

THE GERGESENE DEMONIACS AND COVETOUSNESS THE LAW, FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

July 28, 2024
5th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

Gospel: Matthew 8:28-9:1
Epistle: Romans 10:1-10

Today’s Gospel lesson, either from Matthew 8, Mark 5 or Luke 8 is not used at all in the Western lectionaries. In the Eastern lectionary, this lesson is used twice: in October from Luke 8 and today from Matthew 8. From Luke 8 (or the 6th Sunday of Luke in October), the theme is taken from the text which relates mental illness in terms of demon possession. For today’s Gospel lesson from Matthew 8, the theme follows John Chrysostom’s lead in comparing demon possession to covetousness. Chrysostom refers to covetousness in many of his Homilies on the Scriptures, and from different viewpoints. In this Study, we will track these different aspects and include what other Early Church Fathers had to say also.

Today’s Epistle lesson is used in part in the West. Verses 8-13 are sometimes used for the first Sunday in Lent while verses 4-18 are sometimes used for the 11th Sunday after Trinity.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Matthew 8:24-9:1.....	645
Covetousness is Like Demon Possession.....	646
Covetousness is Hateful to God.....	651
Covetousness is Idolatry.....	652
The Mosaic Law Spoke against Covetousness.....	655
Our Instruction: Have Nothing to do with a Brother Who is Covetous.....	657
No Man Can Serve Two Masters.....	658
Covetousness is a Root of All Kinds of Evil.....	661
Covetousness is not a Natural Sin.....	664
Judas was a Prime Example of Covetousness.....	668
Covetousness is Cruelty to Ourselves.....	675
Being in Need is Better than Being Covetous.....	685
The Covetous Do Not Know Peace.....	687
What to Do with the Covetous: Avoid Them.....	689
Job is a Prime Example of a Lack of Covetousness.....	689
Alms Overcomes Covetousness.....	695
Epistle: Romans 10:1-10.....	704
A Zeal for God.....	704
Ignorance of God’s Righteousness.....	705
The Law as Our Tutor or Pedagogue.....	712
The Law as a Rigid Rule Book.....	718
Confessing with Our Mouth.....	721
What is Salvation?.....	723

John Chrysostom acknowledged¹ to his hecklers that he was like a broken record on the subject of covetousness, always repeating a similar thing. But he also said that it was a really important issue that many people overlook.

“Love is a mighty and irresistible thing; let us make it clear by our actions. Christ reconciled us when we were His enemies; let us, now that we have become His friends, remain so. He led the way, let us at least follow; He loves us not for His own advantage, (for He needs nothing) let us at least love Him for our own benefit. He loved us even when we were His enemies; let us at least love Him now that He is our friend. At present, we do the contrary; for every day God is blasphemed through us, through our plundering, through our covetousness. Perhaps one of you will say, ‘Every day your homilies are about covetousness’. If only I could speak about it every night too; if only I could follow you about in the market-place, and at your table. If only wives, friends, children and neighbors could continually shout this message, so that we might perhaps relax a little. This sickness has seized the entire world, and occupies the souls of everyone; great is the tyranny of Mammon. We have been ransomed by Christ, and yet we are the slaves of gold. We proclaim the sovereignty of Him, and obey the other. Whatever Mammon commands we readily obey, and we have refused to know family, friendship, nature, laws, or anything, for him. No one looks up to Heaven; no one thinks about things to come. But there will be a time, when there will be no profit even in my words. ‘There is no remembrance of You in death; in Hades, who will give thanks to You?’ (Psalm 6:6 OSB) Gold is a desirable thing, and buys us much luxury, and makes us to be honored; but not in the same way as Heaven does.”

Leo the Great noted² that the landscape had changed since the reign of Constantine the Great. Persecution is no longer favored by the world rulers and animal sacrifice to demons has largely been discontinued. Instead the demons are now going after Christians with covetousness instead of with persecution.

“Because the stress of former blasts has lulled, and with a cessation of fighting, a measure of tranquility has long seemed to smile upon us; but we must guard against new divergences which arise from the reign of peace. The adversary was proved ineffective in open persecutions, but now exercises a hidden skill in doing cruelty, in order to overthrow by the stumbling-block of pleasure those whom he could not strike with the blow of affliction. Seeing the faith of princes opposed to him and the indivisible Trinity of the one Godhead as devoutly worshipped in palaces as in churches, he grieves at the shedding of Christian blood being forbidden, and attacks the mode of life of those whose death he cannot bring about. The terror of confiscations he changes into the fire of avarice, and corrupts with covetousness those whose spirit he could not break by losses. The malicious haughtiness ingrained into his nature has not laid aside its hatred, but changed its character in order to subjugate the minds of the faithful by flattery. He inflames those with covetous desires whom he cannot distress with tortures; he sows strife, kindles passions, sets tongues a-wagging, and, lest more cautious hearts should draw back from his lawless wiles, facilitates

¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVI, 3.

² Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XXXVI, vi, 3.

opportunities for crime. Since he is no longer worshipped with the sacrifice of cattle and goats, and the burning of incense, at least he might be paid the homage of diverse wicked deeds.”

John Chrysostom apologized³ for speaking about covetousness so often; but he felt compelled to do so for the salvation of his people. So many were living luxuriously in rabid covetousness and ignoring the poor.

“Covetousness is worse than any desire. It is more grievous than the madness and the silly weakness about silver. Notice how the evil ends up: with the wrath of God on those involved (Colossians 3:5-7). Do not take what I said amiss, for I am not trying to make enemies without reason; but I wanted for you to attain such virtue, that I might hear of you the things I ought. I do not say this for authority’s sake, nor by domineering, but out of pain and of sorrow. Forgive me! I have no wish to violate decency by speaking about such subjects, but I am compelled to it. Not for the sake of the sorrows of the poor do I say these things, but for your salvation; for they will perish who have not fed Christ (Matthew 25:31-46). So what if you once fed some poor man! Still so long as you live so voluptuously and luxuriously, all is to no purpose. What is required is giving in proportion to the property you have; otherwise you are just playing at it.”

Gospel: Matthew 8:24-9:1

The Gospel account took place in the winter of 28 AD and is also described in Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39. (Jesus was crucified in the Spring of 30 AD). Jesus and His disciples had just finished rowing across the Sea of Galilee to the Eastern shore, probably in one of the fishing boats. On the way, a storm arose and Jesus calmed the storm. The Twelve were stunned, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the water obey him?” (Luke 8:25, Matthew 8:27, Mark 4:41). Following the calming of the storm, today’s Gospel lesson took place. When they got back to Nazareth after this trip, Jesus sent the Twelve out two by two to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons all by themselves (Luke 9:1-6, Matthew 10:5-23, Mark 6:7-13). The Gospel lesson, then, is a hands-on-how-to-do-it in preparation for the sending out of the Twelve. Jesus knew He was going to do this and picked a real bearcat as a demonstration.

As soon as they stepped out of the boat in the country of the Gergesenes (or Gadaranes in Matthew 8:28; Gadara and Gergesa were not too far apart), they were met by demon possessed men. Some details about these men:

- There were actually two of them (Matthew 8:28)
- They were naked and lived in the tombs (Luke 8:27)
- They had been like this for a long time (Luke 8:27)
- These men had been locked up, bound with chains and shackles, but they broke the chains (Luke 8:27)
- They were exceedingly fierce; no one could pass that way (Matthew 8:28)
- Night and day these men would cry out and cut themselves with stones (Mark 5:5. Compare 1 Kings 18:28)

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, VIII, vv. 5-7.

In today's terminology, they would be classified as a danger to themselves and others (that is, seriously mentally ill). Treatment programs today involve major tranquilizers to sedate them followed by more tranquilizers to stabilize them and control their erratic behavior.

When Jesus commanded the demons to come out of the men, the demons begged Jesus not to torment them before the time (Matthew 8:29). This is an interesting request! Night and day, the demons had caused the two men to cry out in pain and cut themselves with stones (Mark 5:5). But yet now the demons don't want Jesus to hurt them? Jesus then asked the men their name, and the demons replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many!" (Mark 5:9). A legion represented 2000 to 6000 foot soldiers and included some cavalry. The demons then begged Jesus that He allow them to enter a herd of swine (about 2000 according to Mark 5:13) that were feeding a good way off from them (Matthew 8:30). Jesus permitted them to do so and suddenly the whole herd ran violently down the steep embankment into the lake and drowned.

The reaction to all this by the herdsmen and the townsfolk is almost as strange as the demoniacs' behavior. When the herdsmen brought the townsfolk out and they saw the former demoniacs clothed, in their right mind, and sitting at Jesus' feet, they were afraid. When the herdsmen explained all that had occurred the townsfolk were seized with great fear and asked Jesus to leave. The demoniacs weren't the only ones in the area that had problems.

