (11- 36). He clarifies that the result of the ingratitude of most of the Jews has led to the opening of the door of God's mercy to the Gentiles. Ultimately, when

[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Ibid*

all the Gentiles have accepted the Lord- at the end of time- then the Jews will repent for their ingratitude and pride, and will come and accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third: In this manner, the Apostle provides unquestionable evidence that God keeps His promises. He has used his own life as well as the witnessing of the prophets- namely Moses and Elijah as examples to reinforce this point- even though the promise has been validated only in a few elected. The mystery behind their ingratitude is the 'hardness of the heart'. In other words, ingratitude is due to the corruption of the inner eye (the heart) and its disability to see God and recognize His redeeming deeds. This is what the Apostle proclaims in the following words:

"Even so, then, at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no longer of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it is of works, is it no longer grace; otherwise work is no more work.

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened

Just as it is written, "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear ;) to this very day.

And David says: "Let their table become a snare, and a trap. A stumbling block, and a recompense unto them; let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always" (5-10).

The Apostle presents us with a realistic picture of Israel's condition: most of them have rejected the faith; and only few- as God's true people- have accepted to enjoy the promise. St Paul explains the mystery behind the ingratitude of the majority, and he reinforces this point by quoting evidence from the Old Testament testifying to their hardness.

Note the following points in these apostolic words:

(1) The remnant enjoying salvation is doing so through the free grace of God, and not through the literal observance of the Law or self righteous deeds.for these deeds contradicts grace: deeds based on the deadliness of the literal word and which lack spirit and which are dictated by the ego. As for spiritual deeds, these are the outcome of the Holy Spirit working within us; and they respond and interact with grace for they do not resist Him.

St John Chrysostom writes**: [**Once more, the Apostle underlines grace and reveals its power: it is through grace that a person is constantly saved, and he would perish without it. Let us give thanks that we belong to the ranks of the saved; and that we are not of those who believe that they can be saved through their own deeds rather than blessed by God. As we give thanks, we do so through our deeds and conduct and not by mere words. These thanks are genuine as we do things that definitely glorify God, and as we avoid acting in a manner that would release us from our commitment[1]].

St. John Chrysostom elaborates on the relationship between grace and spiritual endeavor, and how this opposes deeds arising from self righteousness and literal

[1] *Ibid*

dictates…the thanks we give to God for the free gift of grace come in the form of holy actions we do through God, and in avoiding evil of which we have been liberated. Our deeds-whether they are positive as we lead a virtuous life through the Holy Spirit; or negative as we reject the evils of which the Holy Spirit has liberated us- do not oppose divine grace but glorify God in us.

As divine grace transforms the earthly person into a heavenly one, the Psalmist proclaims: 'The heavens declare the glory of God', (PS19: 1). He is transformed not through words but by living a glorious active life. This is how grace has worked in the heart of St Paul, so that it shone with divine glory which was reflected in a life inspired and motivated by God, and in attracting many for His glory. **St. John Chrysostom** goes on to say:

[St Paul had a soul that could be no less than the heavens, for he was able to attract all mankind to himself.

Our souls cannot be equated with the earth, yet his soul equaled the heavens!

The sublimity of his soul surpassed all the heavens in order to become engaged in a conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

The state of his soul is so elevated that God Himself proclaims it!

The angels themselves were astonished when the stars were created (Job 38: 7); whereas God, concerning Paul, is pleased with him and says: '…he is a chosen vessel of Mine', (Acts 9: 15).

The heavens are covered with clouds every now and then, but the soul of St Paul was not clouded for a single moment! Even in the heart of temptation, his soul was more transparent than the heavens at noontime, shinning constantly without allowing the clouds to overtake her. This was because the rays of the 'sun' that shone in his soul surpassed the clouds of trials making her shine with greater brilliance. That is why he says: *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor:12:9).*

Therefore, let us follow his example and struggle. Then this heaven will have no effect on us, and even the sun and the moon will not count. Indeed, all these have been created for our sakes, and not that we have been created for them[1]].

May we accept the work of free grace so that our souls become a heaven for God. Such grace affects souls that respond to her with demonstrated love and spiritual struggle according to the Law, having no self righteousness or deadly literal claims.

(2) St Paul underlines the sublime power of grace as well as the ingratitude of the majority of the nation of Israel. He reveals that their ingratitude arises from their pursuit of self righteousness; therefore they have not received the grace that transforms the heart and that opens their insight to comprehend the redeeming work of God.

He says*:* ***"What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks"(7),*** because they sought to become righteous through the literal practice of the Law and their own self righteousness. Consequently, they have been deprived of the gift of righteousness.

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[1] *Ibid*

***"…but the elect have obtained it…"* (7)…**this is the minority that has accepted to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and has received divine grace, enjoying redemption as an elect people. So that the majority does not object and ask 'How are we to blame since we have not been elected? St Paul reveals their role in the lines of the ungrateful and says: ***"and the rest were hardene*d", (7).** Just as grace is a free gift from God, so does the hardness of heart arise from our own selves.

"***They have resisted the Truth, and have not responded to the free gift of God. Surrendering to their corrupt hearts, their inner vision could not see God, and their inner ears were unable to hear His voice…a matter foretold by the prophets, and which the Apostle sums up in these words: 'Just as it is written: God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day" (8).*** The Old Testament also says:

'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.. ', (Isa 6: 9); and 'Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day', (Deut 29: 4).

"For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes', (Isa 29: 10).

In this manner, St Paul explains to them how they have reached a deplorable condition due to their rejection of God's deeds: their souls have been unable to see and hear the Truth. Indeed, their souls have fallen asleep and become lazy and burdened with heaviness. This indicates rigidity or submission to the state of corruption in which the soul finds her.

The prophet David indicates the fruit of all this as he says: ***"Let their table become a snare, and a trap, a stumbling block, and recompense to them…"* (9), (Ps 69: 22)…**This implies that while they feel confident and settled in their corruption, they will face catastrophes even while they are celebrating. Then their joy will be turned into sadness, and their peace into confusion. The word 'table' could refer to symbols and prophecies in the Old Testament which provide a fulsome table if presented in a spiritual manner. Indeed, this table presents to us 'the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself'. However, the majority have grasped the literal words only. As a result, what was intended to be constructive became a cause of destruction for them, as well as a trap and stumbling block for their reward…testifying against them. The word 'table' could refer more strongly to the sacrificial lamb that is intended to establish fellowship with God through the reconciliation by the holy Blood. Judas- who represents all the ungrateful- played the role of the traitor rather than accepting the reconciliation.

"Let their eyes be darkened…" for they have held on to the veil of the literal word and have rejected to change such ways. The apostle refers to this attitude by saying: 'But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord,'(2Cor 3: 15-18).

"…and bow down their back always" indicates weakness, spiritual disability and slavery because sin is heavy and burdens the soul. At the same time, the Law is unable to lift the soul that lives without grace.

(3) **St Augustine** informs us about the mystery behind Israel's ingratitude and says:

[They could not believe but Isaiah had predicted that, and God had definitely foreseen their corrupted will. Therefore He informed the prophet since nothing is hidden from God[1]].

2- God Accepts the Jews through their Repentance :

The Apostle has previously indicated that the Jews would overturn their ingratitude once they accept, believe, and acknowledge the One whom they had crucified. **St Ambrose**[2] writes that Samson, the Jew who had killed the lion, was a symbol of the Jews who had crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the lion born from the tribe of Judah. Samson had gone back and found in the lion's corpse a store of the honey of wisdom, (Judges 14:8). Samson could be a symbol of the Jews who repent and return to the Lord Jesus Christ; and who consequently find in Him their fullness of all the beauty of wisdom.

St Paul considers that God has allowed the Jews to have this hardness of heart in order to open the gates before the Gentiles. If the Jews returned with repentance and faith to God how much better off would this be for everyone?!! The Apostle says: *"**I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches"* **(11-16).**

Note the following points in the above apostolic words:

First: St John Chrysostom[3] notes that St Paul in the previous Chapters brings consecutive indictments against the Jews. Consequently, he quotes repeatedly from the writings and testimonies of the prophets such as Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, and Hosea. In this Chapter, however, he uses a gentler tone and finds he no longer needs the help of prophetic testimony.

Second: God is awesome in His love and wisdom. He uses the fall of the Jews to redeem the nations, and He uses the salvation of the nations to stir the jealousy of the Jews and make them repent and return to Him…He is the Creator of all that is good, and He transforms evil as well as goodness to establish mankind in Him.

Third: St John Chrysostom[4] comments on these words: *"**I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy"*** **(11)** and says: The Apostle

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[1] *In Ioan. tr 53:6*
[2] *Of the Holy Spirit 2:intr. (9)*
[3] *In Rom. hom 19*
[4] *In Rom. hom 19*

seeks to dismiss the spirit of despair from the Jews, and to prepare them to accept grace. He indicates that their fall has been permitted by God in order to redeem the Gentiles. He could have said that they had stumbled and fallen away from the faith due to their foolishness, whereas redemption has been fulfilled to the Gentiles by their acceptance of the faith. However, St Paul seeks to lift their spirits so that they would arise from the block against which they had fallen, and he proclaims that this fall has caused the salvation of the Gentiles.

This kind of language has been used not only by St Paul, but examples recur in other Gospels where this theme is addressed. In the parable of the wedding: when those that were invited rejected to attend, those in the streets and alleys were invited, (Matt 22: 9). In the parable of the vineyard: when the vinedressers killed the heir, the owner of the vineyard came and leased his vineyard to other vinedressers, (matt 21: 38)…When the Jews opposed Paul and blasphemed, 'he grew bold and said to them: 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles', (Acts 13: 46). This illustrates that preaching had to come to them first, and then it would be directed to the Gentiles. However, when they rejected the faith, the issue changed to being directed to the Gentiles first. The Lord Jesus Christ had come to them and they neither accepted Him nor gave any attention to His deeds and miracles. Indeed, they crucified Him. Therefore He attracted the Gentiles to Him and the last became first, as they accepted the faith and would receive the promises, without the participation of the Jews.

Fourth: St John Chrysostom also comments on these apostolic words: ***"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness"* (12)?'** He says: [Here he speaks in order to honor them…for if by their stumbling many have come to enjoy salvation, and if by their rejection many have become invited, then how much better would the conditions be when they would return?![1]].

In this apostolic passage, the gentle tone is noticeable as St Paul seeks to lift up the spirit of the Jews after having dismissed their claims. He uses two other words for their ingratitude: 'stumbling' and 'failures'…. 'Stumbling' indicates a falling that could be followed by a rising or a desire to arise. 'Failures' could refer to some who have believed and others who have not yet believed and are therefore in a state of 'failure' or incompleteness, and until all or the majority have accepted the faith. Another consideration is that St Paul addresses this Chapter to the Gentiles in order to comfort them. He explains that even though the rejection of the Jews has opened the door to them, their return to the faith does not mean that the door has been closed. Rather, the door has been greatly and generously enlarged with heavenly blessings.

His use of the word **'fullness'** rather than 'return' or 'change' – according to **St John Chrysostom-** indicates the return of the majority of them at the end of time, who will join the others who had accepted the Lord before them.

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[1] *Ibid*

Fifth: The Apostle presents two principal reasons for his ministry to the Gentiles:

(a) His obligation to work as a minister separated to serve the Gentiles. He feels the burden of the responsibility, which God Himself has cast on his shoulders ever since he was in his mother's womb, when he was sanctified for this work. This leads him to say: *"**For I speak to you Gentiles; in as much as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry"*** **(13).** This feeling never left him as he was eager to embrace the Gentile world with his arms and carry them lovingly to the Cross where they would enjoy God's redeeming work.

(b) The second reason is that he finds in his ministry to the Gentiles a means to stir the jealousy of the Jews. He is eager to have them accept the grace offered to them but which they have rejected: *"**…I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them"*** **(14).** The Greek word for 'my relatives' is, literally translated as: 'those of my flesh'; for he considers the Jews as being his flesh!

Sixth: St Paul intends to underline the power of the return of the ungrateful Jews to the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He considers such an event similar to the resurrection of the dead. He says: ***"For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?!"*** **(15).** God would be glorified in them; and the Church, in the whole world, would rejoice by the return of the ungrateful. Everyone would be glad to see them, just as one would be on seeing the dead resurrected to life!

Seventh: St Paul does not ignore the firstborn. In other words, he does not ignore the men of the Old Testament who were Jews, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other prophets. He calls these the firstborn holy men or the originally sanctified, and says*:* *"**For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches"*** **(16)…**It is as though they will return at the end of time, and bear the same sanctity which their fathers possessed.

St John Chrysostom adopts a literal translation of the expression and says: The fathers and prophets of the Old Testament represent the holy first fruit and through them the whole dough will necessarily become sanctified. **St Iraneous**[1] considers that the first fruit refers to the Word of God who took upon Himself a body, which is to say that He carried us in Him, the dough, in order to sanctify us. **St Gregory of Nicea** presents the same interpretation as he says:

[By becoming the First Fruit, I present in Me all humanity to her God and Father.

The First Born has made the true God a God for mankind, and the good Father a Father for them, while blessedness has been assured for human nature as a whole.

Through the First Born, the true God the Father has become a Father and God for all mankind, for 'if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy'.

Where the Lord Jesus Christ the First Born is found, those who are His own will also be found[2]].

[The whole dough will be sanctified through the First Born within Himself][1].

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[1] *Adv. Haer 1:8:4*
[2] *Adv. Eunomius 2:8*

[The One who shared our blood and flesh for our sakes, heals and brings us back to the place from which we had been exiled and had become mere flesh and blood on account of sin (Heb 2: 14)[2]].

Let us accept our Savior who is able to sanctify the whole lump of our lives, that is, bring fullness to our human nature, so that our souls, bodies, thoughts, and hearts become altars for God. Then the kingdom of God would be proclaimed within us as we receive Him as the Original One bearing the branches and sanctifying them.

In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ is the mystery of our sanctification. We carry Him within us as the First Fruit; and He carries us in Him for He is the First Fruit bearing the branches. He hides within us in order to sanctify us and we are carried by Him in order to bear fruit. Indeed, He says*: **"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"*** **(Jn 15: 4,5).**

3- The Gentiles are a Wild Olive Tree :

St Paul the Apostle warns the victorious and redeemed Gentiles who have accepted the faith. Now that they have been grafted into the original olive tree and have been counted as children of Abraham, he cautions them that they could be deprived of that blessing if they submitted to vanity. He says:

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee" **(17, 18).**

Note the following points in this warning:

First: St John Chrysostom notes that the Apostle says **'…some of the branches …'** there are some left- even though the majority have been cut off from the original tree, and have been denied their claim to be descendents of Abraham because of their unbelief. Such gentle language is intended to comfort the Jews so that they do not despair.

The Apostle, on the one hand, likens the Church of the Old Testament to an olive tree with holy roots and spiritual fatness, even though a few branches have turned out to be unholy and needed to be cut off. On the other hand, he likens the Gentiles to a wild olive tree that bears no fruit and no fat. However, through faith, some of its branches have been blessed and have become grafted into the original holy one. In this manner, the Gentiles have become counted as children of Abraham.