Two thousand head of swine represents a major industry for that area. While the Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was a largely Gentile population, meat from the swine was not lawful to be eaten by Jews (Leviticus 11:7). To eat it anyway was a sacrilege and punished by the person being cut off from Israel (Leviticus 7:20-21). If the townsfolk were intent on butchering the 2000 swine that just died in order to recoup some of their loss, they certainly wouldn't want some Jews around to watch. These swine would be doubly unclean, since they died of themselves (Deuteronomy 14:21). So who were the swine being raised for? From the reaction of the townsfolk (that the swine-raising industry supported) to a group of Jews (Jesus and the Twelve), the implication is that some of the meat was sold to Jews and that greed or covetousness was present. And it is from this aspect of the Gospel lesson that John Chrysostom had much to say.

Covetousness is Like Demon Possession

A definition of covetousness here is needed. It is more than merely a desire to improve one's lot in life. Instead it involves discontent and unhappiness with one's current possessions and, with priorities completely out of line, a single minded path toward acquisition of material priorities. This is best illustrated with some examples.

John Chrysostom made⁴ an analogy between the demoniacs and various people of his day. "From history, we are able to know that the swinish sort of men is especially liable to the operations of the demons. As long as they remain men and suffer such things, they are often able yet to prevail; but if they are become altogether swine, they are not only possessed, but are also cast down the precipice."

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 4.

Chrysostom continued to say⁵ that the swinish sort of men in the Church hears admonitions as restrictions but nothing is able to bind him into complying. The demons in the Gospel Reading obeyed Christ but these men don't because Christ won't correct us against our free will.

“What of the covetous man (i.e. in the Church)? Is he not like this? For who will ever be able to bind him? Are there not fears, daily threats, admonitions and counsels, i.e. from the Liturgy, Matins, Gospel and Epistle readings, etc.? All these bonds he bursts asunder. If anyone should come to set him free, he commands him that he does not want to be freed, accounting it the greatest torture to be ‘freed’. What can be more wretched? The evil spirits, even though they despised men, yet they yielded to the command of Christ and quickly sprang out of the man's body. But the covetous man yields not even to His commandment. He daily hears Him saying, ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24), and threatening hell and endless torments but obeys not. Not that he is stronger than Christ, but because against our will Christ does not correct us. In regard to this, Jesus did not try to correct the townsfolk; he left the former demoniacs to do that.

John Cassian described⁶ three kinds of people who fit the mold of the covetous: (1) hoarders; (2) backsliders and (3) the faithless that fear poverty. Cassian gave three examples from the Scriptures of these three: Gehazi (2 Kings 5), Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3-5) and Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

“The disease of covetousness is an unhealthy state, is threefold and is condemned with equal abhorrence by all the fathers. (1) One feature is this disease deceives wretched folk and persuades them to hoard things even though they never had anything of their own. (2) Another feature forces men who had given up some worldly things afterwards to resume and once more desire those things which they gave up. (3) A third feature springs from a faulty and hurtful beginning; it does not allow those whom it has once infected with this lukewarm mind to strip themselves of any of their worldly goods, through fear of poverty and lack of faith. Those who keep back money and property which they certainly ought to have given away, it never allows them to arrive at the perfection of the Gospel.”

“In Holy Scripture we find instances of these three catastrophes which were visited with no light punishment. (1) When Gehazi wished to acquire what he had never had before, not only did he fail to obtain the gift of prophecy which it would have been his to receive from his master by hereditary succession, but on the contrary he was covered by the curse of the holy Elisha with a perpetual leprosy. (2) Judas, wanting to resume the possession of the wealth which he had formerly cast away when he followed Christ, not only fell into betraying the Lord, and lost his Apostolic rank, but also was not allowed to close his life in peace but ended it by a violent death. (3) Ananias and Sapphira, keeping back a part of that which was formerly their own, were at the Apostle's word punished with death.”

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 5.

⁶ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 14.

While the demoniacs were so fierce that “no one could pass that way” (Matthew 8:28), Chrysostom continues⁷, “yet the covetous man is much more fierce even than this, attacking all like hell, swallowing all up, going about as a common enemy to the race of men. He longs also to mar the substance of the earth and to see it all become gold; not the earth only, but hills, woods, fountains and in a word all things that appear. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless and having maimed their nature, not only by slaying their children after birth, but by not allowing them even to be born at all” (that is abortion).

Chrysostom noted⁸ that covetous men are in a particularly difficult situation because no one can deliver them from the effects of their covetousness. They bring so much misfortune on themselves by their behavior that it is like a demonic possession.

“How then shall we deliver the covetous man from the demon? He often undergoes great losses in his attempts to gain money. Wishing to lend at high interest, he often doesn’t check those receiving the money – and loses everything. Others falling into danger, cling to their money and lose their life with their substance by delaying their escape. Covetous men do not know how to sow but always practice reaping, and continually fail in their harvest (Galatians 6:7, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Proverbs 11:8). For no man can be always reaping; neither can he be always gaining. Therefore, being unwilling to spend, neither do they know how to gain. Should they take a wife, the same thing happens to them. For either they are deceived (by avarice) into taking a poor wife instead of a rich one; or when they have brought home one that is rich, they find her full of faults without number and incur more loss than gain. What profit is there of her wealth when she is expensive, debauched and scatters all abroad more vehemently than any wind? But they do not only marry, but also buy at great risk, from their great covetousness, laboring to find not good workers, but cheap ones” (Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 5:18).

Paul had said, “Let your conduct be without the love of money; be content with such things as you have. For He himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). This promise was made to the people of God as they began the very difficult task of the conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 1:5).

On the other hand, our American culture bombards us with a constant urging of consumerism and keeping up with the Joneses. Advertising tells us that we need the latest model car, TV, computer or fashions. The Lord had warned, however, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for your life does not consist in the abundance of the things you possess’ (Luke 12:15).

Paul addressed this at length to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:6-10):

- Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6)
- We brought nothing in and carry nothing out of this world (1 Timothy 6:7, Psalm 49:17, Ecclesiastes 5:14, Job 1:21).
- Be content with food and clothing (1 Timothy 6:8, Matthew 6:25-32)

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 5.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 6

- The covetous fall into a snare, into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:9, Proverbs 30:8-9)
- The love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil (1 Timothy 6:10)
- In pursuing this, some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10).

We tend to belittle covetousness since it is such a major part of our American consumer-oriented economy. Thus, it is a major challenge to follow Paul's admonition: "Let (covetousness) not even be named among you" (Ephesians 5:3). We tend to overlook places in the Scripture that list covetousness among the worst and most debauched characteristics among men (Mark 7:22, Romans 1:29, Ephesians 4:19, 2 Peter 2:1-19) that those who hate God are given over to. Thus, covetousness can become a demonic-like possession for those who refuse to humble their hearts and be content with the Lord's provision. And we, like the townsfolk may end up sending the Son of God away for interrupting our business expansion plans. So John Chrysostom's teaching here is no small thing!

John Chrysostom went into a detailed comparison⁹ of the demon-possessed with the covetous and concluded that there was a remarkable similarity. While the demoniacs went around naked and were not ashamed, the covetous are naked in soul and they associate with others who are also naked in soul, so they never notice their nakedness. In their madness, they try to strip the clothing of virtue off everyone they meet. The demoniacs were "fierce"; but the covetous are fierce also in inflicting poverty on anyone. The demoniacs rushed out to the desert in their madness; the covetous do this in the cities plundering anyone and everyone. While the demoniacs lived in the tombs, the covetous are a tomb with a dead soul inside. While the demoniacs used to cut themselves with stones, the covetous inflict themselves with far more severe torments of anger and anxiety because of their consuming passion for the things of this world.

"Bring forward the possessed and the covetous, and let us make a comparison between the two. But remember we do not criticize the nature, but we lament the act. The possessed (in the Gospel lesson) was never clad with garments; they cut themselves with stones; and they rush over rough paths, driven headlong by the demons. Do not these things seem to be dreadful? I shall show the covetous doing more grievous things than these to their own soul, that the demoniacs' activity is considered child's play by comparison. The covetous are in even a more grievous condition; they are more objects of shame than ten thousand naked persons. It were far better to be naked as to clothing, than being clad with the fruits of covetousness, to go about like them that celebrate the orgies for Bacchus. The nakedness of the possessed is caused by madness; so madness produces this clothing, and the clothing is more miserable than the nakedness."

"This I will endeavor to prove. Whom should we say was more mad, one who should cut himself, or one who together with himself should cut those who met him? It is quite clear that it is the latter. The madmen just strip themselves of their clothing; but the covetous strip all that meet them. Readily would every one of the covetous consent that his clothes should be torn, rather than he be stripped of all his substance!"

⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, LXXXI, 3-4.

“But someone might say, ‘the covetous do not aim blows at the face’. In the first place, the covetous do even this; and if not all, yet all inflict by famine and poverty more grievous pains on the belly.”

“But someone might say, ‘the covetous don’t bite with the teeth’. If only it were with teeth and not with the arrows of covetousness fiercer than teeth. ‘For their teeth are spears and arrows’ (Psalm 57:4 LXX). Who will feel most pained, he that was bitten once, and immediately healed, or he that is forever eaten up by the teeth of poverty? Poverty when involuntary is worse than a furnace or a wild beast.”

“Someone might say, ‘The covetous do not rush into the deserts like the demon-possessed’. Would it were the deserts, and not the cities, that they overran, so that all in the cities might enjoy security. The covetous are more intolerable than all the insane, because they do in the cities these things which the others do in the deserts, making the cities deserts. Like in a desert, where there is no one to hinder, so they plunder the goods of all men. Someone might say, ‘But the covetous do not pelt with stones anyone that meets them’. It is easy to beware of stones; but regarding the wounds caused by paper and ink that they work on the wretched poor (framing writings full of blows without number). Who, out of those that they deal with, can ever easily beware?”

“Let us notice also what they do to themselves. They walk naked up and down the city, for they have no garment of virtue. Due to their exceeding madness this does not seem to them to be a disgrace, for they have no feeling of embarrassment. While they are ashamed of having their body naked, their soul is always naked, and they glory in it. I will tell you the cause of their insensitivity. They are naked among many that are thus naked; therefore they are not ashamed, just as we are not ashamed in a locker room. If there were many clothed with virtue in the locker room, then their shame would appear more. This above all is a worthy subject for many tears, that because the bad are many, bad things are not even considered a disgrace. The demons have brought about this too, not to allow covetous men to obtain even a sense of their evil deeds. Because of the multitude of those that practice wickedness, it throws a shade over their disgrace; if it happened that the covetous was in the midst of a multitude of persons practicing self-restraint, he would see his nakedness more. That the covetous are more naked than the possessed is clear from these things. For the wide and broad way that they follow is more of a desert than any desert. And this way is not only desert, but much more rugged than that *of the mad*. Stones and ravines do not so wound those that climb them, as robbery and covetousness wound the souls that practice this behavior.”

“And that they live by the tombs, like the possessed, or rather that they themselves are tombs, is plain by this. What is a tomb? It is a stone having a dead body lying in it. How do the bodies of the covetous differ from those stones? They are more miserable. It is not a stone containing a dead body, but a body more insensitive than a stone, carrying about a dead soul. One would not be wrong in calling the covetous tombs. Our Lord called the Jews ‘whitewashed tombs’, for this exact reason; He went on to say, ‘Inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence’” (Matthew 23:25-27).

“Let me show you next how the covetous cut their heads with stones! Are not anxieties worse than many stones, not wounding heads, but consuming a soul? They are afraid that those things which they have acquired unjustly should leave their house. They are angry, provoked, against those of their own house, against strangers; despondency, fear, wrath comes upon them in succession, and they are as if they were crossing precipice after precipice, and they are earnestly looking day by day for what they have not yet acquired. They don’t feel pleasure in the things they have, both because of the security of the things they have, and because they are intent upon what they have not yet seized. Like one continually thirsting, though he should drink up ten thousand fountains, does not feel the pleasure, because he is not satisfied. Similarly the covetous, so far from feeling pleasure, are even tormented, the more they heap around themselves; from their not feeling any limit to such desire.”

Covetousness is Hateful to God

Have we ever considered how God views covetousness? Paul refers to covetousness as idolatry (). And we know that this is hateful to God!

Clement of Rome pointed out¹⁰ that the Scripture has said that covetousness, among other things, is hateful to God.

“Let us strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him, in order that we may share in His promised gifts. But how, beloved, shall this be done? This will happen if our understanding is fixed by faith towards God; if we earnestly seek the things which are pleasing and acceptable to Him; if we do the things which are in harmony with His blameless will; and if we follow the way of truth, casting away from us all unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, etc. For they that do such things are hateful to God; not only they that do them, but also those that approve those who practice them (Romans 1:32). But to the sinner God has said, ‘Why do you declare my ordinances, and take up my covenant in your mouth? You have hated instruction, and have cast my words behind you. If you saw a thief, you ran along with him, and have cast in your lot with adulterers. Your mouth has multiplied wickedness, and your tongue has framed deceit. You sat and spoke against your brother, and scandalized your mother's son. These things you did, and I kept silence; you thought wickedly that I should be like you, but I will reprove you, and set your offences before you. Now consider these things, you that forget God, lest he tear you apart, and there is no one to deliver you’” (Psalm 50:16-22 LXX)

Gregory Thaumaturgus wrote¹¹ that some people used the time of persecution in the late 3rd century to enlarge their personal property. Gregory declared these people to be hated of God and of unsurpassable iniquity for looking to profit from the martyrdom of the saints.

“Covetousness is a great evil. It is not possible in a single letter to list those Scriptures in which not robbery alone is declared to be a horrible thing, but also the grasping mind, and the disposition to meddle with what belongs to others,

¹⁰ Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 35.

¹¹ Gregory the Wonder-Worker, Canonical Epistle, I, 2

in order to satisfy the sordid love of gain. All persons of that spirit are excommunicated from the Church of God. During the previous times of persecution, in the midst of such sorrow and lamentation, some have been audacious enough to consider the crisis which brought destruction to everyone the opportunity for their own private expansion of wealth. That is a thing which can be declared only of men who are impious and hated of God, and of unsurpassable iniquity. It seemed good to excommunicate such persons, lest the wrath of God should come upon the whole people, and upon those first of all who are set over them in office, and yet fail to make inquiry. As the Scripture says, the impious may work the destruction of the righteous along with his own (Genesis 18:23-25). ‘Fornication and covetousness are things that bring the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. Do not be partakers with them!’” (Ephesians 5:5-7)

John Chrysostom noted¹² that Jesus taught the pursuit of righteousness as opposed to covetousness with our whole heart. By seeking righteousness, we will actually be “filled” much more than the covetous, who will lose everything.

“The Lord said, ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness’ (Matthew 5:6). What sort of righteousness? He means either the whole of virtue, or that particular virtue which is opposed to covetousness. Since He is about to give commandment concerning mercy, to show how we must show mercy, not plunder or covetousness, He blesses those that lay hold of righteousness.”

“Notice how forcefully He puts it. He didn’t say, ‘Blessed are those who fast for righteousness’, but, ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness’; that with all desire we may pursue it. Since desire is the most peculiar property of covetousness, and we are not as enamored of food as of gaining more and more, He bids us to transfer this desire to a new object: freedom from covetousness. Then He appoints the prize, again from things sensible; saying, ‘for they shall be filled’” (Matthew 5:6).

“If those who don’t covet other men’s goods enjoy such great abundance, much more those who give up their own things will also.”

Covetousness is Idolatry

Paul stated that covetousness was idolatry, but few people actually make the connection and understand why. Many people over the centuries, especially those who attend Church every Sunday have been unable to discern this. This is especially difficult where the national economic system is based on mutual covetousness (capitalism).

John Chrysostom elaborated¹³ on why covetousness is idolatry, even though some people say that Paul’s expression is hyperbole. Both the idolaters and the covetous are apostate, as Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and mammon’. But those who came to Church every Sunday protested that they have never had anything to do with idols. Chrysostom replied that our true worship has to do with our deeds, not just our words. If we are doing the work of the enemy, we can’t say that we are the son of the King; we are a traitor. God didn’t make covetousness; our

¹² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XV, 6.

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XVIII, vv. 5-6, 14.

own insatiable appetite invented it. The covetous who attend Church may censure covetousness among others, but yet they serve it and obey it themselves.

“When we say that ‘the covetous man is an idolater’, some people say the expression is hyperbolic. In this manner they understate and explain away all the commandments. It was in allusion to these that Paul wrote, ‘For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God’ (Ephesians 5:5); adding, ‘let no man deceive you with empty words’ (Ephesians 5:6). Now ‘empty words’ are those which for a while are gratifying, but are in nowise born out in facts; because the whole case is a deception.”