Second: The Apostle asks the converted Gentiles: *"…**do not boast against the branches…Do not be haughty, but fear"*** **(18, 20).**

Whereas he rebukes the Jews for their unbelief and says*: **"Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off'*** **(20);** he speaks firmly to the Gentiles and asks them to be

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[1] *Ibid 4 :3*
[2] *Ibid 12:1*

steadfast in the faith that they have accepted 'by fearing God'. He asks them not be vain and to be fearful lest they be deprived of divine grace. This fear does not arise from lack of faith which love expels, (1Jn 4: 18); but it is the holy fear of God. The Scripture speaks about that and says: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me', (Jer 32: 40); and 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you" (Phil 2:12, 13).

St Iraneous comments**:** [We need to avoid pride and harshness toward the Old Testament people. Indeed, we need to be fearful lest we anger God. Having come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, we should avoid acting in a manner that displeases Him. Otherwise, our sins will not be forgiven and we would be deprived of His kingdom, (Rev 3: 32)[1]].

Satan has conquered many of the Jews through their complete rejection of the faith. He does not draw his sword before believers as he attempts to break them through pride Having received God's grace, we are supported in our struggle, yet He arouses the enemy against us all the more. Therefore it is appropriate to be cautious, and to struggle with that same grace which we have received..

With this spirit, **St Jerome** advises Stowkhiom and says: [I hope you draw from your vow of virginity a sense of fear rather than haughtiness. You walk carrying gold, avoid the path of the thief (pride)[2]].

God has granted us His rich grace to work within us when we respond with her and therefore carry spiritual fruits in our lives. **St Jerome** writes in this context and says: [Our vinedresser demands fruits. Just as He has truly cut off the first branches due to corruption, He will apply the same judgment to us should we not bring any fruit. Besides, fruit involves not only fruit of the body but of the soul as well. Surely, just as God cares for the body, He cares that the soul also works with the body[3]].

Third: God demands that we bear fruit, and the Apostle assures us that this can be achieved by being steadfast in God's goodness (v22). Through faith, we enjoy His bountiful grace; and through steadfastness in that faith, which is evident in our response to such divine grace and in our everyday conduct, we enter more fully into the circle of God's goodness. In other words, God takes the lead and has priority as we walk down the road of our lives, He is the One who completes the road with us, and He is the aim or goal. However, there should not be any negativity on our part…and as the Apostle says: ***"…toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off"* (22).**

St John Chrysostom comments: [The Apostle does not say: 'consider your good deeds, consider your reward'. Rather, he says: **"…consider the goodness of God…"** towards mankind. He wishes to indicate that what we enjoy arises wholly from heavenly grace and therefore we should tremble…and fear. Indeed, blessings will not be ours constantly if we become careless. In the same manner, evil will not remain transfixed in

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[1] *Adv. Haer 4:24:1*
[2] *Ep. 22:3*
[3] *On Ps. hom 33*

us if we become transformed. That is why the Apostle says: **"Otherwise you also will be cut off"].**

On the one hand, the Apostle warns believers lest they be cut off. They need to be steadfast by maintaining the grace of God and responding in a practical manner. On the other hand, he asks unbelievers not to insist on their ingratitude but to be transformed by accepting the faith. He says: *"**And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again"*** **(23)'.**

Here, too, the Apostle stresses the free will of mankind. Man is able to be steadfast in faith or to abandon faith; he can choose to be ungrateful or he can reject such an attitude. This does not mean that a person behave independently and through his own means. Indeed, God has His arms outstretched constantly to support everyone even in having good will, (Phil2: 12). **St John Chrysostom** agrees and says: [You here see the magnitude of man's freedom and the power of his mind, for nothing is constant: neither good nor evil. Note how he elevates the spirit of the broken man, and downgrades that of the self confident. Therefore do not despair when you hear of God's severity, and do not become conceited when you hear of His goodness[1]].

Fourth: Many would find it hard to consider that the Jews would return and accept the Lord Jesus Christ whom they have crucified and resisted even after His resurrection. Is it possible for a Jew to accept the Christian faith and discard his fanaticism? The Apostle answers by saying that even though faith is a task that transcends nature, yet the branches of the wild olive tree have been grafted in the original fat and fruitful one, and the Gentiles- who had inherited the corruption of the heathen- have become counted as spiritual children of Abraham. Would it be hard then to retrieve the natural branches and reinstate them to their original place?! ***"For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"*** **(24).**

4- Awaiting the Repentance of the Jews :

St Paul considers that he has unveiled 'a mystery' (25), and by mystery he means a divine matter that has remained concealed. Moreover, it is a difficult matter for a person with human wisdom to digest. The points relevant to that mystery are:

(a) The ingratitude of Israel is partial and not total…for some Jews have accepted to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as the disciples and others (25)

(b) God awaits the fullness of the Gentiles (25)

(c) When the fullness of the Gentiles is fulfilled, Israel will return and accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, even though this would not include all the people

St John Chrysostom comments on this passage as follows:

[The Apostle uses the word 'mystery' to refer to an unknown and unspoken matter which is most astonishing and totally unexpected. In another passage, St Paul says:

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[1] *In Rom. hom 19*

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor 15: 51).

So what is this mystery?

"…hardening in part has happened to Israel" Here too, St Paul slaps the Jews while he seems to downgrade the Gentiles at the same time…he quotes Isaiah as a witness for he shouted and said: *"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob"* **(Isa 59: 20)….** ***"By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin"*** (Isa 27: 9; Jer 31: 31) . The Scriptures say 'when their sins are taken away, and not when they apply the other acts in the Law. This promise has not been fulfilled in them because they have not received the forgiveness of sin through baptism. Therefore this condition will come to an end… "**Concerning the Gospel they are enemies for your sake" (28);** for when you were called, they were exiled. In spite of that, God does not wish to cancel the invitation to you. Indeed, he is waiting until all the Gentiles believe, and then the Jews will come into the faith…

The Apostle does not conclude with the Jew's rejection, for a second chance to receive mercy will be granted to them[1]].

5- God's Sublime Plan :

St Paul concludes this Chapter with praise as he proclaims the glory of God: His sublime and incomprehensible wisdom and His great love for all mankind. This song of praise arises from a heart that contemplates God's grace and goodness and that is filled with amazing hope for the salvation of the world. Therefore he sings and says:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?
Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?
For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (33-36).

St John Chrysostom comments on this doxology and says that as the Apostle reviews the past, and contemplates God's plans and their workings to establish the present world, he is seized with awe at God's care. Therefore he shouts out so that his hearers trust in that what has been promised will be fulfilled…filled with that immense awe as he stands before God's deeds, he offers thanks and praises to God.

[1] *Ibid*

PART 3

THE PRACTICAL ASPECT

CHAPTERS 12- 15

-The Believer and Everyday Living	Ch 12
-The Believer and the Homeland	Ch 13
-The Believer and his Fellowmen	Ch 14
- The Believer and the Weak	Ch 15

CHAPTERS 12-15
The Practical Part

St Paul, in the previous chapters, has addressed the aspects of faith which have to do with the salvation of all mankind. He has underlined the importance of a living faith that acts with love on a comprehensive scope to include all nations and peoples without prejudice. He has done so in terms of practical living rather than in philosophical terms. Such a life proclaims "the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ" as a life lived with demonstrated faith. In the following final chapters, St Paul follows his characteristic style of concluding with practical recommendations. These are not presented in isolation from the aspect of faith. That means that he does not present them as strictly moral or behavioral advice; but rather as recommendations presented within the context and arising from the viewpoint of belief and faith.

In other words, while the Epistle to the Romans is considered by some to be the "Gospel of Paul", it is an Epistle that presents faith in its practical aspect coupled with advice rooted in that faith…it is a life lived as one wholesome entity.

CHAPTER 12
THE BELIEVER AND EVERYDAY LIVING

The previous chapters have revealed the potential of grace in the life of a believer. In this chapter and the following ones, the Apostle speaks about ways of importing grace into our daily life. This is necessary so that we might enjoy constant divine blessings and avoid being deprived from steadfastness in the Lord. In that context, the Apostle says: "**And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Jn 1: 2).**

In Chapter twelve, St Paul speaks about the following:

1- Offering all our life to God	**1**
2- Internal as well as external renewal	**2**
3- Struggling earnestly	**3**
4- Diversity of Gifts	**4-8**
5- Brotherly love	**9-10**
6- Spiritual fervor	**11**
7- Finding joy in hope	**12**
8- Distributing to the needs of the saints	**13**
9- Blessing persecutors	**14**
10- Applications of fellowship	**15**
11- Humility	**16**
12- Living peaceably with all	**17-21**

1- Offering All our Life to God:

St Paul begins this part of his message with an appeal to offer our whole lives as a practical sacrifice of love to God. Rather than present detailed and defined instructions, he proclaims the ultimate purpose of the Law: to respond to love with love, and to offer the totality of life to God- in its depths and roots. He says: **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (1).**

The incarnated Word of God has offered His love to us in a practical manner by sacrificing His body as an offering of love on the Cross. Likewise, it is appropriate that through our union with Him, we should have the same thought and offer our love to God in a practical manner. We can do so by offering our bodies as a sacrificial offering of love to God. This does not mean that we kill the body in a tangible manner, but by accepting the "trust' for the sake of God. This explains the Apostle's words: "For Your sake we are killed all day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom 8: 36).

Note the following points in the above verse:

First: The Apostle begins his discourse with the linking word "therefore". This is intended to indicate that what he is about to recommend is actually an extension of his previous discourse. He introduces the message he yearns to deliver by the word "therefore" as there should not be any disconnection between his words on faith and his words on behavior- if such expressions are correctly used. Indeed, there cannot be holy behavior without faith, and true faith cannot live without demonstrated good behavior.

Second: The Apostle asks his listeners to anticipate "the mercies of God" or His endless kindness as they offer their bodies as a living sacrifice…to avoid the misconception that he asks them for a tangible sacrifice, he says: "**a living sacrifice".**

St John Chrysostom says: [When the Apostle speaks of a "sacrifice' he adds the word "living' in order to dismiss any thought that he is asking them to kill themselves. Moreover, to make it distinct from the Jewish sacrificial offering, he says: **"...holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service".** This is because their sacrifice was tangible and not wholly acceptable. God, in the Scriptures, says: "Who has required this from your hand?" (Isa 1: 12). Different expressions have indicated clearly His rejection and dismissal…for He says: "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me" (Ps 50: 23); "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than ox or bull" (Ps 69: 30, 31). In another passage, He ridicules animal offerings, and says: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps 50: 14). This is what Paul also asks us to do when he tells us to offer our bodies as a "**living sacrifice**".

Some may ask: How can the body become a living sacrifice?

Let your eye not look at wickedness, then it will become a sacrificial offering!

By not uttering unclean words, your tongue becomes an offering!

By not practicing forbidden acts, your hands become a complete offering!

This is not enough, however, for it is necessary to do good deeds: The hand should offer alms, the mouth should bless opponents, and the hearing should find pleasure in the passages of the Holy Bible. Indeed, offerings do not approve of anything that is unclean; for they should be the first born of all deeds.

Therefore let us offer the first born with our hands, feet, mouth, and all our members! Such offering is acceptable. As for the offerings of the Jews, these were unclean, and so the Scriptures state: "It shall be like bread of mourners to them" (Hosea 8: 4). May our offerings not be like that!...

The Law of this offering is new and its fire is of an amazing kind. Its fire does not require wood underneath it, for it posses a living fire within it which does not burn the offering but assuredly revives it. This is the offering that God has demanded since ages past, and that is why the Prophet says: "The sacrifices of God are a broken heart…" (Ps 51: 17). When they offered sacrifice, the three youths said:

Based on that, we do not need a knife, an altar, or fire. In fact, we do need all these, yet they should not be hand-made for they are granted to us from above. We need a divine fire, and a similar kind of knife, while our altar extends as wide as the heavens!

When Elijah offered a tangible sacrifice, a fire descended and ate up all the water, fire, and stone. Is not the possibility for this to happen to you much greater?![1]] .

St Jerome describes this sacrifice that we should offer to God. He says: [Bring your offerings- what kind of offerings? The offering of yourself! Virginity is a sacrificial offering to the Lord Jesus Christ. So is every form of purity- whether it is a life of virginity, or widowhood, or (marital) spotlessness- considered a sacrificial offering to the Lord Jesus Christ[2]].

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[1] *In Rom. hom 20*

[2] *On Ps. hom 23*

Third: Why does St Paul say **"present your bodies"** rather than "your lives"? It is clear that the Apostle desired every believer to offer all his life as an offering of love to God. However, he focuses here on the body as it is a means of expressing- in a practical manner, what lies in the heart and mind together with the soul. Besides, he wishes to discard dangerous claims and teachings to abhor the body and consider it an element of darkness…God accepts the body as living sacrifices when He finds it is sanctified for Him.

A body that is offered as an acceptable and living sacrifice to God undoubtedly deserves, through grace, to share with the soul, the eternal reward and to resurrect with her to live in heaven forever.

Fourth: Through "**reasonable service"** the body is presented as a living sacrifice. That is to say that worship arises and is offered through genuine spiritual thought…and this is reasonable service, as the believer comprehends divine mysteries through the spirit.

2- Inner as well as Outward Renewal :

"And do not be conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (2).

In order to present our lives as a sacrifice of love, we need to present them as a sanctified offering to the Lord. Therefore our lives should not follow the pattern of the people of this world. Such people live to please the body; and they seek temporal honors. What is needed is to renew the inner mind so that we do not nurture our own will; but we carry the beneficent and wholly pleasing will of God. Renewing the heart and soul according to the image of our Creator invests us with His will actively working within us. Consequently, all our external and apparent deeds and behavior will reflect and represent inner purity.

St Gregory, bishop of Niceas writes: [How can you obey St Paul who recommends that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable if you continue to follow the model of the world, and do not work to renew your minds. If you do not struggle but continue to follow the customary path of the old man [1]?!]

In our writings on renewal- in the book of "The Holy Spirit between the New Birth and Constant Renewal'- we make a distinction between the renewal we have received in the baptismal waters and the constant renewal of the mind. In the first instance of renewal, the old man is crucified and we appear as the new man bearing the image of our Creator and the power of His resurrection. In the second instance of renewal, through our constant development by the grace of God continuously working within us, we are lifted up from power to power and from glory to glory. Through this constant renewal by the continual work of grace, we practice a holy life as a living offering of love to God that never ends. This has led **Caprianus the Martyr** to say: [You offer this sacrifice to God and you celebrate it without ceasing, day and night, for you

[1] *On Virginity*

have become sacrifices to God. You have proved yourselves to be holy offerings without blemish[1]].

St John Chrysostom makes a comparison between those who conform to this world, or who carry its appearance or **"form"** and those who change inwardly by renewing their minds. He finds that the first kind carry the form of the passing and temporary world as they are concerned with apparent and temporal matters; whereas the second kind nurture the eternal truth within them. He writes:

[The appearance (form) of this world is hateful, worthless, and temporal. It lacks sublimity, continuity, and uprightness. It is wholly corrupt. Therefore if you seek to walk uprightly, do not conform to the present life for you will not find in it anything that is permanent or stable. That is why St Paul speaks about conforming "to this world". In another text, he says: "For the form of this world is passing away," (1Cor7: 31)….

If you were to speak about wealth, or glory, or man's beauty, or luxury, or other such great matters which you desire, you will find that they are mere "forms" and not realities. They are mere expositions and masks and have no lasting existence.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds'…St Paul does not say "by changing its form' but he says "transform' to indicate that the ways of the world are "forms' whereas the way of virtue is not a form but a real existence. This existence carries a specific natural beauty which does not need temporal masks or outward forms…

There is nothing that is weaker than vice, and which passes away as quickly...Do you sin daily? Do you allow yourself to grow old? Do not despair or fall down. Rather, get renewed through repentance and tears, together with confession and doing good deeds…[2]].

St John Chrysostom finds that a person who conforms to this present world carries a temporal passing nature, whereas a person who gets renewed daily through repentance meets the eternal Truth instead of the passing shadows. In other words, a person who gets associated with sin grows old and his soul perishes; whereas a person who gets associated with repentance is like an eagle whose internal youth is renewed (Ps 103: 5). Such renewal allows a person to carry within him God's beneficent and wholly pleasing goodwill.

3- Sobriety in Struggle:

St Paul asks us to lead holy lives in God through the new potentials we have received by the renewal of our minds. He then asks us not to think too highly than we ought, or imagine, that we are better than others. While the Spirit works in St Paul in a sublime manner, yet each person possesses a talent and measure appropriate to his spiritual stature. Therefore a person needs to behave with humility and wisdom as he struggles spiritually and according to the talents and blessings that God has granted to him.

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[1] *Ep. 76:3*
[2] *In Rom. hom 20*

The Apostle writes: "**For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (3).**

St Augustine writes: [When St Jon the Baptist said: "for God does not give by measure…" (Jn 3: 37), he was speaking specifically about the Son of God who has not received the Holy Spirit by measure because the Holy Spirit dwelled within Him in the fullness of the Godhead (Col 2: 9)…for He is the only Son, equal to the Father by nature and not through grace….as for all others, the Spirit is given by overflowing measure so that each one may attain his own fullness. It is not the Spirit that is distributed, but the talents that the Spirit grants; for there are varied talents but the Spirit is one, (1Cor 12: 4)[1]]..

We enjoy the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each one possesses a talent and a spiritual measure to be perfected. Through such spiritual fulfillment, we become more eager to receive the work of the Spirit and His gifts. We pray to receive more and He responds; and we continue to be in a state of constant growth as we hope to reach the fullness of the Lord's stature. Yet there is a huge difference between our relationship with the Spirit and that of the Lord Jesus Christ with Him: we enjoy the Spirit as a free gift, a donation, and a blessing; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ is at one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the divine being.

St John Chrysostom comments: [St Paul says: "I beseech you …**by (the mercies**) of God" (1); and he later repeats and says: "For I say, **through the grace…**". Note the humility of the teacher's thoughts and his totally submissive spirit! He wishes to convey that, based on his (own merits), he is not worthy of the trust placed in him to give advice or recommendations. Therefore he includes in his words "the mercies of God' at certain times, and "grace' at others. He wishes to say: "While I speak, I am not uttering my own words, but the words inspired by God.

He does not say: "I speak by God's wisdom"; nor "I speak by the given Law". Rather, he says: **"by grace'** in order to remind them constantly of the gifts they have been granted. He wishes to make them more submissive, and to reveal to them, that due to the great gifts they have received, they should feel obligated to listen and obey his words.

"…to everyone who is among you…"(3): I am not addressing one person or another, I am addressing both the ruler and the ruled, the slave and the free, the illiterate and the wise, men and women, young and old; for the Law applies to all and it is the Law of the Lord. In this manner, St Paul uses a style that refutes objection, and provides lessons to everyone…

Let us listen to his words: **"…not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think…".** Here St Paul presents to us the mother of all good work, and that is **"humility of the mind".** He follows in the footsteps of his Master when He stood on the mountain and gave a sermon filled with behavioral instructions which he introduced with this source at the very beginning. The Lord began by saying: "Blessed are the poor in

[1] *In Ioan tr 74:3*

spirit" (Matt 5: 3). This is how St Paul also begins as he delivers dogmatic aspects as well as practical ones. He speaks to us about virtue in general, and asks us to offer an amazing sacrifice. As he wishes to present a specific picture for this sacrifice, he begins with the head and the humility of the mind as a person ought not "**to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly…"(3).**

He intends to convey the following: We have been entrusted with wisdom so that we can think reasonably, and not to use it in vain ways. He does not say these words with the intent of advising us to have low standards of thinking, but with the intent that we think soberly. By that he means maintaining a virtuous and healthy state of the reasoning mind...the Greek word for sober refers only to the maintenance of a reasonable mind.

In order to reveal that a person who is not humble in that respect cannot possibly be reasonable – that is, he cannot possess a healthy reasoning mind…he adds to humility of thought the quality of sobriety…

Note how he exposes clearly the causes of the disease in order to strip them away gradually. After stating the necessity of sobriety or seriousness, he goes on to say: "…**as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith…" (3)** to indicate that faith is the gift which is granted. By saying "has dealt to each" he is being gentle with those who have been given less, while calling for more humility on the part of those who receive a greater portion. Truly God hands faith out in portions, and this not based on any of your own efforts; therefore why do you become haughty?... If the faith that works miracles is one and the same faith handed out by God, then on what basis do you get puffed up?[1]].

4-Diversity of Talents:

Having instructed us to have a real inner renewal (2), so that we possess a reasoning mind coupled with a spirit of humility, we become aware that the faith we have is a divine gift. Therefore we also need to know that we need not be proud or pretend that this is the outcome of our own endeavor or deserving. Based on this solid foundation, St Paul asks us to work and to struggle, and appeals to each one of us to use his talent according to what God has granted to him. In other words, our inner renewal and the humility of our minds should inspire our hearts to work according to God's gift- which complement those gifts granted to our fellowmen- and not according to our desires. In this manner, we will achieve harmony as we work as one Spirit, yet each works in his domain with joy and gladness. No one will be envious by believing that a person is better because of his talent, or be scornful of someone he finds to be less talented…for talents are varied but the spirit is one…(1Cor 12: 4) . The Apostle writes: **"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith" (4-6).**

The imagery and descriptions that the Apostle uses in this passage appear also in his writings to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12: 12….). In these passages, he underlines the

[1] *In Rom. hom 20*

beauty and unity of the Church and the wholeness of its members as one body possessing diverse gifts and talents…this concept resolves and heals the ailment of every proud soul that conceives itself to be better than other fellowmen!

St John Chrysostom writes the following commentary:

[The power of this medicine is so deep, and the power of this imagery is so great as well, for it cures the disease of pride. Why does a person despise another? Are we not all one body, the great and the lowly of us?

If we are one jointly, and members of each other, so why do you isolate yourself through pride? Why do you humiliate your brother? Just as he is one of your members, so are you to him.

The Apostle has determined two factors that break the proud spirit: first, we are members of each other- not only is the lowly a member of the great member, but the great is also a member of the lowly. The second factor is that we are one body. Indeed there is also a third factor, and that is that a talent is a gift of grace. Therefore do not become haughty as you have received all good talents from God…

Besides, when St Paul addresses the subject of talents, he does not say that one is greater or another is lesser. So what does he say? Talents are **diverse!** His words are: "**…having gifts…'** and not lesser or greater but **"differing'**[1]].

Next, the Apostle presents samples of talents:

First: "…if prophesy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith…". (6):

What does he mean by prophesy? He does not mean the mere revelation of future events in this world. Rather, the real aim of a prophet is to proclaim the mysteries and intentions of God towards mankind: His plans to build His Church, and to allow mankind to enjoy the coming glories. In other word, a prophet reveals the "eternal glories' and not temporal events.

In the Old Testament, the principal task of the prophets was to lead God's people to the hope that the Messiah and Savior will come. They used symbols, implications, and prophecies in different ways. However, with the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, prophesy became intrinsically aimed at leading souls to His final Coming in order to enjoy fellowship in His inheritance.

Such a task cannot be the outcome of human endeavor, but it is a gift of God to the speaker and to the listener. Therefore both need the gift of faith in their lives in order to enjoy such a divine blessing.

St John Chrysostom says: [Though it is a gift, yet it is not randomly poured out. The measure depends on the recipient: it overflows according to the capacity of the vessels[2]].

Second: "…or ministry, let us use it in our ministering…" (7):

St John Chrysostom comments: [Even missionaries are considered ministries, and so is every spiritual undertaking a ministry. Indeed, **"ministry"** is a specific word

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[1] *Ibid 21*
[2] *Ibid*

denoting a specific duty (that is the role of deacons), although it is being used here in a general manner[1]].

The Apostle directs his message to every servant- whatever his designation might be-to serve within the sphere entrusted to him. In other words, he recommends service rather than being preoccupied with other tasks. May each one be trustworthy in his/her service, whatever that service might be!

Third: "…he who teaches, in teaching…" (7):

The Apostle makes a distinction among apostles, prophets, and teachers: **"…and God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers" (1 Cor 12: 28).** Teachers and prophets could have different capacities within the sphere of teaching such as those related to constructive spiritual studies.

St John Chrysostom finds that the Apostle has started with the simplest- "the prophets" then with the greatest "the apostles" then he goes back to the lesser ones "the teachers'. He does so to discard completely every thought of pride arising from the type of the talent.

Fourth: "…he who exhorts, in exhortation…" (8):

The distinction between the preacher and the teacher stems from the premise that the task of the first is to urge the crowds to repent, while the second is concerned with aspects of spiritual learning and thought…ultimately, the aim of everyone is to bring every soul to meet with the Holy Trinity.

By exhortation, St Paul could be referring to meditative emotional speech, whereas teaching is more oriented towards the study of a specific topic.

Fifth: "…he who gives, with liberality…" (8):

St Paul has now completed his survey of the spiritual talents related to ministering, teaching, preaching, and pastoral care. He now addresses practical aspects of behavior as an inseparable part of spiritual talents. As he urges a giver to give generously, he urges him to be honest in his giving…to give lovingly and without measure and to give with an open heart…remembering the Lord's words: "**It is more blessed to give than to receive**" (Acts 20: 35). This means that one should give with joy and gladness and without expecting a reward- feeling spiritual pleasure and joy in giving more than in receiving.

The literal translation in Greek is as follows: "the one who gives with simplicity'; for the simple person gives generously.

Sixth: "…he who leads, with diligence…" (8):

The Apostle does not draw any limits between the talents of preaching, teaching, or ministering and the loving services (of giving) or leadership….for the Church is a complete whole as long as it serves in the spirit of the Scriptures, and even though it embraces members who posses diverse gifts.

May the Church leader be driven to work by spiritual energy and holy zeal?

Seventh: "…he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (9).

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[1] *Ibid*

St John Chrysostom writes the following: [It is not enough to show mercy for it is appropriate to offer it generously, and in a spirit of kindness as well as joyful delight…St Paul stresses the same point in his Epistle to the Corinthians. He urges them to be generous and says: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2Cor 9: 6). In order to correct their emotional orientation, he says: "….not grudgingly, or of necessity" (2Cor 9: 7). In fact, if you are sad while doing an act of mercy, you tend to be harsh or violent. If you are sad, how could you give support to those who are grieving??!...That is why he says that the merciful should act with "cheerfulness'. Moreover, how could someone with sad features embrace the heavenly kingdom?! Who is the person who continues to look miserable after having received forgiveness for his sins? Therefore do not be concerned about the money you have spent (as an act of mercy), but rather of what you will receive through spending it. The sower rejoices when he sows, even though he is unsure of the result of his efforts. How much greater joy would a person experience as he /she labors and ploughs a heavenly field?! You are giving just a handful in order to receive plenty…the woman who had one mite was counted as having exceeded those who offered much because of her generous heart[1]].

5- Brotherly Love:

Having urged us to work in a spirit of humility, and each one according to his/her talents; St Paul asks us to act with brotherly love. This is translated in a practical manner through loving what's beneficial for others, hating wickedness, and honoring others before ourselves. His says: **"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affection one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another…" (9, 10).**

Humility is the clear means of developing the talents, for love is the pervading thought that unites God with the Church as she embraces her living members. All live together in the spirit of perfection, in complete harmony and fellowship with one another.

St Basil the Great recommends us to observe the following: [It is appropriate for a Christian to speak in a soft voice, never answering or acting harshly or carelessly. He/she should behave gently in every situation, (Phil 4: 5), and show honor to every person[2]].

St Paul has spoken extensively about love (1 Cor 13) revealing its power and efficiency as well as its eternal features. St Peter recommends us to "have fervent love for one another" (1 Peter 4: 8). St John considers that love is more like the joy of the resurrection, and expresses this in the following words: "**We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn 3: 14).**

Love is not an absolute emotion. It is a pleasure and an adherence to what is good through our union with the Lord Jesus Christ who is love. Besides, it implies our revulsion from wickedness …this indicates that love arises from the inner depths and

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Ep. 22:2*

fellowship with God. The Apostle says**: "…every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God….for God is love'. (1 Jn 4: 7,8)…**This is what St Paul conveys in his words: **"Let love be without hypocrisy**" (9).

St John Chrysostom writes: [If you have such (love), you will not be concerned with material loss, or personal problems, or your struggles in conversations, issues, and ministry. Rather, you will tolerate all these courageously…in order to help your fellowmen…this is love. If anyone possesses it, he possesses everything else].

That is how **St John Chrysostom** views someone who has love without hypocrisy, and who practices the above mentioned recommendations. Besides, it is necessary to hate wickedness intensely and so be alienated from wicked deeds. Indeed, such a person becomes alienated from even the inclination to wickedness; for he develops a hostility, repulsion, and confrontation against vice. It is not just a negative attitude merely demonstrated in hating wickedness, but it involves the adherence to goodness.

God has commanded that a man adheres to his wife (Gen 2: 24) so that they become one body. In the same manner, the Apostle recommends us to adhere to goodness; and as though it is a wife with whom we unite and become one with her.

The Apostle interprets such love in practical terms and from two different aspects: brotherly love and giving preference to honor others over ourselves (10). St Peter also recommends us to show brotherly love that arises from godliness (2 Peter 1: 7). St Paul urges us to honor others as he says: "…let each esteem others better than himself…" (Phil 3: 2).

St John Chrysostom writes the following comment: [When St Paul says **"Be kindly affectionate to one another…"** he intends to tell us to be fervent friends as well. We should not wait for others to love us, but we should leap and be the initiators. In this manner, we would reap the award of their love as well. Having revealed the reason for our obligation to love one another, St Paul goes on to indicate the path that sets ablaze a steadfast affection. He says: **"…giving preference to one another…" (10).** This is the path that leads to friendship, and where love exists after its birth. Nothing creates friendship more than the fervent desire of man to honor his fellowmen].

6- Spiritual Fervor:

"Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit; serving the Lord' (11).

St Paul leads us to focus our eyes on God's sublime gifts and on His grace working within us. He wishes us to activate the talents we have been granted in a spirit of humility and brotherly love. Christian life consists of constant struggle, and of seizing every opportunity to work fervently through God's Spirit. This will enable us to continue being energized by the Spirit as we worship the Lord with all our power.

He urges us to struggle in these words: **"Not lagging in diligence" (11).** King Solomon, the wise, says: **"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles 9: 10),** and: **"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise**" (Prov 6: 6). St Peter also gives this advice: **"…giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue;…. brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall"** (2 Peter**:** 1: 5,10).

St John Chrysostom writes the following:

[How do we avoid "**lagging in diligence" (and in fervor)?... "fervent in spirit" …**that is to be keen and wide awake …when the Spirit dwells in you, He enables you to

achieve these goals, and everything will appear easy through the Spirit; so that you shall shine and glitter in every way].