“The words, ‘the covetous man is an idolater’, are not hyperbolic; they are true. How and in what way? Because the covetous man apostatizes from God, just as the idolater does. Lest one should imagine this is out of the blue, there is a declaration of Christ which says, ‘You cannot serve God and Mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). If then it is not possible to serve God and Mammon, they who serve Mammon have thrown themselves out of the service of God; and they who have denied His sovereignty, and serve lifeless gold, it is plain enough that they are idolaters. A man will say, ‘But I never made an idol or set up an altar, sacrificed sheep, or poured libations of wine. I came into the Church, and lifted up my hands to the Only-begotten Son of God; I partake of the mysteries, I communicate in prayer, and in everything else which is a Christian’s duty. ‘How then’, he will say, ‘am I a worshiper of idols?’ This is the very thing which is the most astonishing of all. When you have had experience, and have ‘tasted’ the loving kindness of God, and ‘have seen that the Lord is good’ (Psalm 34:8), you should abandon Him who is gracious, and take to yourself a cruel tyrant, and should pretend to be serving Him, while in reality you have submitted yourself to the hard and galling yoke of covetousness. The things we have done in Church are only about your Master’s gifts, not about doing our own duty. How do we judge a soldier? Is it when he is on duty guarding the king, and is fed by him, and called the king’s own, or is it when he is minding his own affairs and interests? To pretend to be with him, and to be attentive to his interests while advancing the cause of the enemy, we declare to be worse than if he breaks away from the king’s service, and joins the enemy. You are despising God, just as an idolater does, not with your own mouth singly, but with the ten thousands of those whom you have wronged. Yet you will say, ‘an idolater he is not’. But surely, whenever they say, ‘Oh! that Christian, that covetous fellow’, then not only is he himself committing outrage by his own act, but he frequently forces those whom he has wronged to use these words; and if they don’t use them, this is to be set to the account of their godliness.”

“Listen to another argument about how covetousness is idolatry, and more shocking than idolatry! Idolaters worship the creatures of God, ‘for they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (Romans 1:25). But the covetous are worshipping a creature of their own. God didn’t make covetousness; our own insatiable appetite invented it. Those that worship idols honor the idols they worship; and if anyone speaks of their idols with disrespect or ridicule, they stand up in defense of their idols. Whereas the covetous, as if in a sort of intoxication, worship an object that it is full of impiety. So the covetous,

even more than the idolaters, excel in wickedness. You can never excuse it, saying that it is not evil. If idolaters are without excuse, the covetous are far more; they may censure covetousness and revile those who devote themselves to it, yet they serve and obey it.”

John Chrysostom begged¹⁴ the people of his time to see what is coming to those who are covetous, which leads to idolatry. There was the rich man who didn’t help Lazarus; there are the many who never bothered to feed Christ; there are those who prophesied in His Name, but practiced lawlessness; there are the virgins who didn’t have enough oil. All these lost everything.

“Let us take alarm then, I entreat you; let us dread the words that we don’t meet with the realities. Covetousness is corruption, corruption more dangerous than any other, and leading on to idolatry. Let us shun the corruption; let us choose the incorruption. Have you in covetousness overreached and defrauded some one? The fruits of your covetousness perish, but the covetousness remains; a corruption which is the foundation of incorruptible corruption¹⁵. The enjoyment passes away, but the sin remains imperishable. A fearful evil is it for us not to strip ourselves of everything in this present world; a great calamity to depart into the next with loads of sins about us. ‘For in death no man remembers You; and who will give You thanks in Hades?’ (Psalm 6:5 LXX) There is the place of judgment; then is there no longer an opportunity for repentance. How many things did the rich man wail about then? (Luke 16:23) Yet it was too late. How many things did they say who had neglected to feed Christ? (Matthew 25:41) Yet they were led away notwithstanding into the everlasting fire. How many things had they then to say, ‘who practiced lawlessness’; ‘Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ (Matthew 7:22-23) And yet notwithstanding, they were not saved. All these things therefore will take place then; but we will have no chance, if they are not done now. Let us fear then, lest we should ever have to say then, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and didn’t feed You?’ (Matthew 25:44) Let us feed Him now, not one day, or two, or three days. ‘For let not mercy and truth’, says the Wise Man, ‘forsake you’ (Proverbs 3:3 LXX). He does not say ‘do it once, or twice’. The Virgins, we know, had oil, but not enough to last (Matthew 25:3, 8). Thus we need much oil, and thus should we be ‘like a fruitful olive in the house of God’ (Psalm 52:8 LXX). Let us reflect then how much a burden of sins each of us has about him, and let us desire that not only the sins may be quenched, but that the acts of righteousness may be accounted to us for righteousness. If the good deeds are not so many in number as to put aside the crimes laid against us, then shall no one rescue us from that punishment, from which God grant that we may be all delivered.”

John Chrysostom noted¹⁶ that covetousness, which is idolatry, has as its mother the passion of vainglory. Whereas the passion of anger is only active when it has persons to excite it, the passion of vainglory is always active.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIV, Moral.

¹⁵ That is, the incorruptible corruption of the age to come.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, III, 6.

“The passion of anger, tyrannical though it is and hard to bear, still doesn’t always disturb, but only when it has persons that excite it. But the passion of vainglory is always active, and there is no time when it can cease, since reason neither hinders nor restrains it, but it is always with us. It not only persuades us to sin, but snatches from our hands anything which we may chance to do right, or sometimes not allowing us to do right at all. If Paul calls covetousness idolatry, what ought we to name that which is mother and root, and source of it, I mean, vainglory? We cannot possibly find any term such as its wickedness deserves. Beloved, let us return to our senses; let us put off this filthy garment; let us tear and cut it off from us; let us at some time or other become free with true freedom, and be sensible of the nobility which has been given to us by God. Nothing is so ridiculous and disgraceful as this passion, nothing so full of shame and dishonor. If we can see this, we shall be able to receive a reward from Him who sees exactly all our doings, if we are content to have Him only for a spectator.”

The Mosaic Law Spoke against Covetousness

The Mosaic Law was more than just the Ten Commandments and involved every facet of life for the people of God. Appendix A is a summary of all these aspects of the Mosaic Law.

Part of the Mosaic Law given at Mt Sinai said, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor’s” (Exodus 20:17). Thus the Law made it very clear that covetousness was sin.

On the other hand, the Mosaic Law also stated that generosity and helping the poor was to be a part of everyday life. The command in the Mosaic Law to love one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) uses the Hebrew word “*rea*” meaning friend or companion and thus implies a very close neighbor. But the Mosaic Law also says to treat the stranger among you as the native and to love the stranger as yourself, remembering that you were once strangers in Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34). The Hebrew word for stranger is “*ger*” meaning sojourner; in the Greek Septuagint, the corresponding word is “*proselutos*” meaning one who draws near; that is, a proselyte.

The Mosaic Law strictly forbade making profits off people trying to be godly. For example, the Mosaic Law specified that if a citizen of Israel or a foreign visitor were to become poor, he was to be supported and no interest charged (Leviticus 25:35-37). This became a big issue during Nehemiah’s time and Nehemiah extracted an oath from the priests that they would refrain from any interest or markup charged against their brothers during a famine (Nehemiah 5:1-13).

If the breadwinner of a family died early and unexpectedly, there were several options for his widow and children. The man’s oldest unmarried brother was required to take his wife and raise up children for his brother. If the man who died had children, this didn’t apply and the children needed to help their mother. Special provisions were made under Mosaic Law for widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 24:19-21; 16:10-11) and a special third tithe was set aside for them (Deuteronomy 14:29; 26:12). While they were not supposed to be neglected (Ezekiel 22:7, Malachi 3:5), the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day did just that under the pretense of

legality (Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47). As soon as the struggling widow ran out of money, they foreclosed on her house and seized her property. This was in violation of the Mosaic Law. People were to freely open their hand to the poor and generously lend him sufficient for his needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). To not do so was a sin and the poor man may cry to the Lord against his rich neighbors. In being generous to him, however, “the Lord will bless them in all their work and in everything they do” (Deuteronomy 15:9-11). The widow of Nain, whose only son had just died, was probably in dire straits and could expect to lose everything in a short time.

The rich man of the parable whose land yielded plentifully (Luke 12:16) is a striking contrast to the Mosaic Law. According to the Mosaic Law, the more he obtained, the more generous he was to be. Instead, he decided out of covetousness to keep it all for himself; since he couldn't even store it all; he decided to build bigger storehouses (Luke 12:18).

John Chrysostom noted¹⁷ that the Law had a seemingly strange effect on people who were bent toward sin; by saying “Don't covet”, people began to covet more. This was the fault of the patient and not the physician.

“Paul said that the Law is not sin, but he ‘would not have known sin except through the Law’ (Romans 7:7). Notice the reach of Paul's wisdom! What the Law is not, Paul has set down, so that by removing this possibility, he may persuade us to accept the alternative. ‘For I would not have known covetousness unless the Law had said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Romans 7:7).

“Notice how by degrees Paul shows that the Law is not an accuser of sin only, but in a way its producer? Not from any fault of its own, but from that of the habitually disobedient Jews, Paul proves that this happened.”