The Spirit of God is a blazing fire, and as we respond to Him, our depths become energized, and He transforms us into a blazing fire. No water can quench that fire, for it is a spiritual fire which teaches us to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. This leads the Apostle to say: "**…serving the Lord…" (11)**.

St.Jerome[1] speaks to us concerning this apostolic recommendation to be**: "…fervent in spirit": [**By urging us to be fervent in spirit, the Apostle wants us to be intrinsically wise[2]].

[May God protect us from the cold creeping into our hearts (Matt 24: 12), for we sin only when our love grows cold…

"Our God is a consuming fire" (Deut 4: 24). Since God is a consuming fire, then this is only intended to strip away the cold of Satan].

This fiery Spirit kindles us so that we worship the Lord with our spirit and soar above the confines of time and events. This enables us to live by the spirit and in a state of constant victory. In this context, **St Athanasius, the apostle and pope,** writes these words:

[If you live in fear of the times and work in a cowardly manner, you do not possess a mature mind. It is appropriate that you display a zeal for God, face circumstances with courage, while applying the blessed words of St Paul who says: "in all these things we are more than conquerors" (Rom 8 : 37). Moreover, during our lives here on earth, we worship God and not the temporal world[3]]. This is how **St Athansius** considers weak souls that lack fervor: they are worshipers of the temporal world and not of God for they worship in a spirit of weakness rather than of victory, and according to circumstances and events.

7- Finding Joy in Hope:

As the Holy Spirit enflames us, and as we worship the Lord and soar above the confines of time, we become filled with hope in things unseen. Consequently, our hearts rejoice and become conditioned to tolerate troubles, while turning to God in constant prayers. St Paul expresses this in his words: **"rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer" (12).**

St Augustine writes: [Let us listen and rejoice in hope: even though the present life is not desirable but could be tolerated, for you will have the power to bear all its tribulations[4]].

St John Chrysostom considers that in these recommendations St Paul presents a series of means which assist the believer in his struggles. He comments on the Apostle's words by saying:

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[1] *Ep. 52:4*
[2] *On Ps. hom 57*
[3] *Ep. 49 ad Dracontium*
[4] *In Ioan tr 111:1*

[All these matters are fuel for this fire: having demanded the believer to give money (8), to endure fatigue and to toil with diligence (v8), to teach (7), and other forms of work, the Apostle provides the wrestler with love and spiritual power through hope.

Nothing can make the spirit so powerful and so eager to take chances except hope! Before we receive the things which we hope for, he presents a reward, and that is being **"patient in tribulation"**. Even before we receive the things to come, we will enjoy in this present life great goodness through tribulations as we become patient and tested.

He also presents another weapon: **"continuing steadfastly in prayer".** Love makes matters easier, the spirit sustains, and trials enrich you so that you become strongly tested. This enables you to tolerate everything gallantly. Added to all that, we have the very great weapon of prayer.

In this light, you find the Apostle strengthening the believer, coming to the wrestling ring in steady steps, for he reveals the easy means by which his recommendations can be applied[1]].

8- Contributing to the Needs of the Saints:

"Love" is clearly the guiding vision to all these apostolic recommendations. One of the features of this practical pursuit is: **"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" (13).** Love is a natural fruit of participating as members of the one body where each one contributes to the needs of other fellowmen. Such commitment appears clearly in the Philippians who provide the needs of St Paul. He does not rejoice on account of the contribution in itself, but he rejoices because of the abundance of the fruit of love. He expresses this in his words: **"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account….But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil 4: 16-19).**

St John Chrysostom writes: [St Paul uses the words "distributing to the needs of the saints " and not the word "giving" to indicate that they receive more than what they give since the matter has no commercial aspect but it is a sign of "distribution" and fellowship. Have you offered money to them? They have gallantly brought you to the Lord. St Paul speaks of being **"…given to hospitality'** rather than just "hosting strangers' to teach us not to wait until they come to ask us for assistance. Indeed, we should be eager to find them just as Lot and Abraham had done. Abraham had spent the whole day looking out to find an opportunity to offer a good sacrifice. When he saw that opportunity, he ran to meet them and bowed down and said: **"My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant" (Gen 18: 3).** This is not what we do when we meet with a stranger or a poor person: we frown and even do not wish to speak to them. After lots of pleading, we soften up and believe we have done our duty when we ask one of our employees to give out a trivial sum of money[2]].

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[1] *In Rom. hom 21*
[2] *Ibid*

St Caprianus[1] thanked the Bishop of Numidia because he allowed his church and congregation to contribute a sum in order to free some fellowmen who had been captured by the barbarians. This was the custom of the early Church as she greatly rejoiced when she was allowed to contribute in such ways to the service of the saints.

9- Blessing the Persecutors:

"Bless those who persecute you: bless and do not curse" (13).

The divine commandment orders us to bless our persecutors (Matt 5: 44; Lk 6: 28).When we deserved to be cursed, the Lord bore this curse on His shoulders on our behalf on the Cross, and consequently granted us an active blessing working within us. It is therefore appropriate that we respond to His act through loving His beloved creation: by loving our persecutors and blessing them…through the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives bear His blessing. Therefore how can we curse someone? This is why St James the apostle says: "Out of the same mouth proceeded blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James 3: 10,11).

St John Chrysostom writes: [He does not ask us to just refrain from insulting or taking revenge. He asks us to do better, as he says: "…bless those who persecute you"….such a person would be acting wisely, and this is the work of angels. Having said **"bless"** he says "**Do not curse…"**to warn us against doing both at the same time. Those who curse us add a reward into our account. When you are wise, you add to the reward an additional one. Whereas your persecutor delivers persecution, you deliver your blessings to others. In this manner, you win for yourself a great reward on account of your love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone who curses his persecutors reveals that he does not rejoice in tolerating pain for the Lord's sake. In the same manner, someone who blesses reveals great love for the Lord Jesus Christ.[2]].

10- Applications of Fellowship

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (15).

Such fellowship is not founded on mere social concepts or amiable appearances. It is the fellowship of members who feel for one another…

It might seem easy to mourn with those who mourn and to groan as they groan. At the same time, it seems very hard to participate in a brother's joy or to contribute to his joy. According to the Apostle, this requires a sublime soul who does not envy his brother's success and rejoices as he counts such success as his own as well. St Paul says: **"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,' (1Cor 12: 26,27).**

St John Chrysostom writes: [Nothing underlines love as strongly as the fellowship shared in times of joy and of pain. Being free of troubles yourself does not

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[1] *Ep. 59*
[2] *In Rom. hom 22*

validate distancing yourself from fellowship with others. Indeed, when your neighbor or relative is burdened, consider it your own. Share in his tears in order to support his humbled spirit; and share in his joy as well so that his joy becomes genuine and deeper. Be steadfast in your love as this is a service to yourself more than a service to a neighbor. Indeed, through your tears you become merciful, and through joy you purify yourself of envy and grief….if it is hard to strip away the evil, share with your tears and this will reduce the grief to half its amount. If you cannot increase blessings, share in the joy so that you will greatly add to your brother's joy[1]].

11-Humility:

"**Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion" (16).**

The Apostle Paul urges us to a love that "does not seek for itself' (1Cor 13: 5) but seeks what's good for others (Phil4: 2) and as though it is for himself…this is that kind of love where a person loves others as much as loves himself and has the same concern…making no distinction between what is for himself and what is for others.

With this spirit, a believer is not concerned with worldly matters- that is, with the wealth and vainglory and honors of this world. He does not care to mix with the rich and the great because they are wealthy and honorable; but rather seeks to find the humble and the poor. This reflects the mindset of the Lord, and as St Paul says: "**Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2: 57).** During His life on earth, the Lord sought the meek**,** and the Bible says: **"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom", (James 2: 5)?!**

Let us live with the mindset of the Lord and not be led by the proud human wisdom: **"Do not be wise in your own opinion" (16)** Also in the Book of Proverbs, we are told: "**Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov 26: 12).** This is because an ignorant person might realize his ignorance and therefore accept advice, whereas a person- who perceives himself to be wise, is proud and refuses advice from God or the guidance of the Church.

St John Chrysostom comments on these apostolic recommendations and writes:

[Once more, the Apostle focuses on humility in thought- a theme he has underlined previously-as conditions for the growth of pride were present either on account of their city (as the capital of the Roman Empire), or on account of many other variables…nothing leads to divisions among churches as much as (vain) glory.

What do these words convey: **"Be of the same mind toward one another" (16)** Has a poor person come to your house? Behave like him and do not place expensive objects to vaunt your pride before him. No one is rich or poor in the eyes of the Lord. Do not be embarrassed of the poor due to his outward clothing but welcome him on account of his inner faith. If he is grieving, do not restrain from comforting him, and if he is

[1] *Ibid*

joyful, do not reprimand him but rather share in his joy. ..consider all his concerns as your own, for the Apostle says: "Be of the same mind toward one another'. For example: If you consider yourself to be great, then consider him to be great as well…

"Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble…" (16). This means to step down to their level of meekness and participate with them gladly. Do not be humble in mind only, but also be a supporter and give generously- not as though you are giving to others but as though giving to yourself. It should be similar to a father's concern for his child, and the head for its body- the Bible says: "**Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (Heb 13: 3)….**

"Do not be wise in your own opinion" (16) Do not imagine that you can independently achieve any task. The Bible says: **"Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight' (Prov 5: 21)…**Nothing inflates mankind and drives them to conceive that they are superior to others more than their belief in their own endeavors. It is for this reason that God has put us in a place where each needs the others. Therefore, if you are wise, you should feel that you need others; whereas you would be the most dumb and weak if you feel that you have no need for others. Do not feel you are being humiliated by your need for others, for this indeed increases your glory, makes you stronger, more luminous, and in greater safety[1]].

12- At Peace with Everyone:

"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (17-21).

We have previously addressed these recommendations in our study of the Gospel according to St Matthew (Ch 5). Therefore we will only underline the following points:

First: A Christian person is concerned with good issues when he is in the presence of all men. He is concerned with witnessing to God, the lover of mankind. He does not find any reason to react wickedly in response to the evil acts of others… this would not be in harmony with his goals nor with the new nature he enjoys.

Second: The Apostle says: "**If it is possible , as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men,'.** It is appropriate that we exert every effort to win every soul through love and peace. However, there are situations where this is impossible-such as the opposition of heretics to the faith. Sometimes it is impossible to deal peaceably with them since, if they sneak into a church, they deceive the simple minded and lead them to devious beliefs or rejection of the faith; or lead one person in a marriage which would lead to a denial of the faith, (1Cor 7: 15).

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[1] *Ibid*

May we exert every effort to be at peace, as much as possible, with every person. As a result, we will enjoy the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem within us. In this context, **St Jerome** says: [Anyone who is not at peace with his fellowmen is living outside the limits of Jerusalem[1]].

Third: What do these words mean: "**Repay no one for evil…but rather give peace to wrath"** (9)? If he is referring to the anger of man, then he wishes to recommend that we tolerate that anger with patience, and deal with his rebellion with love and according to the Lord's words: **"That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"** (Matt 5: 39).

St John Chrysostom believes that St Paul is referring to "the anger of God' and intends to say that a person should not avenge himself but should leave the matter to God who will defend him. He recommends that: [we leave it to God, and let us be concerned with our own wrong doing].

St Ambrose mentions our father Jacob as a living example for escaping from his brother when he was angry. He says: Follow the example of our father (Jacob) who listened to the advice of his mother (Rebecca) who told him to run far away.

Who is this mother? She is "Rebecca' who represents "patience'…

The mother loved her son yet preferred to be deprived of him rather than having him deprived of God (therefore she advised him to escape from this anger)[2]].

[Learn the council of being patient; and choose to escape and live in a strange land rather than to arouse the anger of your brother. Jacob did not return until he felt that his brother had calmed down. In doing so, Jacob found great grace in the eyes of the Lord[3]].

Fourth: What is St Paul's intention when he says: **"For in so doing, you will heap coals on his head'?** Do you offer food to the hungry enemy, and water to the thirsty in order to tease him?!

In our study of the Gospel of St Matthew (5: 44), we found that the commandment has nothing in common with such a meaning. It means coals of the fire of the Spirit of God that purify the enemy: through repentance, he comes to comprehend the love you give in return for his hostility.

- This means that you purge your enemy from sin due to your patience which overcomes his counsel.
- In other words, you heal him of his vices by burning his hatred, and so win him over through repentance.
- The Law teaches us to love our enemy. If the beast of the enemy falls, we are obligated to lift him up The Apostle encourages as he says: **"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.** He does not intend us to behave in this manner in order to curse or belittle the adversary as most would like to believe. Rather, he

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[1] *On Ps. hom 57*
[2] *Ep. 63: 100*
[3] *Duties of Clergy 1:21 (91)*

intends to educate and attract him to repent as he is conquered by our gentleness. He would surrender to the warmth of love and no longer continues to be an adversary.

St Jerome[1]

Fifth: The Apostle advises us and says: **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (21).** Evil weakens a person, therefore we should not respond to weakness by weakness. Rather, we should deal with the maturity that love brings and with an open heart. In this context, **Fr Youssef** says: By being gentle, we are enabled to overcome their anger…a weak person is unable to help the weak, neither can an ailing person heal another suffering person. However, a person who has not surrendered to weakness can bring healing to the weak[2]].

[1] *On Ps. hom 22, 41; adv. Pelag. 1:30 (see St Aug: On Christian Doctrine 3:16)*
[2] *Cassian: Conf 16:22, 23*

CHAPTER 13
THE BELIEVER AND THE HOMELAND

The Apostle has already addressed the subject of the Christian and his daily life (Ch 12), and has underlined the manner in which it is possible to apply a living faith in his daily life. This appears in his worship to God, in the manner he sanctifies his body through the Holy Spirit, in his relationship with believers as members with him in the one body, and also in his relationship with all people and even his persecutors. By the grace of God, the believer presents a living testimony to His Savior, the Lover of mankind. In Chapter 13, St Paul addresses, in a spirit of humility and respect, the issue of his status as an active citizen who feels he has obligations towards his mother country. Since the believer realizes that his heart has soared towards the heavens to find there an eternal motherland, he feels increasingly obligated to witness to that heavenly country. He does so through his demonstrated submission, love and daily behavior.

1-Submission to Authority **1-5**
2-Loyalty to our Homeland **6-7**
3-Commitment to Love Neighbors **8- 10**
4- Preparedness for the Heavenly Homeland **11-14**

1-Submission to Authorities:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation". (1, 2)

There is no doubt that the attitude of the ruling non- Israelite Jews constituted a problem**.** They observed the literal commandments of the Mosaic Law that says: **"Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother", (Deut 17: 15).** In fact, they misinterpreted these words as they resisted authorities wherever they ruled. In the year 49 A.D., they stirred so much rebellion in Rome that the Emperor Claudius Caesar felt it necessary to drive them out of the city (Acts 18: 2).In the Jewish mind, religious belief and politics are closely related. This has led them to believe that the redeeming Messiah would come in order to rescue them from the Roman rule, and would spread their own power over the whole world. This has led them to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ as he had not met their expectations. In contrast, the true Christian believer realizes that heaven is the sphere of internal focus. In this context, St Paul says: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth," (Col 3: 1,2). In doing so, the believer"s heart is drawn to heaven as he realizes that his whole life is in the hands of God, the Pantocrator. Therefore as a believer, the Christian person does not yearn for temporal positions or ranks and his faith has no ties with politics. Indeed, he perceives that his Church offers "a heavenly life" and is not a mere temporal institution. There is no place for politics in such an environment, and everyone is welcomed with a spirit of meekness, submission, and love in the Lord Jesus Christ.

St Paul writes: **“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”, (1).** At that time, the Emperor Nero was violently persecuting the Church, yet St Paul believed that Nero too – in spite of his wickedness- had been crowned by divine permission and for the good of the Church. It was not the job of the Church to resist him neither openly nor within the heart. However, she could react to his evil by love and submission in temporal matters as long as these did not impinge on her faith in God.

In Proverbs 8: 15 and 16, we are told: **“By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth”.** Also, in (Prov 21: 1) “**The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will”.** That is why the Church does not cease to pray for the president or the king, his advisors, and his men, so that the Lord might give them peace and wisdom…

St John Chrysostom writes about the Church and her ministers and says the following: [Since it is appropriate to respond to our attackers with goodness, then would it not be appropriate to submit to those who can benefit us? …the Apostle has indicated that his teachings are relevant to everyone, such as priests and monks; and not just for those who have international jobs. He says: **“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”.** Therefore whether you are an apostle, a preacher, or a prophet, or does any other work…know that submission to authority is not destructive to faith and religion[1]].

St John Chrysostom further interprets and clarifies by saying that we observe submission to leaders and rulers since they are there through God”s plan. This does not mean that every ruling king or responsible person has been designated by God, but that the plan itself is from God. **St John Chrysostom** asks: [“What do you say? Has God chosen every ruler?” The answer: I do not say so, for I am not talking about individuals but about the positions: there has to be the ruler and the ruled to avoid confusion. Otherwise people would be like the waves-crashing here and there. This is what I call God”s plan and wisdom; and that is why St Paul says: “**. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”.** He does not say “there is no ruler except the one God designates”. Also the wise writer of the Proverbs says: **“a prudent wife is from the LORD”, (**Prov 19: 14- Septuagint translation**).** This indicates that God has instituted marriage, but that does not mean that He brings to every man a wife to marry. In fact, we see how many people get married with evil intentions under the cover of marriage. We cannot associate that with God].

St John Chrysostom goes on to reveal that submission is not intended here to be observed for temporal benefits, but to please God. Submission here does not imply weakness but it means “obedience in the Lord”. Therefore a believer appropriately submits in fear from evil and not in fear of people: **“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth**

[1] *In Rom. hom 23*

evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake", (3-5).

In this manner, St Paul raises us above submission that springs from fear or flattery. He recommends submission that springs from a sincere inner conscience. The result would be submission to authorities that arises from the inner depths so that we do what is good and beneficial. In good conscience, and as we avoid evil, our submission to the authorities will be in harmony with our inner sanctity.

St John Chrysostom comments on the above apostolic verses and says: [Note how he wishes to encourage people to act as friends of the ruler, as he reveals that he praises them from his throne and as there is no reason for anger…it is our wickedness and not the ruler that is reason for fear!].

2- Loyalty to our Country:

By submitting to authorities, we are actually obeying a biblical commandment which is an inseparable aspect of our spiritual life. Such submission should not be through mere lip service but through hard work. That is, by doing good and useful service to our country, and by fulfilling happily all our duties towards it. St Paul says: **"For because of this you also pay taxes for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: taxes to whom taxes are due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour", (6, 7).**

St John Chrysostom considers that the Apostle has transformed what many find to be a burden into an agreeable issue. A person who pays taxes does so for his own benefit since rulers are "**God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing".**They work tirelessly to ensure the security of the land, protecting it from enemies and from the wicked- such as thieves and criminals. Therefore rulers carry heavy burdens and have to be vigilant, while the citizen pays his taxes to enjoy the peace of which the rulers are deprived. This is what drives St Paul to urge us not only to submit to them, but also to pray for them so that we might enjoy a peaceful and secure life (1 Tim 2: 1,2).

Note that in the original Greek translation the word "repay" is used for the word "pay" which is used here. This conveys that what we pay as taxes or tribute to rulers is not a donation from us, but it is a payment of a debt: they remain alert and work hard to ensure that all citizens are secure.

We have previously elaborated on the divine command: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's", (Matt 22: 21; 1 Pet 2: 13, 17).

Note also that taxes denote what rulers collect on persons and property, while customs are collected on merchandise.

3- The Commitment to Love our Neighbors:

Our obligations towards our country do not simply cover our submission to authorities and paying our financial obligations such as taxes. It also includes love to all mankind, and as St Paul says: **"Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law"**, (8).

A believer is uncomfortable as long as he owes a debt, and he will do his best to pay it back. The Apostle could be referring here to the debt owed to the rulers and which should be paid since they work hard to ensure the safety of the nation.

In any case, we should pay every person his due. However, we continue to feel we owe the debt of love towards all for the sake of God who has loved us. **St John Chrysostom** writes on the subject of paying the debt of love as follows: [He wishes us to constantly pay the debt, and that is endless). **St Augustine** asks us to pray to God to grant us love so that we may fulfill the debt[1].

With such a mindset, we practice love as well as fulfill the Law: "**for he who loves another has fulfilled the Law (8);** and as **St John Chrysostom** says**:** [Once more, he discusses the good deeds which produce every virtue…you are indebted with love to your brother because we are members of one another. If we abandoned love, the body would be torn to pieces. Therefore love your brother. At the same time, note that by being a friend to him you are at the same time obeying the Law. In this light, you are indebted to him since you have reaped a benefit to yourself].

The Apostle clarifies this point in these words: **"For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", (9).**

The heart is actually filled with God Himself when it is filled with true love. He satisfies the heart, soul, feelings, and senses so fully that a person does not feel the need for worldly pleasures, attractions, physical desires, or deceptive sins to fill his life. Love brings satisfaction to the human existence and fills life with joy!

Through love, we also meet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of mankind; and the biblical commandments become the law that governs our inner life. Consequently, the Law is perfected within us since His presence transforms its application into easy and simple commandments.

The Apostle continues his discourse and says: **"Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law", (10).**

Love, which is the mother of all virtues, elevates a person"s depths above all evil so that he lives in the spirit and fulfills the Law.

❖ Where love is present, what else do we need?... And where love is absent, what could be good or beneficial? The devil believes (James 2: 19) but he has no love; yet no one has love if he does not believe.

St Augustine[2]

❖ Love is the fulfillment of the Law, just as the Lord Jesus Christ (who fulfilled the Law)…Through love, the Law is fulfilled: Do not commit adultery, do not covet your neighbors wife…these are sins that were prohibited and obeyed, in the past, through fear.

St Clement of Alexandria[3]

❖ Love is the beginning and end of virtue: it constitutes the roots and peak of virtue. It is as though love is the beginning and the process of its completion, so what can equal it?!

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[1] *In Ioan. tr 57:1*
[2] *Ibid 83:3*
[3] *Strom 4:19*

St John Chrysostom[1]

4- Readiness for the Heavenly Homeland:

Our commitment to be loyal to our earthly homeland arises from our inner depths that are fired up by our love for the heavenly motherland, and our constant yearning to be prepared to take flight to her. That is our reason for submitting to authorities and honoring them in a practical manner by living virtuous lives.

St Paul says: **"And do this, knowing that now is the time to awake out of sleep for now our salvation is nearer than when we then believed", (11).**

Let us be trustworthy and loving to all because our days on earth are limited: they are just "an hour" and as though it is a sleep from which we awake to find ourselves face to face with God in His eternal heavenly kingdom.

The Apostle feels that every day that passes by brings him nearer to the end of his earthly life, and leads him into eternity where he will enjoy his heart"s desire. It is as though, day after day and hour after hour, he anticipates his departure from this world! This was the feeling of the early Church, as we are told in (1Cor 7: 29) "…the time is short…"; and in 1 Peter: 4: "…the end of all things is at hand"; and in (1 Jn 2: 18) "…it is the last hour…".

❖ The time is near for the resurrection, for the fearful Judgment Day, for the day that will burn like a furnace…therefore we must get rid of our laziness…

Note how the Apostle indicates to his hearers that the resurrection is approaching soon, and that the days are passing by so that this present life will come to an end, and eternal life is drawing near. Therefore it is not appropriate that they show lack of zeal at the beginning of their struggle when their desire has reached its highest point, while their zeal would become colder with the passage of time. The opposite should happen as they should become stronger and stronger as the days go by and the coming of the King approaches. They should not become negligent with time, for they need to get prepared as the time for reward draws near. Indeed, this should motivate them to struggle more fiercely. It is similar to a match where the enthusiasm of the competitors increases as the game nears its end.

St John Chrysostom[2]

The Apostle goes on to say: **"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts," (12 _14).**

St Paul considers that the night of the present life comes to an end, but the day of eternity –which has no end, is drawing near. Therefore it is appropriate that we get ready for this day by carrying within us the Lord Jesus Christ who is the "sun of righteousness". When we put Him on, He destroys all the deeds of darkness in us, and shines in us by his holy deeds that are weapons of light.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 23*
[2] *Ibid 24*

St Gregory (the Great) draws an analogy between St Paul and the cock that sings in a beautiful voice to awaken us when the darkness has ended and the dawn of day has come[1]..

❖ Let us lead our lives here in the same manner in which we will live during the day-that is in the world to come.

St Jerome[2]

❖ If your chest has been relieved of the darkness, if the night has been lifted up from there, if obscurity has been driven out, if the brilliance of daylight has lightened up your senses, if you have become a child of light…then do the works of the Lord Jesus Christ for He is the Light and the Day.

St Caprianus[3]

❖ It is appropriate that we let the works themselves shout out, for these enable us to walk in the day as they shed light on our deeds (Matt 5: 6).

St Clement of Alexandria[4]

❖ **"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ**", (14)

We put Him on when we love virtue and hate evil; when we train ourselves to be chaste and subdue our lusts; when we love righteousness and not sin; when we honor moderation and the mind is firm; when we do not forget the poor but open our doors to all mankind; and when we welcome humble thoughts and despise pride.

Pope Athanasius, the Saint and Apostle[5]

❖ **"The night is far spent, the day is at hand", (12)**

This night is almost over and the day is at hand, therefore we need to do the works of the day rather than those of the present time...

When the night has completely passed away, we will rush towards the day and say: "The day has come, let us do the works of the day"…such as getting dressed, and abandoning our dreams and our sleep…In this manner, we will get rid of our imaginations and the dreams of this life. Let us strip away the deep sleep and wrap ourselves with the clothes of virtue…

St Paul says: **"Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light", (12).** Indeed, for the light invites us to put on the weapons and to fight (spiritually). Do not fear on hearing about weapons. Tangible weapons are heavy and handling them is hard. However, the weapons mentioned here are desirable instruments of light and it is worthwhile to pray to receive them! They make you shine more brilliantly than the sun"s rays, and grant you great radiance, while ensuring your safety …they are weapons of the Light!

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[1] *Pastoral Rule 3:39*
[2] *On Ps. hom 46*
[3] *On Jealousy & Envy 10*
[4] *Strom. 4:26*
[5] *Pasch. Ep. 4:3*

“Let us walk properly, as in the day” (13) St Paul urges us in these words “Let us walk” rather than the command “walk” in order to indicate the simplicity of the task as well as soften his reproach!

“**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ”(14)** St Paul does not mention specific deeds**,** as he seeks to arouse in his listeners greater matters. When he speaks about vice, he indicates its deeds. However, when he speaks about virtue, he mentions her weapons rather than her deeds. This is because he wishes to stress that virtue instills great peace and brilliance to the believer…he presents the Lord Himself as the costume … the King Himself…by being enveloped in Him we are dressed in absolute virtue.

St John Chrysostom[1]

[1] *In Rom. hom 24*

CHAPTER 14
THE BELIEVER AND HIS FELLOWMEN

The Church may be considered as a hospital where all patients are treated, rather than a tribunal where people are indicted. In this light, a Christian should find it appropriate to be gentle towards his fellowmen who are weak in their faith. In the spirit of love, the believer will provide support rather than indictment so that all might walk in the path of redemption and enjoy fellowship with God.

1- Tolerating the Weak without Contempt **1-9**
2- Avoiding the Indictment of our Fellowmen **10-13**
3- The Kingdom of God and the Failings of the Weak **14-23**

1- Tolerating the Weak without Contempt:

Before studying the words of St Paul in this Chapter, we would like to elaborate on the meaning of "weak fellowmen':

a. St John Chrysostom[1] considers that St Paul is addressing here a problem that arose between the Jews and the victorious converted believers. Some feared that the converts ate pork besides meat and so unconsciously broke the Law. Therefore they pretended to be pious and to fast, and abstained from eating meat altogether. Others comprehended that they had become free from such literal rites through the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore ate all kinds of meat. As a result, a struggle and arguments developed between them and those who appeared to be fasting and who actually suffered on account of their weak faith.

In his appeal, St Paul wisely avoids to enter into this struggle, and considers the issue of food so trivial that he does not want the Christians to waste their thoughts or time on such matters. Therefore he opposes the struggle between the two groups without favoring any side.

With wisdom too, St Paul appears to be reproaching the strong ones who had no doubts about the various foods. He reproaches them due to their disdain of weak fellowmen who had lived for years under the Mosaic Law and before they came to learn about the Christian faith. It was hard for them, therefore, to put away that burden. In his reproach however, the Apostle does not deviate from the truth while he gently reveals the frailty of the weak and their doubts. He offers, indirectly, a solution by calling them "weak' to indicate that they are no longer healthy and are in need to turn to the Spirit for support in order to regain their strength.

b. Some thinkers consider that the victorious converts belonged to a group of Jews known as the Essene sect. These tended to overcome the body through great asceticism. St Paul refers to them in (Col 2: 16-23); and the Jewish historian Josephus reports that some Roman Jews abstained from eating meat as they feared to be defiled by anything that could be impure among the various kinds of meat.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 25*

c. Some thinkers believe that it was these fellowmen who forbade eating the meat and drinking the wines that were offered to the pagan idols first and then sold in the markets, (Col 9: 4-13)

In any case, what is reported in this Chapter is a living charter for relationships between fellowmen in the Church who seek spiritual stature. He reveals the obligation of everyone to relinquish foolish arguments on trivial matters, and to be concerned with constructive issues. This needs to be done in a spirit of love that carries no disdain or indictment.

The Apostle says: **"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him**" (1-3).

The following points are noteworthy (1-9):

First: If someone's faith is weak as he doubts which meats are considered impure by the Law, nevertheless he is acceptable to God even though he is weak. Therefore it is not right to reject him, and the Church should welcome him without destroying his life through trivial arguments.

Second: The Apostle tells the strong "**do not despise'** the weak…those firm in their faith need to guide the weak and urge him to better ways, without arousing any doubt concerning his salvation and without belittling him. The amazing thing is that St Paul the Apostle, who represents strength of faith that transcends all doubt and all literal interpretations of the Mosaic Law, was subject to such treatment. He had walked in this path in order to avoid being a stumbling block to those whose faith was weak; and not due to any questions in his mind. He explains: "For though I am free from all *men,* I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"(1 Cor 9: 19-22).

Fr Youssef writes in the same context and says: [It surely was neither beneficial for Timothy to be circumcised, nor for the Apostle to have his head shaved, nor to observe the Jewish rites of purification, or to walk barefooted, or pay the traditional monies. However, this was done for the sake of many and without seeking any personal gain[1]].