“Notice how Paul has cleared the Law of any blame. ‘But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the Law sin *was* dead’ (Romans 7:8). Sin increased the desire, and the reverse of the Law's intent was brought about. This came because of weakness, not of any badness with the Law. When we desire a thing, and then are hindered from it, the flame of the desire is increased. Now this came not from the Law; for the Law hindered us of itself to keep us away from sin; but sin, that is, our own listlessness and bad disposition, used what was good for the reverse. This is not a fault with the physician, but with the patient who applies the medicine wrongly. The Law was given, not to inflame desire, but to extinguish it; though the reverse came of it. Yet the blame attaches not to the Law, but to us. If a person had a fever, and wanted to take a cold drink when it was not good for him, and one were to restrain him from taking his fill of it, and so increase his lust after this ruinous pleasure, there would be no fault with the restrainer. The physician's business is simply prohibiting it; the restraining himself is the patient's business. On the other hand, there are many bad men who by good precepts grow in their own wickedness. This was the way in which the devil ruined Judas, by plunging him into avarice, and making him steal what belonged to the poor (John 12:5-6). However it was not the being entrusted with the money bag that brought this to pass, but the wickedness of Judas' own spirit. Eve, by bringing Adam to eat from the tree, threw him out of Paradise. But neither in that case was the tree the cause,

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v.7.

even if it was through it that the occasion took place. Sin finds opportunity because of the Law; this will be found to be the case in the New Testament also, where there are thousands of laws, and about many more important matters. One may see the same come to pass there also, not with regard to covetousness only, but to all wickedness generally. Jesus said, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin’ (John 15:22). Sin finds a footing in this fact, and so the greater punishment. Again when Paul speaks about grace, he says, ‘Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?’ (Hebrews 10:29). The worse punishment has its origin from the greater benefit?”

Our Instruction: Have Nothing to do with a Brother Who is Covetous

Paul stated, “Now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous -- not even to eat with such a person” (1 Corinthians 5:11); and “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them” (Ephesians 5:6-7).

John Chrysostom noted¹⁸ that Paul’s instruction has to do with brethren who continue to be covetous after they are baptized. Jesus, on the other hand ate with many before they were baptized. Also it is not clear if Paul’s words apply to everyone; Paul may mean for the teachers to continue to try to seek out the lost.

“In the first place, it is not yet clear whether to teachers also Jesus gave this charge about associating with covetous brethren, and not rather to brethren only. When Jesus ate with the covetous (such as tax collectors), these were not yet of the number who had become brethren. Besides, Paul commands, even with respect to them that had become brethren, to avoid them when they continue as they were; but those Jesus sought out had now ceased being covetous, and were converted.”

John Chrysostom also noted¹⁹ that the covetous man not only lives in darkness, but spreads great darkness all around. Therefore it makes sense to avoid contact with him.

“Consider how many acts of plunder, how many acts of covetousness, you have committed. Restore all fourfold (Luke 19:8). Thus plead your cause to God. There are some who have arrived at such a pitch of madness and blindness, as not even to comprehend their duty; but who go on acting in all cases, just as if they were taking pains to make the judgment of God yet heavier to themselves. This is the reason why Paul wrote, ‘Walk as children of light’ (Ephesians 5:8). Now the covetous man of all others lives in darkness, and spreads great darkness over all things around.”

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XXX, 2.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, XVIII, Moral.

in secret. But all things that are exposed are made clear by the light' (Ephesians 5:11-13). Listen to this, I beg you all, as many of you as don't like being hated for nothing, but want to be loved."

Chrysostom also made²⁰ an analogy: dining with a covetous man is like dining with someone who is smeared with dung. Would we stay and eat anyway? Most people would be offended and leave. Covetousness in this case is much worse than dung, in that it pollutes the body and the soul, and it makes washing difficult. Paul said it was OK to dine with the heathen under some circumstances, but not the covetous.

"Let us keep our hands to ourselves; or rather, let us not keep them, but stretch them out honorably, not for grasping, but for alms-giving. Let us not have our hand unfruitful or withered; for the hand which doesn't give alms is withered; and that which is grasping is polluted and unclean."

"Let no one eat with such hands; for this is an insult to those invited. Suppose a man invited us to dinner and made us sit on tapestry, a soft couch with linen interwoven with gold, in a great and splendid house, and had set by us a great multitude of attendants, and had prepared a tray of silver and gold, and filled it with many dainties of great cost and of all sorts. Then imagine that he urged us to eat, provided we would only endure his smearing his hands with dung, and so sitting down to eat with us — would any man endure this? Would he not rather have considered it an insult? Indeed I think he would, and he would have immediately left. But now in fact, we don't see hands filled with dung, but even the food filled with dung; and yet we do not leave or find fault. If this person is a person in authority, we even think it is a grand affair; we destroy our own soul in eating such things. Covetousness is worse than any dung; for it pollutes, not the body but the soul, and makes it hard to be washed. Though we see him that sits down to dinner defiled with this filth both on his hands, his face, his house filled with it, and his table also full of it, don't we feel as if we were highly honored, and as if we were going to enjoy ourselves?"

"Don't we fear Paul who allows us to go without restraint to the tables of the heathen if we wish, but not even if we wish to those of the covetous? For, 'if any man who is named a Brother' (1 Corinthians 5:11), he says, meaning here by Brother everyone who is a believer, not him who leads a solitary life. What is it that makes brotherhood? It is the Washing of Regeneration; the being enabled to call God our Father. He that is a monk, if he is a catechumen, is not a Brother; but the believer though he lives very worldly, is a Brother. 'I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is covetous -- not even to eat with such a person' (1 Corinthians 5:11). Not so with respect to the heathen; but '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'" (1 Corinthians 10:27).

No Man Can Serve Two Masters

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 7.

mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Luke added to this discussion: “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Jesus. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God’” (Luke 16:14-15).

Jerome pointed out²¹ that covetousness involves not just seizing what belongs to others, but also refusing to be generous with what we have. Everything we have has been given to us to use to help others. That which is our own is the spiritual benefits we accrue by using wisely what we have been given.

“We must also avoid the sin of covetousness, not merely by refusing to seize what belongs to others, for that is punished by the laws of the state, but also by not keeping our own property, which has now become no longer ours. The Lord said, ‘If we have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give us what is our own?’ (Luke 16:12) ‘That which is another man's’ is a quantity of gold or of silver; ‘that which is our own’ is the spiritual heritage of which it is elsewhere said: ‘The ransom of a man's life is his riches’ (Proverbs 13:8). ‘No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). Riches, that is; in the Syrian language, riches are called ‘mammon’. The ‘thorns’ which choke our faith (Matthew 13:7, 22) are the taking thought for our life (Matthew 6:25). Care for the things which the Gentiles seek after is the root of covetousness.”

“But one might say: ‘I am a girl delicately reared, and I cannot labor with my hands. Suppose that I live to old age and then fall sick, who will take pity on me?’ Listen to Jesus speaking to the Apostles: ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them’ (Matthew 6:25-26). Should clothing fail us, we can set the lilies before our eyes. Should hunger seize us, we can think of the words in which the poor and hungry are blessed. Should pain afflict us, we read, ‘Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities’ (2 Corinthians 12:10) and ‘A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to punch me, lest I be exalted above measure’ (2 Corinthians 12:7). Rejoice in all God's judgments; for the Psalmist says: ‘The daughters of Judah rejoiced because of your judgments, O Lord?’ (Psalm 97:8) Let the words be ever on your lips: ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there’ (Job 1:21); and ‘We brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out’” (1 Timothy 6:7).

In this same vein, James said, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). John said, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). And Paul said, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

²¹ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, XXII, 31.

Jesus gave the Parable of the Great Supper, which addresses covetousness and its impact on the age to come. Many people have difficulty separating the cares of this life from what is really important.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it²². I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them²³. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife²⁴, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper’” (Luke 14:16-24).

Clement of Alexandria stated²⁵ that the covetous didn’t respond to the invitation because they owned property, but because of their affection for their property.

“What about the saying, ‘No man can serve two masters, God and Mammon?’ The Lord used this expression for the love of money. For instance, the covetous, who were invited, didn’t respond to the invitation to the supper, not because of their possessing property, but because of their inordinate affection to what they possessed.

Jesus gave another parable on covetousness where a rich man owned land that yielded plentifully. Out of covetousness and in contrast to the direction of the Mosaic Law, the rich man decided to keep all his profits to himself.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses’. Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my

²² One might think it strange that someone could buy a property without ever seeing it, but this was common in 1st century Israel. In the Year of Jubilee (every 50th year), all land reverted to the family of the original inheritors at the time of the division of the Land in the days of Joshua. The worth of any piece of property was then calculated in terms of how many crops could be produced until then. An important matter, however, was what needed to be done to the Land to get it ready.

²³ Oxen were used for plowing fields, and this could only be done after a rain had softened the soil. Otherwise the hard soil would break the plow. The man who just bought 5 yoke of oxen had obviously plans for a great deal of planting that would earn him a lot of money. But he only had a narrow window to get this done.

²⁴ When a man got married, he was excused for one year from normal responsibilities, such as serving in the armed forces (Deuteronomy 24:5). This man used this aspect of the Mosaic Law as an excuse for not responding to the Lord’s invitation to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 6.

soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:15-21).

Another example of covetousness is illustrated by the actions of Gehazi, the servant of the Prophet Elisha. Gehazi had seen Elisha do great wonders time and time again, but like Judas, his covetousness got the better of him. By coveting the gifts that Naaman had offered to Elisha, but which Elisha had refused to accept, Gehazi also inherited Naaman's leprosy instead of the prophetic gift that Elisha might give him.