Third: The Apostle says: "**let not him who does not eat judge him who eats':** Those whose faith was weak, and who had doubts concerning the foods prohibited by the Law of Moses, were indicting the converted Jews who no longer submitted to its literal application. They considered them greedy. In this manner, the weak became a judge of the strong rather than considering his own deeds and recognizing his mistakes.

Fourth: St Ambrose[2] considers that a believer who observes the chastity of his body but disdains the married is like someone who eats grains. It is not appropriate for

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[1] *Cassian: Conf. 17: 20*
[2] *Conc. Virgins 1: 6*

the chaste to indict or convict the married, or for the married to convict the chaste. Indeed, both are acceptable to God as long as they behave in a spirit of faith and love.

St Clement of Alexandria writes about the issue of food in a believer's life. He notes that it is appropriate not to give much importance to appetizing foods even when we have guests. He says: [Real food is in giving thanks…a person who gives thanks is not preoccupied with pleasures. If we wish to encourage our guests to be virtuous, we need to avoid offering appetizing food. In this manner we will be providing a luminous example of virtue since we proclaim our love towards him in the Lord Jesus Christ[1]].

Fifth: St Paul goes on to say: "**Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand"(4).** Here the Apostle is addressing those whose faith is weak yet convict their fellowmen of greed as they eat all meats. They consider these to be sinners while they place themselves in the seat of judges and condemn others…whereas the Judge himself seeks to strengthen believers and make them steadfast.

The words "**To his own master he stands or falls'** indicate that the Judge considers the steadfast faith of a believer to be a gain for Himself, whereas his failure is a loss. This is a matter that concerns God Himself, Who is the Master of all mankind, and Who yearns to win over every soul to Himself.

May we conceive the extent to which God yearns to make us, as well as all our oppressed fellowmen, to be steadfast in Him…He is the One most concerned for the salvation of all, if such an expression can be used!

Sixth: "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (5).

What is the Apostle's intend in his use of the word "**day'** in this context?

Some believe that he is applying the same principle concerning absolved and forbidden foods observed in the Jewish traditions during the Jewish fasts and feasts. Will the Jews observe just these days to be holy, or will they consider that all days are holy? **St John Chrysostom** believes that the Apostle is referring to the Jewish fasts…However; we find that he is asking every believer to "**be fully convinced in his own mind".** This means that one should apply his mind and conscience concerning this issue.

St John Chrysostom wonders why the Apostle is using that kind of logic with the people of Rome. Why does he give each individual the freedom to make his own decision concerning this issue, whereas he is clearly strict in stating what is right in his other Epistles? In (Col 2: 8, 16), he says: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ… So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths". St John Chrysostom answers by stating that the Church in Rome had received the message of faith at a much later time. Therefore the believers there could make such decisions. Moreover, the Apostle does not wish to cause divisions concerning the observation or disregard of the Jewish seasonal fasts and feasts. We can also add and say that the Apostle wishes them to wait until his visit. He would then reveal to them the mysteries of the Christian faith so that all would

[1] *Instruc. 2:1*

be lifted up above these seasonal traditions. That would not be the result of an apostolic command that had to be unquestionably obeyed. Rather, it would be the result of evangelical and apostolic teaching that they would comprehend and digest through direct interaction and dialogue.

The difference between his address here and that in his message to the Colossians is that the Apostle here is addressing the simple people who have just started on the path of faith. In contrast, in his address to the Colossians, he warns them against separatists who strongly call for the institution of Judaism. Consequently, these voices cause confusion on a wide scale. There is a difference between a believer who has doubts because he has practiced the literal teachings of the Law for a long time, and between a teacher who intentionally speaks and preaches that the Church should be obligated to resume the traditional life of literal submission to the Law.

We do not wish to address the subject of the ecclesiastical plan for feasts and fasts based on evangelical principles and its complete divergence from the plan based on the Law and its literal applications. This is a topic which we address in our interpretation of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians.

We resume our study here and note that the Apostle seeks to draw the believers in this new Church away from the arguments concerning the literal applications of the Law. Rather than attend to these matters, he desires them to give thanks to God as he says: **"He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it.* He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks" (6).** Through such practices, the Apostle reveals how everyone could demonstrate sincere intentions, as all find it appropriate to give thanks to God rather than enter into useless arguments. It would involve those who are weak and unable to give up the obligation to apply the Law such as the observation of the Jewish feast and fasts; as well as those who have become free of these literal practices.

Possibly, these words also indicate that the custom of the Christians to offer thanks at meal times goes back to apostolic times.

Seven: With great wisdom, the Apostle draws both parties away from discussing such matters as he intends to reveal that God is concerned with each individual. God has bought us with the precious Blood and has counted us as His own. He counts it as His gain if we live for Him through faith; and as His loss if we die due to lack of faith. The Apostle says: "**For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (7-9).**

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [In this manner, the Apostle has clarified matters…How can someone who lives to obey the Law (and is servile to its literal practice) live for the Lord Jesus Christ?...We are not free for we have a Master Who desires us to live and does not seek our death. Therefore such matters are His concern more than ours. With these words, he reveals that God cares for us more than we care for ourselves, and consequently counts it His gain if we live, and His loss if we die. When we die, we die for ourselves as well as for the Lord – and here he refers to our death of faith. In either case, this should be enough to convince us that He cares: it is for Him that we live or die. The Apostle is not satisfied with these words as he adds saying:

"**Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" :** He seeks to carry us over the barrier of physical death…which is a great indication of his care[1]]**.**

St John Chrysostom continues his comment and says that God as a Master is concerned with our salvation. He does not despise His slaves as He offers His love in the form of His Life and not in terms of money when He Himself became our salvation. He has offered His Blood as a great price and ransom, while indicating His inexpressible power…How can we abandon Him after all that, and revert to the literal application of the Law?!

He has died and He is risen in order to grant us life, therefore we count ourselves indebted to Him whether we are presently here on earth or have passed away. The Apostle says: "…and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again,' (2 Cor 5: 15).

2- Refraining from Convicting our Fellowmen:

The Lord has offered His precious Blood as a mystery for our redemption: through Him we live and by Him we are strengthened in our struggles. We have become His own in our totality…with such an understanding, we find it reasonable to submit all our feelings to the One who has saved us rather than be preoccupied with convicting others. Moreover, accusers are not their own masters for they too belong to Him who has redeemed all mankind.

By convicting others, we corrupt our lives and offend our God as well as our fellowmen. On the one hand, we corrupt our inner depths when we despise our brothers rather than show kindness to them. On the other hand, we offend God Who is the Judge to whom all are subject. Everyone will have to present an account of his life to Him. St Paul points out that by indicting others we become as stumbling blocks to them:

"But why do you judge your brother?

Or why do you show contempt for your brother?

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written:

"As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (10-13).

He addresses his weak brother, who has doubts concerning literal Jewish traditions, and urges him not to convict his strong brother who has risen above the literal observation of the Law. He also addresses the strong and urges him not to belittle the weak…none of them should be concerned with the deeds of the other. Indeed, all should look up to God Who is the Judge of all mankind and to Whom all creatures are subject, (Isa 45: 23).

The Apostle borrows Isaiah words about God (Isa. 45: 23) and applies them to the Lord Jesus Christ as He is God the Word and the Judge.

3- The Kingdom of God and the Stumbling of the Weak:

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[1] *In Rom. hom 25*

St Paul draws us away from the preoccupation with the conviction of others or belittling our fellowmen, and brings us before the seat of God. He wishes us to stand there not only to arouse in us feelings of awe of that day, but also to raise our thoughts to the "kingdom of God'. We all need to enjoy that state of mind constantly as this will enable us to focus our concerns on one matter, and that is our fellowship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit.

The Apostle says: "**I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean" (14)…** This is a clear statement which the Lord has declared to indicate that all is pure to the pure; and it becomes defiling to the defiled. God's creation is pure: when we have no doubts and eat, it is accounted as pure. However, if we have doubts due to the Law which has set temporal symbols- and which have been fulfilled- and which distinguished between foods as some being acceptable and others defiling; then these have become impure. Moreover, if we suspect that these have been offered as sacrifice to idols, then they have become impure just by reason of our doubts and not for any other reason. This is what the Apostle confirms to the people of Corinth: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being.* Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for *"the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."* If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner,* and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for *"the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness"*. Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience"(1 Cor 10: 23-29).

Therefore there is nothing in God's creation that is impure. For this reason, the Church, during periods of fasting, confirms that it does not abstain from foods due to their impurity- otherwise this would be an invention or deviation from the truth.(1Tim4: 3- 4) The Church abstains from foods for the purpose of controlling and directing the body to what is beneficial under the guidance of the Holy Spirit[1].

Truly, all things are pure. It is the spirit of man which introduces corruption when he has doubts in his mind, and uses things as defiling objects, though they are good by nature. Consequently, they become defiling objects…However, the strong- who has no doubts in his conscience – abstains from these foods on account of his love and desire that his brother does not perish. The Lord Jesus Christ has died for that brother, and St Paul urges us in these words: **"Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died" (15).** In another passage, he says: "But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to

[1] *Cassian: Conf. 21:13*

idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor 8: 8-13).

St John Chrysostom comments: [The sadness of your brother is of greater importance than your insistence to have your food. Note how the Apostle focuses on love: he knows that love can do all things…Do you not value your brother and so ensure his redemption by abstaining from foods? The Lord Jesus Christ did not abstain from becoming a slave, and from dying for his sake. Therefore you should not belittle the act of abstaining from foods for the sake of his salvation…He has died not only for the weak, but for the enemy as well. Will you not abstain from foods for the sake of the weak? The Lord has offered the greater sacrifice, will you not offer the lesser one?![1]].

"…for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (17).

Do not be preoccupied with the subject of foods as long as the issue of your brother's salvation engages your whole being. For his sake, abstain from foods that cause him to stumble. In this manner, you also do not provide the opportunity for others to attack the goodness of your thoughts (no weaknesses due to foods)… in other words, even if you righteously have no doubts concerning foods, yet by giving in to the weak you become a stumbling block to others. You do so as the soul of your brother is more precious than the foods from which you abstain or which you eat.

St John Chrysostom considers that when a believer struggles and vacillates on the issue of foods, he causes admonitions to his fellowmen and divisions in the Church. Consequently, people outside the Church speak wickedly of Her as well as of your goodness- and which consists of love and unity among brothers, as well as gentleness, etc…

Therefore let us testify for the kingdom of God rather than being divisive on account of secondary matters such as foods. Let us testify through unity and the bonds of true love, and through the evidence in us of the fruits of the Spirit which are righteousness, peace, and joy.

❖ The best thing is to obtain the kingdom of God…through the fellowship of holy love and the heavenly Church. Love is a holy matter that qualifies you to be a child of God, and that promotes fellowship.

St Clement of Alexandria[2]

❖ The kingdom of God is within us (Lk 17: 21), and it is revealed in righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14: 17), therefore who ever has obtained these exists in heaven. The opposite is true for those who live in wickedness, conflicts, and sadness leading to death…these live in the kingdom of the devil, in hell, and in death. This is what distinguishes the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Satan.

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[1] *In Rom. 26*
[2] *Instr 2: 1*

❖ The Apostle does not speak about joy unconditionally…he clearly confirms and qualifies it as being "in the Holy Spirit" (14: 17). He is acquainted with the spiteful joy which we hear about: "…the world will rejoice…"(Jn 16: 20), and "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep" (Lk 6: 25).

Fr Moses[1]

What is the kingdom of heaven of which the Apostle is speaking in this passage?

❖ It is worthy to consider the kingdom of heaven from three aspects:

It could be seen as the place which the saints will attain when they are given authority. The Scripture tells us: "…has authority over ten cities…you also be over five cities…" (Lk 19:17, 19). The disciples were told: "…you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19: 28).

Or it could indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ possesses the heavens where all things "are subject to Him"and where God is "all in all" (1Cor 15:28).

Or that the saints will share and possess with God in heaven.

Fr Moses[2]

Let us be concerned with the kingdom of God- in other words, let Him reign within us, or let us reign through Him- above any other consideration. In this manner, we will be acceptable to God and commended by men "**for he who serves Christ in these things (righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit) is acceptable to God and approved by men" (18).**

St Paul concludes his speech by urging us to do deeds that are positive and constructive to the every soul. He says:

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin" (19-23).

Therefore let our goal be to maintain the peace and unity of the Church. Let us keep away from divisions since nothing can be constructive or maintain the work of God in the Church unless peace and brotherly love exist.

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[1] *Cassian: Conf. 1:13*
[2] *Ibid*

CHAPTER 15

THE BELIEVER AND THE WEAK

St Paul considers that "the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ" lies in the opening of the door of faith to the whole world, and so allowing all nations access to the Lord's free salvation. This Epistle, in its entirety, proclaims this mystery as it addresses the comprehensive nature of salvation. In this chapter, the Apostle presents practical applications which are in harmony with all the other parts of his message. He stresses the obligations of the Church as a whole as well as the role of each member in her. All should demonstrate a loving heart that yearns to bring all to salvation, coupled with tolerance of the weak, concern for the Gentiles regardless of their past, and supporting the apostle by their prayers. This would enable him to fulfill, through his life and preaching, the proclamation of this mystery in spite of the opposition of some fanatic Jews.

1- Tolerating the Weak	**1-7**
2- Opening up the Heart to Embrace the Gentiles	**8-13**
3- Supporting the Apostle in his Ministry to the Gentiles	**14- 21**
4- His Eagerness to Minister to them in Rome	**22-24**
5- His Recognition of the Contribution of the Gentiles	**25- 28**
6- Supporting Him through Prayers	**29-30**
7- Resistance of the Unbelievers to Him	**31-32**
8- Concluding Words	**33**

1- Tolerance of the Weak:

"**We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (1-3).**

This is the "mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ' as the Word of God proclaimed His power by descending to us and carrying our weakness. He did so in order to raise us to the fullness of His power, radiance, and glory. Consequently, the believer carries within him/her the "mystery of the Lord' –that is His thought- and comprehends true power as he lovingly tolerates the failures of the weak, is concerned with the well being of fellowmen and their progress, and does not seek any personal gain. Such conduct is not the result of our own doing, but it is the work of the Lord Who lives in us and who yearns for the salvation of all men.

Note the following points in these apostolic recommendations:

First: St John Chrysostom writes: [Note how he arouses their attention by praising them. He not only describes them as being strong, but also includes them with him as strong believers as he says: "**We then who are strong…"** [1]]

This is the method that the Apostle adopts in all his ministry and Epistles. Before he recommends, he encourages; and before revealing the wounds, he proclaims what is good and virtuous. In this chapter, rather than reproaching them for their contempt of the

[1] *In Rom. hom. 27*

weak and belittling the nations, he proclaims that they are strong through the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore they need to apply the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who has opened His arms wide to all the weak and all the Gentiles, receiving them with love and without indictment!

In his discourse, St Paul proclaims that we always find in the Church the strong as well as the weak. As **St Augustine states:** [No Church is excerpted from that[1]]…By tolerating the weak, the strong are commended for their great love, while the weak follow the example set by the strong without any resentment or jealousy, and so progress constantly.

Second: St Paul says: "**For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me".** In an indirect way, he wishes to inform them that they are strong because the Lord has carried their weaknesses and their reproaches were consequently shifted onto Him. He carried the shame of their sins in order to bring them out of weakness and into a state of strength. In this context, **St John Chrysostom** writes: [Are you strong? Attribute that to God who has made you so, especially when you truly see the weakness of the ailing. We were also ailing and we have become strong through grace. Let us also strive for the weak (that is, let us support them through grace)[2]].

Third: Through divine grace**,** we have attained strength in Jesus Christ. Therefore it is appropriate that we translate this power in a practical manner, and do as the Apostle says: "**Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification"(2).** In this context, **St John Chrysostom** writes: [Are you strong? Let the weak test your strength, let him come and know your power, and please him. The Apostle does not merely say "please him' but he adds "for his good". Besides, he does not merely say "for his good' for fear the advanced person would say: look how I draw him for his good! But the Apostle adds: **"leading to edification"…**this is a procedure that needs to be observed by "**each of us"[3]].**

This is the true "power' found in the Lord Jesus Christ: that we bend over to the poor with our Lord Jesus Christ and lift him in the arms of love, to rise up with him and live and walk together in the good path. This would lead to the edification of our own souls as well as theirs, besides the edification of the whole world through the Lord Jesus Christ.

By observing such conduct, we please others for their own good and leading to their edification. We contribute with our hearts, feelings, and senses more than our money, and our effort to serve them. Consequently, we are enabled to share in their sorrows, pains, and hardships.

Fourth: St Paul presents the Lord Jesus Christ as an example to follow. He has not pleased Himself, but bore on our behalf the reproaches we deserved in order to grant us His righteousness. This is typical of the Apostle as he always presents the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Model to follow.

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[1] *Ser, on N.T. 26:4*
[2] *In Rom. hom 27*
[3] *Ibid*

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [When the Apostle speaks about giving alms, he presents the Lord (as an example) and says: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"(2 Cor 8: 9). When he speaks about love, he urges us by saying: "…just as Christ also loved…"(Eph 5: 25). When he recommends us to bear shame and hardships, he presents the Lord as our refuge: "…for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame"(Heb 12: 2). He follows the same technique in this verse (Rom 15: 3), and he explains that the prophet had foretold this in the past when he said: "…the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me"(Psalm 69: 9). Why did he not say: "He stripped Himself' (Phil 2: 7)? This is because he not only wished to refer to His incarnation only but he also intended to refer to His mistreatment and the accusations of many who regarded Him with contempt and as a weak man. They said: "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross," (Matt 27: 40). They also said: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save,' (Matt 27: 42). St Paul also reveals that they did not mock the Lord alone for they also spoke of the Father, as it is written: "the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me'. What the Apostle is saying conveys the following: What is happening now is no new or strange incidence, for they commonly reproached (the Father) in the Old Testament. Now they were rising up against His Son …and these matters have been reported to provide us with examples[1]].

Fifth: What has been reported in the Old Testament (Psalm 69: 9) to indicate that the reproaches were directed at the Father as well as the Son, has been written for our good. It is intended to urge us to tolerate failures and reproaches through patience and support. Our hope is that we are following the example of the Lord Himself who tolerated the weak. This is what the Apostle conveys in his words: **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"**(4).

The goal of the Holy Bible is to urge us to be tolerant and patient. Consequently, we are granted comfort in the midst of pain, and this opens up the doors of hope…and while we are comforted in the midst of our pain, how will our condition be when we depart from this world and its suffering?!

Sixth: The Apostle therefore urges us to tolerate the failures of the weak for their good and edification. He presents the Lord Jesus Christ as a living example for such conduct, and He works within us to achieve this end. At the same time, the Apostle lifts prayers to God so that He might support us. He says:

"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"(5,6).

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [This is what love seeks to accomplish: that every person cares for others just as much as he cares for himself. To indicate that such love has no precedence, he adds the words "**according to Christ**

[1] *Ibid*

Jesus". This is something he adds in every instance, for there is another kind of love; and what use can it be when we are together (if it is not according to the Lord Jesus Christ)![1]].

This love in the Lord Jesus Christ glorifies God the Father not through the mouth alone- that is through words, but through unity of the will as well (with one mind).

This love in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who grants unity, is the path leading to the fulfillment of the recommendation: **"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (7).**

2- Opening up the Heart to Embrace the Gentiles:

He urges us to tolerate the weak by means of the true Love: through the Lord Jesus Christ who grants unity. He then presents a practical application which he draws from the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as from our own. Through love, the Lord Jesus Christ has embraced the circumcised and the nations together as He has carried the failures of all. With the same love, it is appropriate that the converted Jews open their hearts and accept their fellowmen who are coming into the camp of the Lord from the Gentile nations. This would fulfill the plan of God which He has announced in the Old Testament concerning the acceptance of the nations to believe in Him.

The Apostle says: **"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name" (8,9).**

What does he intend to convey by these words? **St John Chrysostom** states that Abraham received the promise that through his descendants all nations will be blessed (Gen 12: 7; 22: 18). What happened is that though Abraham's descendants were circumcised yet they broke the Law. They were therefore considered as trespassers and the Law became cursed. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ has come as a minister of circumcision and to fulfill the Law rather than breaking it. Once He was raised on the Cross, He tore away the curse of the Law which leads to rebellion. He suffered so that the promise given to Abraham would not be cancelled. He lifted the anger from the fallen in order to release them from estrangement and enmity with God…in this manner, the Lord lifted away the curse and raised them from the power of the Law, so that the divine promise given to their fathers would be fulfilled in them. This is true about the circumcised. At the same time, the doors of divine mercy were opened to the nations so that they would enjoy – side by side with the circumcised- the redeeming work of the Lord. Consequently, by the grace of God, both- the Jews and the Gentiles- will join in thanksgiving and in praising His Name. The Psalmist prophesies about that saying: "Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name", (Ps18: 49).In this context, Moses too prophesies and says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people"(Deut 32: 43). David the prophet says: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles" (Ps 117: 1). And Isaiah the prophet also says: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots…. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him"(Isa 11: 1,10).

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[1] *Ibid*

[All these quotes have been presented to reveal the importance and urgency of unity and of glorifying God. Besides, the Jews should not boast over the nations. At the same time, St Paul urges the Gentiles to be humble as he realizes that he has been granted sublime grace[1]].

Ever since the earliest times, God has planned salvation for all nations and Gentiles. This is evident in the prophecies made by men of the Old Testament. Then how could the Jews possibly close their hearts and reject to accept their fellowmen of the Gentiles into the faith and refuse to share with them in rejoicing and praising God?!

May the Jew open his heart with love and embrace the Gentile. May the Gentile open his heart in thanksgiving to God who has raised him from his weakness and carried him to be among the ranks of believers!

The doors of hope have been opened to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles. That is why the Apostle offers a prayer or intercession to God so that He may increase their hope. He prays that they enter into the faith with the power of the Holy Spirit and that they might be filled with joy and peace. He says**: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (13).**

3- Supporting the Apostle in his Ministry to the Nations:

The Apostle has so far spoken to them about their duty, as strong men, to tolerate the failures of the weak. As converted Jews, they were to accept the Gentiles into the faith gladly and joyfully. Now he chooses to speak to them in softer words so that his recommendations would not burden them. Therefore he praises them by indicating that what he is recommending is not too hard for them when compared to their spiritual stature and comprehension. He says: **"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (14).**

It is worthy to note his gentleness in view of the following considerations:

First: There is no mention that he has heard about their goodness, but he expresses his own conviction of their goodness…he does not need others to testify for them before him…it is as though he is telling them that even though I seem to advise you or to reproach you harshly, yet I am convinced that you are charged with goodness!

Second: St John Chrysostom comments on these words**: "you are full of goodness…"**and says: [It is as though he is telling them: It is not on account of your hardness or the contempt you show to your fellowmen that I entreat you to accept the work of God rather than ignoring or destroying it. I know that you are filled with goodness, yet it seems adequate that I urge you here to perfect your virtues[2]].

Third: He gently urges them to increasingly open their hearts with love towards others. In this manner they would not be short in the fullness of goodness, knowledge, and ability…concerning the heart: they are good, loving, and gentle; concerning ideology: they are the epitome of knowledge and instruction; and concerning potentials:

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[1] *Ibid 28*
[2] *Ibid 29*

they are equipped…on account of all that, he finds the audacity to ask them for more and more! That demonstrates great wisdom and encouragement!

Fourth: St Paul addresses them in the spirit of humble brotherhood. This brotherhood has armed him with the means that enable him to write to them courageously rather than as someone recommending matters that are foreign to their way of life. He reminds them to continue progressing in the ways they have actually adopted, and says: **"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God" (15).**

St John Chrysostom writes: [Note the humility of St Paul's thoughts, note his wisdom…He leaves the seat of leadership, here and there, in order to speak to them as brothers and friends sharing the same standing[1]].

Fifth: The Apostle states that he is committed to write to them as part of his apostolic ministry and for which he has been designated as an apostle to the Gentiles. While Rome was the capital of the Gentile world in those times, yet he feels it should be the center of his work. This is the grace that God has granted to him- the ministry to the Gentiles- and which he never ceases to enjoy.

The Apostle considers him a priest who brings the sacrificial offering of love in the form of his ministry. Even though he is not a descendent of Levi, yet he is God's priest acting as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He presents the Gentiles who have become an acceptable and holy offering through the work of the Holy Spirit. He says: **"that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (16).**

St John Chrysostom interprets these verses as follows: [for me, this is what I understand by the priesthood; for it consists of preaching and proclaiming. This is the sacrifice I offer. No one would go wrong on a priest when he is full of zeal to offer a spotless sacrifice. St Paul uses these words in order to lift up their thoughts. He indicates that they are an offering and apologizes for his role in that task. It is as though he is saying: The knife I possess is the Holy Bible, the Word for preaching. I undertake that task with no intention to be glorified or to become famous, but to make the offering of the Gentiles an acceptable and holy sacrifice through the Holy Spirit. This means that the souls I instruct become acceptable. As God has led me to such sublimity, I can claim no honor to myself as much as it all reflects on you.

How do they become acceptable? Through the Holy Spirit: there is a need, not only for faith but also for a spiritual way of life. This ensures maintaining the Spirit which has been granted once and for all to all mankind. We neither need wood or fire, nor an altar or a knife; but we need the Spirit who surely abides within us. That is why I attempt to prevent the fire from dying out and it gives me joy…just as a priest stands to keep the fire ablaze, so do I to stir your minds[2]].

The Apostle indicates clearly and accurately his role in the ministry as he calls himself "a minister' and "a priest' yet the One who sanctifies is the Spirit of God Himself. He says: **"… that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified**

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Ibid*

by the Holy Spirit". St Basil the Great informs us about the role of the Holy Spirit and says:

[The created is a slave, and it is the Spirit who liberates (Rom 8: 2);

The created needs life, and the Spirit is the One who grants life, (Jn 6: 63).

The created seeks instruction, and the Spirit provides instruction (Jn 14: 26).

The created becomes sanctified, and it is the Spirit who sanctifies (Rom 15: 26).

Those whom you call angels, leaders, heavenly hosts…those receive sanctification through the Spirit. While the Spirit Himself is holy by nature and does not receive goodness from anything outside Himself for goodness arises from His core. That is why he draws a distinction by naming Him "the Holy Spirit' (Isaiah6: 3)[1]].

Sixth: While the Apostle indirectly presents himself as a model, he feels that he is a priest on account of his apostolic love. This makes him present his life of faith as an offering of love that is acceptable and holy before God. He offers it not on account of himself but on their account, and so that God would be glorified in them as they accept Him. As they reciprocate his love, they would support him in his service to the Gentiles. They would show their love by displaying generous hearts and tolerance of the weak, as well as praying and witnessing for God before them. That leads him to say: **"Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient" (17, 18).**

Ministry work that seeks to provide spiritual edification to others through the Lord is also credited to the preacher or the minister. Consequently, he is glorified- not of himself but through the grace of God that works through him as a minister and in them as the ones receiving the service. Indeed, God works by His Holy Spirit in him and in them. According to **St John Chrysostom,** who speaks on behalf of St Paul and says: [He means to say: I do not get glorified of myself or by my zeal but by the grace of God…Note how he tries with all his strength to attribute all the work to God, without claiming to have done anything himself. What I utter, do, or perform are miracles done by God. He is the One doing all this, the Holy Spirit who has made all things[2]].

Seventh: St Paul urges his audience to support his ministry by prayers as well as by deeds of love. He wants God to be glorified in them and so he presents his own person as an example: he is fired by his zeal to minister. He intends to preach without any restrictions- not only in countries that are subject to Rome but among Barbarians as well. Yet that zeal is bonded to a spirit of humility. He leaves from Jerusalem to preach the Holy Word in every place and even in Illyricum[3]. However, he does not minister or travel to places where other ministers have gone. This is because he does not wish to take credit for someone else's work…he goes where no one has gone and where the road is therefore rough and the struggle harder.

He explains: **"…in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the**

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[1] *Ep. 159:2*

[2] *In Rom. hom 29*

[3] *Illiricum was one of the countries ruled by the Roman kingdom, NW of Macedonia*

gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation" (19, 20).

St John Chrysostom comments, saying: [He says this to indicate that he is far removed from vain glory. Besides, he wishes to instruct them that he is writing to them to fulfill his ministry. He does not seek any personal glory or honor from them; but he seeks to fulfill his priestly work and as one concerned for their salvation…You can see him hurrying to areas where the work is greater and the conditions more severe[1]].

St Jerome says: [Note that Paul, who was persecuted in Judah, is preaching among the Gentiles now. He carries the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Conqueror who attracts everyone. He has conquered the whole world –from the Ocean to the Red Sea[2]].

4- His Eagerness to Minister to them in Rome:

The Apostle underlines that he is not seeking any personal recognition or honor in order to arouse in them the same spirit towards their desire for the salvation of others. This should be especially true when they address the weak and the Gentiles. In this passage, he indicates how much he has longed to visit them. Again he underlines that he is motivated by love and not by any desire for worldly glory. He explains: **"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while" (22-24).**

The following points are noteworthy in these words by the Apostle:

First: St John Chrysostom finds that St Paul has underlined his great love for them as he has yearned for many years to visit them. At the same time, he leaves no scope for pride as he clarifies that he is just visiting them on his way to Spain. It is true that they are well loved, but others too- like the people in Spain, are loved in the same way. Even though his visit to them is an incidental stop on his way to Spain, yet his love is sincere. He arouses their love through the depth of his love for them. He tells them he will visit so that he "may enjoy (their) company". This is the language that parents use to attract their children to themselves…. [He is like a fervent father who has fathered real sons…that is how he loved the believers[3]].

5- His Recognition of the Contribution of the Nations:

Although St Paul states his great longing to visit the people in Rome, yet he apologizes for postponing the visit. He explains that he is obliged to go to Jerusalem first in order to deliver the contributions of the Gentiles to the saints there as they were suffering from hunger. The believers in Macedonia and Achaia- who were of Gentile origin- were glad to offer material help to the converted Jews in Jerusalem in their time of need. They were happy to feel worthy of paying back the love that these Jews had shown towards them by spiritually and lovingly serving them.