"Then Elisha said to Naaman, 'Go in peace'. So he departed from him a short distance. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, 'Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but *as* the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him'. So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw *him* running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, 'Is all well?' And he said, 'All *is* well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.' So Naaman said, 'Please, take two talents'. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed *them* to two of his servants; and they carried *them* on ahead of him. When he came to the citadel, he took *them* from their hand, and stored *them* away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed. Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, 'Where *did you go*, Gehazi?' And he said, 'Your servant did not go anywhere'. Then he said to him, 'Did not my heart go *with you* when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? *Is it* time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever'. And he went out from his presence leprous, *as white as snow*" (2 Kings 5:19-27).

Tertullian noted²⁶ that Jesus ran into the covetousness of the Pharisees many times. The Pharisees were the target of Jesus' comment about serving God and mammon.

"We are all aware that money is the instigator of unrighteousness, and the lord of the whole world. Therefore, when Jesus saw the covetousness of the Pharisees doing servile worship to it, He hurled this sentence against them, 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6:24). Then the Pharisees, who were covetous of riches, derided Him, when they understood that by mammon He meant money."

Covetousness is a Root of All Kinds of Evil

Paul stated, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and

²⁶ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, iv, 33.

pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God: flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:9-11).

Cyprian of Carthage referred²⁷ to the covetous as “Pharisees”, even if they happen to attend Church regularly. While we heap up retirement savings, we are a slave of our money and are bound with the chains of covetousness. By being generous, we should make Christ a partner with us, by dividing our wealth with the poor; in return, Christ will make us fellow-heirs with him.

“He who feeds Christ is himself fed by Christ; earthly things will not be lacking to those to whom heavenly and divine things are given. To think otherwise is unbelief. Where does this impious and sacrilegious consideration come from? What does a faithless heart have to do in the home of faith? Why is he, who does not altogether trust in Christ, called a Christian? The name of Pharisee is more fitting for him. In the Gospel the Lord was speaking concerning almsgiving, and faithfully and wholesomely warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly wealth by providing good works, that we might afterwards be received into eternal dwellings. The Scripture added after this, ‘Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him’ (Luke 16:14). Some like this we see now in the Church, whose closed ears and darkened hearts admit no light from spiritual and saving warnings.”

“Why do we applaud ourselves in those vain and silly conceits, as if we were withheld from good works by fear for the future? Why do we lay out before us certain shadows and omens of a vain excuse? Confess what is the truth; and since you cannot deceive those who know, speak the secret and hidden things of your mind. The gloom of barrenness has besieged our mind; and while the light of truth has departed, the deep and profound darkness of avarice has blinded our carnal heart. We are the captive and slave of our money; we are bound with the chains and bonds of covetousness; we whom Christ had once loosed, are once more in chains. We keep our money, which, when kept, does not keep us. ‘These are the ways of all who accomplish lawless things; for they take away their own soul in ungodliness’ (Proverbs 1:19 OSB). We heap up a retirement, which burdens us with its weight; and we do not remember what God answered to the rich man, who boasted with a foolish exultation of the abundance of his exuberant harvest. ‘But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) Why do we watch in loneliness over our riches? Why for our punishment do we heap up the burden of our retirement, that, in proportion as we are rich in this world, we may become poor to God? Divide the returns with the Lord our God; share the gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with us in our earthly possessions, that He also may make us a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom.”

Tertullian stated²⁸ that we don’t have to desire earthly things because they are not ours anyway. The desire for earthly things is a root of all evil; we should concentrate on desiring heavenly things.

²⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, VIII, 12-13.

²⁸ Tertullian, *Of Patience*, III, vi, 7.

“That which we have not the smallest need to seek after (because the Lord did not seek after it either), we ought to endure without heart-sickness the cutting down or taking away. The Spirit of the Lord has through Paul pronounced ‘Covetousness²⁹ a root of all *kinds of evil*’ (1 Timothy 6:10). Let us not interpret covetousness as consisting merely in the selfish desire for what is another’s. Even what seems to be ours is another’s; for nothing is ours, since all things are God’s, to whom we also belong. When suffering from a loss, if we feel impatient, grieving for what is lost from what is not our own, we shall be detected as bordering on covetousness. We seek what is another’s when we can’t stand losing what is another’s. He, who is greatly stirred with impatience at a loss, by giving things earthly the precedence over things heavenly, sins directly against God. The Holy Spirit, which he has received from the Lord, is greatly shocked for the sake of a worldly matter. Willingly, therefore, let us lose earthly things; let us keep heavenly things. Let the whole world perish, so that I may make patience my gain!”

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁰ the sacrifice of good works are more important than prayer and fasting, and he gave some examples from the Scriptures. On the other hand, sacrifices or offerings that come from covetousness or robbery are worse than the offering that Cain gave. We need to understand what the Lord meant when He said, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”

“Jesus said, ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven’ (Matthew 5:16). Nothing is more full of light than a most excellent conversation. As one of the wise men has said, ‘The ways of the righteous shine like light; they go on and shine, until the day be fully come’ (Proverbs 4:18 LXX); and they don’t shine just for them who kindle the flame by their works, and are guides in the way of righteousness, but also for those who are their neighbors. Let us then pour oil into these lamps, that the flame becomes higher, that rich light appears. Not only has this oil great strength now, but even when sacrifices were at their height, it was far more acceptable. Jesus said, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ (Matthew 12:7; Hosea 6:6); and with good reason. That is a lifeless altar, this a living altar; and all that is laid on that altar becomes the food of fire, ends in dust, is poured out as ashes, and the smoke of it is dissolved into the air. But here there is nothing like this, and the fruits which it bears are different. As Paul declares in describing the treasures of kindness to the poor laid up by the Corinthians, ‘For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God. Through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the Gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you’ (2 Corinthians 9:12-14). Do you behold it resolving itself into thanksgiving and praise of God, continual prayers of those who have been benefited, and more fervent charity? Let us then sacrifice, beloved, let us sacrifice every day upon these altars. This sacrifice is greater than prayer and fasting, and many things

²⁹ That is, Tertullian links covetousness with the love of money.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIII, 4.

besides, if only it comes from honest gain, honest labor, and is pure from all covetousness, robbery, and violence. God accepts such offerings as these, but the others He turns away from and hates. He will not be honored out of other men's calamities³¹; such sacrifice is unclean and profane, and would rather anger God than appease Him. We must be careful that we do not, in the place of service, insult Him whom we would honor. If Cain for making a second-rate offering, having done no other wrong, suffered extreme punishment, how will we fare when we offer anything gained by robbery and covetousness? We will suffer yet more severely. It is for this that God has shown to us the pattern of this commandment, that we might have mercy, not be mean to our fellow-servants. He who takes what belongs to one and gives it to another, has not shown mercy, but inflicted hurt, and done an extreme injustice. Just as then a stone cannot yield oil, so neither can cruelty produce humanity; for alms when it has such a root as this is no longer alms. Therefore I exhort that we don't just look at this, that we give to those that need, but also that we don't give from other men's plunder. 'When one prays and another curses, to whose voice will the Lord listen?' (Ecclesiasticus 34:24 RSV) If we guide ourselves thus strictly, we shall be able by the grace of God to obtain much loving-kindness, mercy and pardon for what we have done amiss during all this long time, and to escape the river of fire" (Daniel 7:10).

The Latin Vulgate³² contains a verse of Scripture that is left out of the modern text of both the Hebrew and the Greek Septuagint:

"Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. Why is earth and ashes proud? There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one sets even his own soul for sale; because while he lives he has cast away his bowels" (Ecclesiasticus 10:9-10 Vul)

Covetousness is not a Natural Sin

Some sins arise from a misuse of natural desires that we have from birth. Sex is useful for procreation, but can be abused for fornication. Anger is useful if we direct it at our own sins, but not if we direct it at our fellow Christian. Covetousness, however, is not a natural sin and does not come from any natural desire.

John Chrysostom pointed out³³ how covetousness is not a natural or inborn sin, and was not present in the Garden at the beginning. That came later with one man envying another. Yet covetousness has a dreadful disabling effect on one's life and hope, as illustrated by Gehazi, Ananias, Judas and the Jewish leaders. They were so locked in to their covetousness that they were just about incurable. In contrast to those who are possessed with covetousness are the celibates living in monasteries, where they give away all their possessions in order to join.

³¹ That is, if one person works at swindling people out of their savings, then turns around and offers a tithe of this "income" to God, God is not at all pleased with this and does not accept this offering any more than He accepted Cain's offering.

³² The Latin Vulgate was translated from Hebrew into Latin by Jerome in the 4th century AD from the Hebrew text available at that time to Jerome. The modern Hebrew text was compiled by the Masoretic Jewish scholars in the 10th century AD.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXV, 3.

“A dreadful thing is the love of money; it disables both eyes and ears, and makes men worse to deal with than a wild beast, allowing a man to consider neither conscience, friendship, fellowship nor the salvation of his own soul. Having withdrawn them from all these things, like some harsh mistress, it makes those captured by it its slaves. The dreadful part of so bitter a slavery is that it persuades them even to be grateful for it; and the more they become enslaved, the more their pleasure increases. In this way especially the malady becomes incurable, in this way the monster becomes hard to conquer. This made Gehazi a leper instead of a disciple and a prophet; this destroyed Ananias and her with him; this made Judas a traitor; this corrupted the rulers of the Jews, who received gifts, and became the partners of thieves. This has brought in ten thousand wars, filling the roads with blood, the cities with wailings and lamentations. This has made meals to become impure, and tables accursed, and has filled food with transgression; therefore Paul has called it ‘idolatry’ (Colossians 3:5), and not even so has he deterred men from it. Why has he called it ‘idolatry?’ Many people possess wealth, and don’t dare use it, but consecrate it, handing it down untouched, not daring to touch it, as though it were some dedicated thing³⁴. If at any time they are forced to do so, they felt as though they had done something unlawful. As the Greek carefully tends his idol, so we entrust our gold to doors and bars; providing a chest instead of a shrine, and laying it up in silver vessels. We do not bow down to it as he does to the image; yet we show all kind of attention to it.

The Greek would rather give up his eyes or his life than his graven image. So also would those who love gold. ‘But’, said one, ‘I don’t worship the gold’. Neither does the Greek worship the image, but the demon that dwells in it; in like manner, though we don’t worship the gold, yet we worship that demon who springs on our soul, from the sight of the gold and our lust for it. More grievous than an evil spirit is the lust of money-loving and many obey it more than others do idols. The idol-worshippers disobey in many things, but the covetous yield everything, and whatever it tells them to do, they obey. ‘Be at war with everyone’, it says, ‘forget nature, despise God, sacrifice to me yourself’, and in all they obey. To the graven images they sacrifice oxen and sheep, but avarice said, ‘Sacrifice to me your own soul’, and the man obeys. Notice what kind of altars it has, what kind of sacrifices it receives! ‘The covetous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 6:10), but not even so do they fear’. Yet this desire, covetousness, is weaker than all the others, it is not inborn, or natural. If it were natural, it would have been placed in us at the beginning; but there was no gold at the beginning, and no man desired gold. But I will tell you where the mischief entered. By each man’s envying the one before him, men have increased the disease, and he who has gotten much wealth in advance provokes him who had no desire. When men see splendid houses, extensive land, troops of slaves, silver vessels and great heaps of apparel, they use every means to outdo them; so that the first set of men are causes of the second, and these of those who come after. Now if one generation were sober-minded, they would not be teachers of evil to others; yet the next generation has no excuse either. There are others who despise riches. Who despises them? Shall I mention many both in cities and in

³⁴ A “dedicated thing” was something dedicated to God which could not be used for any other purpose.

the mountains who live in monasteries? Why don't we become better from their example? Many such we shall find, contented with what belongs to them, taking care of their own, and living on honest labor. Why do we not rival and imitate these? How much wrath, tell me, how much expense, how many enmities the covetous incurred; and what was the gain? Deathless punishment, having no consolation; and not only while alive, but also when gone, being accused by all? When we see the portraits of the many laid up in their houses, shall we not weep the more? The Prophet said it well, 'You chasten man with rebukes for iniquity, and You make his life to consume away like a spider's web; every man is disquieted in vain' (Psalm 39:11 LXX); anxiety about such things is indeed disquiet, disquiet and superfluous trouble. But it is not so in the everlasting mansions, not so in those tabernacles. Here one has labored, and another enjoys; but there each shall possess his own labors, and shall receive a clear reward. Let us press forward to get that possession, there let us prepare houses for ourselves, that we may rest in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John Cassian stated³⁵ that covetousness is something that is outside our nature, and it has nothing to do with bodily maintenance, food or drink. Some nations have been entirely free from it, and the world before the flood was so also for long ages. Some people can renounce the things of this world without blinking an eye, even though they might have to fight other passions their entire life.

“Covetousness and anger are not of the same character; covetousness is something outside our nature, while anger seems to have as it were its seed plot within us. Yet they spring up in the same way; in most instances they find the reasons for their being stirred in something outside of us. Often men who are still rather weak complain that they have fallen into these sins through irritation and the instigation of others, and are plunged headlong into the passions of anger and covetousness by the provocation of other people. That covetousness is something outside our nature, we can clearly see from this; it is proved not to have its first starting point inside us, nor does it originate in what contributes to keeping body and soul together, and to the existence of life. It is plain that nothing belongs to the actual needs and necessities of our common life except our daily food and drink; but everything else, with whatever zeal and care we preserve it, is shown to be something distinct from the wants of man by the needs of life itself. So this temptation, as being something outside our nature, only attacks those who are lukewarm and built on a bad foundation, whereas those which are natural to us do not cease from troubling even the best of us our whole life. So far is this shown to be true, we find that there are some nations who are altogether free from this passion of covetousness, because they have never by use and custom received into themselves this fault and infirmity. Also we believe that the old world before the flood was for long ages ignorant of the madness of this desire. In the case of each one of us who makes his renunciation of the things of the world a thorough one, we know that it is pulled out by the roots without any difficulty. We can find thousands of men to bear witness to this, who in a single moment have given up all their property, and have so thoroughly eradicated this passion as not to be in the slightest degree troubled by it afterwards. Conversely throughout all their life

³⁵ John Cassian, *Conference of Abbot Serapion*, I, v, 8.

they may have to fight against gluttony, however, and cannot be safe from it without striving with the utmost watchfulness of heart and bodily abstinence.”

Cassian further described³⁶ how covetousness is not a natural sin; other sins originate in our nature, but can be overcome with a long struggle. Covetousness comes on us later and can be more easily guarded against and resisted; if it is not dealt with early, and gains an entrance to our heart, it is very difficult to expel. God gave us these natural impulses for our good; but they can be turned and perverted.

“Our conflict against covetousness, which we can describe as the love of money, is a foreign warfare, and one outside of our nature. The rest of the incitements to sin planted in human nature seem to have their commencement as if they were congenital with us, and somehow being deeply rooted in our flesh. They originate almost with our birth, anticipate our powers of discerning good and evil, and although in very early days they attack a man, yet they are overcome with a long struggle.”

“But the disease of covetousness, coming upon us at a later period, and approaching the soul from outside, can be more easily guarded against and resisted. If it is not dealt with early and is allowed to gain an entrance into the heart, it is the more dangerous to everyone and is expelled only with greater difficulty. For it becomes ‘a root of all *kinds of evil*’ (1 Timothy 6:10), and gives rise to a multiplicity of incitements to sin.”

“We know too how great is the use of sorrow, which is reckoned among the other vices, when it is turned to an opposite use. On the one hand, when it is in accordance with the fear of God it is most needful, and on the other, when it is in accordance with the world, most pernicious. Paul teaches us that ‘you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. Godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death’” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

“If we say that these impulses were implanted in us by the Creator, we can’t blame Him if we choose wrongly to abuse them. We pervert them to harmful purposes, if we are ready to be made sorry by means of the useless Cains³⁷ of this world, and not by means of showing penitence and the correction of our faults. It is good to be angry with ourselves (which would be profitable) but not with our brethren in defiance of God’s command. In the case of iron, which is given to us for good and useful purposes, if anyone should pervert it for murdering the innocent, one would not therefore blame the maker of the metal because man had used it to injure others, when He had provided for good and useful purposes of living happily.”

John Chrysostom picked up³⁸ on the commands of John the Baptist, who told tax collectors and soldiers to drop covetousness and to be content with their wages. Going beyond this to voluntary poverty (like monastics) has been done even by heathen philosophers; why not by Christians to avoid covetousness? Covetousness reduces men to acting like wild beasts.

³⁶ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 1-4.

³⁷ That is, Cain was angry with his brother Abel because God had accepted Abel’s offering and rejected his.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, XXI, 6.

“Let us lay aside our excessive covetousness, let us endure moderation, and let us learn to acquire by honest labor all that we are to have. John the Baptist, when speaking with tax collectors and soldiers, commanded them ‘to be content with their wages’ (Luke 3:12-14). Anxious though he was to lead them on to another, and a higher self-command, yet since they were still unfit for this, he spoke of lesser things. If he had mentioned what are higher than these, they would have failed to apply themselves to them, and would have fallen from the others.”

“For this same reason we are asking you to perform inferior duties. As yet, the burden of voluntary poverty is too great for you, and heaven is closer to the earth, than such self-denial is from you. Let us then lay hold, if it be only of the lowest commandments, for even this is no small encouragement. Some amongst the heathen have achieved even this voluntary poverty³⁹, though not in a proper spirit, and have stripped themselves of all their possessions. However, we are content in your case, if alms are given abundantly by you; for we shall soon arrive at those other duties too, if we advance in this way.”