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[1] *In Rom. hom 29*
[2] *On Ps. hom 14*
[3] *In Rom. hom 29*

St Paul says: **"For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things" (26, 27).**

First: St John Chrysostom notes that the Apostle does not intend to arouse the Church of Rome to make contributions towards the needs of the saints in Jerusalem who had been exposed to hunger. If that was his intention, he would have visited them to collect their contributions. However, he seized it as an occasion to demonstrate that the Church as a whole has entered into a fellowship of love: the contributions from churches whose congregations were mostly of Gentile origins to churches whose congregations were mostly of Jewish origins indicate that fellowship. Therefore St Paul is not seeking material contributions; but he is seeking to arouse love in their hearts and to minister to the spiritual needs of the Gentiles.

Second: St John Chrysostom writes the following commentary: [He did not say: I will go and collect the donations; but he said "to minister' (deaconus)[1]. Since the great Apostle considers that contributions take the form of spiritual deeds and ministry rather than plain social work, how much more joyful would he be when he carries the Gospel of Truth to the people in Rome rather than the delivery of material donations?!].

The churches considered their contributions a sign of "fellowship' and of inner love and unity. Therefore the Apostle was neither carrying their money nor their material donations. He was carrying something of greater value: their hearts filled with love and the spirit of unity which held them together with the other members. With this concept, the Apostle considers that he was carrying a royal treasure preserved by the royal seal which no thief could steal or harm.

Third: St John Chrysostom[2] states that St Paul names what he carries as "fruit' (28) and not "contributions". This is because what he is carrying would also benefit the donors as it represents their spiritual fruit.

6- Supporting Him through Prayers:

The Apostle appears to rejoice due to the spiritual fruit proclaimed in the Gentile churches. These had not offered mere material donations but multiple spiritual fruit which indicated their love towards their fellowmen in Jerusalem. Rather than ask for material donations, the Apostle goes on to urge the church in Rome to contribute too by struggling hard and offering prayers to God on his behalf. He needs them to pray so that God would fulfill His plan for his mission in spite of the opposition he faces**.**

It is amazing that he fears they would consider themselves unworthy to struggle with him in ministering to the Gentiles through their prayers. Therefore, just before requesting them to struggle in prayers for his ministry, he tells them: "**But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (29).** It is as though he is telling them that on visiting them he would find them worthy of much praise on account of the Gospel and on account of their holy deeds which

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[1] *Ibid*
[2] *Ibid*

deserve all admiration. Besides, all their efforts to pray for him and his ministry are in harmony with the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Holy Spirit. He states his need as follows: **"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me" (30).** Therefore their prayers would definitely be acceptable and effective since they conform to the will of God and His sublime love.

7- Resistance of the Unbelievers to Him:

Their ministry is motivated by their generous hearts which extend love to their Gentile fellowmen. However, their service does not end by tolerating the weak and witnessing before them of God's redeeming work. It includes praying for preachers that God may save them from stubborn opponents. The Apostle considers that he is the neediest for prayers on account of the fierce opposition he faces. He says: **"…that I may be delivered from those in Judea who does not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints" (31).**

8- Concluding Words:

St Paul speaks about the opposition he faces from the wicked and the commitment of the Church to pray for him. He too is committed to pray for everyone so that God may support everyone in his struggle and he prays saying: "**Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen" (33).**

PART 4

CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE

CHAPTER 16

CHAPTER 16

CLOSING WORDS

The previous chapter could be considered as the concluding part of the practical teachings of the Epistle. It is a part that is in harmony and complements the part preceding it- on faith. This is because it is impossible to separate the faith of the church from its daily conduct. This final part, which represents the concluding words of the Epistle, provides us with a great number of names. Although we know very little about many of them; yet these reflect a living, joyful, and effective picture of Christian life during the Apostolic period. The Holy Spirit reveals, through them, the fervor of the Church. All sought to establish a spiritual Church in the Lord, and they were charged with a spirit of love which sanctifies shared feelings and emotions. St Paul identifies many as "beloved", "countrymen", "fellow workers in Christ Jesus"; and he labels others as "our sister", "helper", and "one who labored much in the Lord"…he has a special designation for each person engraved by the Spirit in his heart…

1-Recommendations Concerning Phoebe	**1-2**
2-Personal Greetings	**3-15**
3-General Holy Kiss	**16**
4-Warnings concerning False Teachings	**17-20**
5- Greetings from Paul"s Friends	**21-24**
6-Closing Doxology/Benediction	**25-27**

1-Recommendations Concerning Phoebe:

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also" (1,2).

The Apostle is addressing a church which he has not yet visited in person. However, he introduces and recommends Phoebe- a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea- in the spirit of love which bonds him with all fellowmen. He intends to convey to them that he is a friend who could ask for a service, rather than a stranger. Just as he extends love to them, he seeks their love and services.

Some scholars believe that she is a converted Gentile as the name "Phoebe" is derived from "Phoebs" which is the name of one of the heathen idols. Others believe that the name "Phoebe" is derived from the Greek word "Foss" which means "shines" or "glows"[1].

She seems to have been wealthy and of high social status, and had been designated as deaconess to the Church in Cnechrea, the port of Corinth. This was about nine miles east of the city. Her service there was very efficient as we understand from St Paul"s words: **"…for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also**".

St John Chrysostom comments:

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[1] *Ibid*

[Note how he honors her in many ways. He mentions her before all the others and calls her his sister. To be called a sister of St Paul is no minor issue. He also indicates her status as a deaconess/servant of the church…

May you attend to her for two reasons: receive her in the Lord, and she herself is a saint[1]].

2-Individual Greetings:

This Epistle provides us with 26 names, but we know nothing about most of them. However, we feel the importance of this part of the message as it presents a vivid insight into the Apostle"s heart. Here is a compassionate heart that appreciates and treasures holy feelings in the Lord. Besides, we are enabled to have a glimpse of the deep friendships and generous pure love that existed among the members of the early Church.

The Apostle presents each one of his friends, and he attaches to each a specific designation which indicates how very dear each is to him. Such designations are not based on fame, wealth, or knowledge. They are inspired by fellowship in a life of piety and struggle in the ministry.

Note that in the 26 names there is one Hebrew name of "Mary"; 4 Latin names of Amplias, Urbanus, Julia, and Nereus; while the rest of the names are of Greek origin.

St Paul says: "**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house" (3-5).**

Priscilla and Aquila are also mentioned in Acts 18:2, 18, 26; 1 Cor 16:19; and 2 Thess 4:19. They were Jews who made tents, and they had to leave Rome when Claudius Caesar in the year 49 A.D. issued an order to ban all Jews from Rome. They came back to Rome later on. They were pious and wealthy merchants. The wife was probably more zealous and this could explain why the Apostle mentions her before her husband, (also refer to 1Cor16:19; and Rom 18:2). St Paul first met them in Corinth (Acts:2), and he stayed with them for about 18 months. They accompanied him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18); and then they returned to Rome. Wherever they went, they opened their home to be a church where visitors and believers could worship and get served. **St John Chrysostom** [2] believes that their home was called a church either because they had won over all the members of their household into the faith or because they opened their home to minister to visiting believers.

These believers had exposed their lives to danger because of St Paul. This could have happened during the riots that took place in Corinth (Acts 18:6-10), or in Ephesus (Acts 19:31, 32)…That is why all the churches of the Gentiles as well as St Paul constantly thanked them.

"Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ", (5).

The word "**Epaenetus"** has a Greek origin which means "deserving praise"[3]. He was the first to be converted by St Paul in Asia Minor…the Apostle calls him beloved and the firstfruits of his work in that area…he seems to be asking him to reciprocate his

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[1] *Strong: Greek Dict. Of the N.T. articles 5402,5457*
[2] *In Rom. hom 30*
[3] *Ibid*

love by not ceasing to work in Rome to spread the faith which he has accepted before many others.

"Greet Mary, who labored much for us", (6): We know nothing about her except that she helped the Apostle in his ministry before he left for Rome…He seems to be asking her never to stop struggling for the sake of the ministry.

St John Chrysostom comments on this verse as follows: [What is this? A woman has been honored and considered converted? Do we men not get embarrassed?!...We consider it an honor for us to have women like these among us; but we are embarrassed to find ourselves, as men, walking behind them[1]]. He goes on to say that although women are not allowed to teach publicly (1 Tim 2: 12; 1 Cor14: 35); yet they are not forbidden to use instruction. As a wife, a woman can win her husband over (1cor7: 16) and refines her children (1 Tim 2: 15). In fact, we find Priscilla instructing Paul. **St John Chrysostom** also comments on the Apostle's words: "**who labored much for us**" and says: [She had offered many other services which exposed her to dangers- such as expenses and travels. Women, in those days were spiritual and stronger than lions, and they jointly struggled with the apostles to spread the Gospel[2]].

"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me", (7). The first name comes from Greek and means "the victorious"[3], the second has a Latin origin. Both persons were Jews and were related to St Paul. They suffered imprisonment with him at certain undefined time. He treasures their relationship as they came to the Lord before him; and they played such an important role in the ministry that they became well known among the apostles.

St John Chrysostom[4] believes that they had not been imprisoned in the literal sense (as prisoners of war); but that they had gone through something more severe: they had been estranged and deprived of their families, had survived famine, near deaths, and endless hardships.

In any case, the Apostle does not ignore the physical ties that become sanctified through faith. Moreover, he is not embarrassed to reveal that they had come to Lord before he did…

"Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord", (8):

The word "Amplias" comes from Latin and means "enlarge" or "**amplify"[5].**

St John Chrysostom considers that in calling him "beloved" the Apostle reveals his great love to Amplias due to his virtuous life.

"Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord", (9-11).

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[1] *New Westminister Dict. Of the Bible, p 269*
[2] *In Rom. hom 31*
[3] *Ibid*
[4] *New Westminister Dict. P 43*
[5] *In Rom. hom 30*

"Urbanus**"**is a Latin word meaning "city dweller"[1]; "Stachys" is a Greek word meaning "an ear of wheat"[2]; "Appelles"[3] could be derived from "Apollo"[4]; "Aristobulus"is a Greek word meaning "sharp and wise"[5]; "Herodian" could be a derivation from "Herodus" that is descending from a hero; and "Narcissus" is a Latin word whose meaning is uncertain…

St John Chrysostom writes the following commentary: **[He praises each one in a specific way to avoid arousing any jealousy among them. He does not wish to create any confusion or disrespect by praising some and belittling others. He honors equally each one even though not all deserve such equal recognition[6]].**

The Apostle also sends greetings to "Tryphena" and "Tryphosa". It is said that they were neighbors who labored to serve the Lord and deserved the praise of St Paul. The two names are Latin and derived from the Greek words meaning "gentle" or tender". He also greets "Persis" which in Greek means "chivalrous". He does not feel embarrassed to call her "beloved" due to her old age.

He also mentions "Rufus" who was said to be the son of Simon of Cyrene who had carried the Lord"s Cross (Mark 15:21). St Paul testifies that the mother of Rufus had become a "mother" to him on account of the love and service she offered to him.

This is how St Paul counts and greets all his brothers and sisters in the Lord.

3-General Holy Kiss:

Having greeted specific persons by name- men and women, servants of the Lord and the congregation, masters and slaves; St Paul goes on to send out a message of love to every one of those whose names he does not know. He proclaims to them the love of the whole Church and not only his own love: **"Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you", (16)**. This reflects how the Church in this world is one family-men would kiss each other, and women would kiss each other with a holy kiss (1Cor 16:20; 1 Thes 5:26; 1 Peter5: 14). This spiritual kiss represents an integral part of

worship, an indication of love unspoiled by flattery. Until today, we hear the deacon, during the holy liturgy telling us to "Greet each other with a holy kiss".

The Anglican monk Dicks states that the apostolic kiss has maintained its earlier significance only in the Ethiopian and Coptic churches[7].

- Do not think that a kiss such as the one which friends are accustomed to exchange in social gatherings (agio) does not belong to this category. Indeed, a kiss indicates the union of souls and dispels all hate.

St Cyril of Jerusalem

- A kiss is a sign of peace, for what the lips reveal externally is found internally in the[1] heart.

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[1] *New Westminister Dict. P 40*
[2] *Mckenzie: Dict. Of the Bible, p 909*
[3] *New Westminister Dict. p 904*
[4] *Mckenzie, 38*
[5] *New Westminister Dict. p 62*
[6] *In Rom. hom 31*
[7] *Gregory Dix: The Shape of the Liturgy, p 110*

St Augustine[2]

4-Warning Against Divisive Persons:

St Paul warns against people who create divisions and stumbling blocks. These are materialistic individuals who do not serve the Lord but who serve their own greed and ambitions.

St John Chrysostom writes: [(Divisions) are instruments of Satan by which he reverses everything. As long as the parts of the body are united together, Satan cannot find an entry spot. The fall comes through divisions. Where do divisions come from? From opinions that contradict the teachings of the apostles. Where do these opinions come from? From slavery to greed and other lusts…this is what St Paul indicates as he writes to the people of Philippi: "whose god is their belly", (Phil 3:19)[3].

He asks his audience to beware of false teachings who: "**by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple", (18)**. They are deceivers who utter honey covered words that do not reflect their innermost schemes…it is therefore advisable to "be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil," (19).

Whereas the enemy uses the instruments of deception and slyness to catch the simple minded in his net, our Lord is able to destroy him: **"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, Amen", (20)**. St Paul prays that God may grant everyone divine grace which will save us from all trials and temptations.

- As he speaks about those who create divisions and stumbling blocks among people, he points to "the God of peace" in order to enrich his audience with hope. Hope that would liberate from such evils…this is a prayer and a prophecy at the same time (that God destroys Satan quickly under our feet)! This is the strongest weapon: a secure stronghold and a steadfast tower!...

St John Chrysostom [4]

- You see how Satan, the hunter, is eager to seize and destroy our souls. He sets up all sorts of nets and other means of deception…but as long as we are in a state of grace, our souls will enjoy peace. However, our souls will become as troubled as a boat struck by wild waves if we play around with sin.

St Jerome[5]

The Apostle offers prayer on behalf of his congregation in order to destroy Satan himself rather than with the purpose of destroying divisive persons. He prays so that the devil, who works within such evil persons, might fall helplessly under their feet. Indeed, he will be destroyed rapidly because the times are short and the days of his deception are few.

5- Greetings from the Apostle"s Friends:

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[1] للمؤلف: المسيح في سرّ الأفخارستيا، 1973، ص 411.
[2] *PL 38: 1101 A*
[3] *In Rom. hom 32*
[4] *Ibid*
[5] *On Ps. hom 20*

Some scholars believe that St Paul has read this message to the people of Corinth before sending it, and that the greetings included here were written at the request of the church in Corinth.

Greetings come from St Timothy, the beloved son of St Paul. He was his son in the faith and a partner in the ministry, as well as his companion in many of his travels…

There is also a greeting from Gaius, his host and indeed "the host of the whole church". He had probably turned his home into a place of worship, and had hosted many who were strangers visiting Corinth.

6- Concluding Doxology and Benediction

The benediction here is an echo of all that has been mentioned throughout this Epistle. St Paul expresses in it the need for God who grants not only hope, but firmness in Him as well. The mystery that He has proclaimed at the beginning of time is the eternal and hidden mystery which the prophets have foretold: the mystery of the coming and submission of all nations to the faith. He says: **"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.", (25-27).**

In these words, St Paul underlines the following:

A-God is the One who makes us stand firmly in His Gospel

B-God"s plan for us is an eternal (mystery)

C-This plan has been foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament

D-God"s plan is that all nations obey the faith

The Apostle clearly indicates that Tertius (22) is the one who has written this Epistle, and that the deaconess Phoebe is the one who carried it to the people in Rome.