“But if we do not so much as this, of what favor shall we be worthy, who are bidden to surpass those under the old Law, and yet show ourselves inferior to the philosophers among the heathen? What shall we say, when we ought to be angels and sons of God, but do not even quite maintain being men? To rob and to covet comes not of the gentleness of men, but of the fierceness of wild beasts; actually worse than wild beasts are the assailers of their neighbor’s goods. To wild beasts this comes by nature; but we who are honored with reason, and yet are falling away unto that unnatural vileness, what forgiveness shall we receive?”

Judas was a Prime Example of Covetousness

When Jesus called Judas, Judas gave up his worldly possessions like the other Apostles (Matthew 19:21-29). However, this began to grate on Judas, and he began to steal the money from that which was collected for the poor (John 12:6). When Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with a very costly ointment a few days before the Crucifixion, Judas objected as to why this was done and not sold to give to the poor. Judas didn’t care about the poor; he just wanted to take the money for himself (John 12:5-8). Because his covetousness blinded Judas so much, he sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Judas may have expected Jesus to just walk away through the midst of the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane as Judas had seen Jesus walk away through the midst on other occasions (Luke 4:30, John 8:59). Thus Judas probably expected that no one would get hurt, and he would have a profit of the thirty pieces of silver.

John Chrysostom noted⁴⁰ how covetousness had blinded Judas without Judas’ knowledge such that Judas acted senselessly and recklessly as if demon-possessed. Nothing Jesus could do or say could move, shame or turn Judas from the course he plotted.

“Where did Judas’ blindness lead him? Such is covetousness; it renders men fools, senseless, and reckless, dogs instead of men; or rather even more fierce than dogs, and demons after being dogs. Judas received to himself the demon while he was plotting against Jesus (Luke 22:3, John 13:2), but Jesus, even when

³⁹ Such as Epicurus and Diogenes of Sinope

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXI, 3.

doing Judas good, Judas betrayed, having already become a demon in will. The insatiable desire for profit makes men out of their mind, frenzy-smitten, altogether given up to profit, as was the case with Judas.”

“The salvation of the world was being brought about (at the Last Supper), the mysteries were being delivered, and the subject of sorrow was being done away with by His death. So welcome was the cross to Jesus. But nothing softened Judas, the savage monster, nothing moved him, nothing shamed him. Jesus pronounced him wretched, ‘Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!’ (Mark 14:21). Jesus alarmed him again, saying, ‘It would have been good for that man if he had not been born’ (Matthew 26:24). Jesus then put him to shame, saying, ‘He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me’ (Matthew 26:23). But none of these things checked him; he was seized by covetousness, as by some madness, or rather by a more grievous disease.”

Chrysostom further addressed⁴¹ Judas’ covetousness and why it drove him to betray Jesus. He had been with Jesus daily for over 3 years watching Jesus perform countless miracles, and had even done miracles himself. Yet this didn’t sink in. Jesus knew that Judas was incorrigible, yet He didn’t cease to try to soften him. Every day Judas was instructed not to desire the things of this world, but yet he still went out of his way to sell the Priceless One for 30 pieces of silver. This is a terrible monster to have! Judas became this way because Christ does not force us to comply; Judas’ covetousness just ate him up! There are other examples in the Scriptures also, such as Gehazi and Ananias. If we become lax, these same desires can overtake us also.

“Judas went to the Jewish leaders of his own accord and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Jesus to you? And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Jesus’ (Matthew 26:15-16). Judas was afraid of the multitude, and desired to seize Jesus alone. What madness! Covetousness really blinded him! Judas had often seen Jesus escape through the midst of His would-be captors, and avoid being seized (Luke 4:30, John 8:59). Jesus gave many demonstrations of His Godhead and power, while the Jewish leaders tried to seize Him (Luke 20:20, Matthew 22:15); why wasn’t Judas listening to His awesome words, to put an end to his evil thought? Not even at the Last Supper did Jesus cease caring for Judas, but up to the last day He spoke to him of these things (John 13:26). This didn’t profit Judas at all. Yet the Lord did not cease to do His part.”

“Knowing this, then, let us also not cease doing all things for those that sin, warning, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, advising, though we don’t profit from it. Christ certainly foreknew that the traitor was incorrigible, yet nevertheless He ceased not to supply what could be done by Himself, as well admonishing, threatening and mourning over him; not plainly or openly, but in a concealed way. At the time of the betrayal, Jesus even allowed Judas to kiss Him, but this did not benefit Judas at all. So great an evil is covetousness; it made Judas both a traitor, and a sacrilegious robber.”

“Listen all you covetous; you that have the disease of Judas; listen and beware of the calamity. Judas was with Christ for three years, performed miracles himself, and had the benefit of so much instruction; but because he was not freed

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 3.

from the disease, he sunk into such a gulf. How much more shall you, who do not so much as listen to the Scripture, who are constantly riveted to the things present, become an easy prey to this calamity, unless you have the advantage of constant care. Every day Judas with Christ, who had nowhere to lay His head; every day was he instructed by deeds and by words, not to have gold, silver, or two coats. Yet Judas did not acquire self-restraint; and how do you expect to escape the disease, if you don't have the benefit of earnest attention, and do not use much diligence? Terrible is this monster, yet nevertheless, if you are willing, you will easily get the better of him. This desire is not natural; and this is clear from those that are free from it. Natural things are common to everyone; but this desire has its origin from laxity alone. It takes its birth from this and it derives its increase from this also. When it has seized those who look greedily after it, it makes them live contrary to nature. Notice the way they treat their fellow countrymen, their friends, their brethren, in a word all men, and with these even themselves; this is to live contrary to nature. From this it is evident that the disease of covetousness, wherein Judas was entangled, caused Judas to become a traitor. How did he become such a one, you may say, having been called by Christ? Because God's call is not compulsory, neither does it force the will of those who don't want to choose virtue. It admonishes, advises, and manages all things, so as to persuade men to become good; but if some don't want it, it does not compel. If you want to learn why Judas became such as he was, you will find him to have been ruined by covetousness."

"How was he taken by this calamity? Because he grew lax! From this arises such changes that arise from diligence. How many for instance that were violent, are now gentler than lambs? How many adulterous persons have become afterwards celibate? How many, formerly covetous, have now given away even their own possessions? Gehazi also lived with a holy man, and he too became depraved from the same disease (2 Kings 5:19-27). This calamity is the most grievous of all. From this come tomb-robbers, murderers, wars and fighting, and whatever evil you may mention. In every respect is such a one useless, whether he needs to lead an army or guide a people. If he is to marry a wife, he will not take the virtuous woman, but the vilest of all; if he has to buy a house, he will not buy that which suits a free man, but that which can bring much rent."

"Should he be a king, he is the most wretched of all men, a pest to the world, and the poorest of all men. He will feel like the common man, who doesn't have many possessions, but he will try to acquire all men's goods, thinking himself to have less than any. His desire for acquisition will know no bounds. Therefore also one said, 'Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. Why is earth and ashes proud? There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one sets even his own soul for sale'" (Ecclesiasticus 10:9-10 Vul).

Chrysostom added⁴² that the demons can't approach us unless God permits them; He does this at times to chasten us and make us more approved – like He did with Job. Similarly, Satan didn't attack Judas severely until Jesus cut him off from the Twelve at the Last Supper. We gain a lot from knowing what happened with Judas; we need to know how the love of money can

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, VI, vv. 5-8.

have really negative effects. In retrospect, we can see how Judas acted like a crazy man just for the love of money. Even though Jesus knew about Judas' intent well before he made his offer to the Jewish leaders (John 6:64), Jesus still treated Judas like an Apostle. Judas, by contrast, acted like a total ingrate, as if he were made of stone. And Judas was not paid much for his betrayal, considering that this was such a huge crime against so great a benefactor. A covetous heart will never see the face of Christ.

“The demons will not approach us, unless God permit them; for if the demons dared not to enter into the herd of swine, except by God's permission (Mark 5:12-13), how much less into men's souls. God does permit them sometimes, either chastening or punishing us, or making us more approved, as in the case of Job. Notice that Satan didn't come to Job; he didn't dare to be near him, he only worked on Job's possessions and his health! When Satan leaped on Judas, he dared not when Judas was a member of the Twelve. He attacked him from outside, but he dared not enter in; but when he saw him cut off from that holy flock, he leaped upon him with more than wolfish vehemence, and didn't leave him till he had slain him with a double death.”

“These things are written for our admonition. What gain have we from knowing that one of the Twelve was a traitor? What profit? What advantage? Much! When we know how he arrived at this deadly counsel, we are on our guard that we too might not suffer the same thing. How did Judas come to this? From the love of money! He was a thief (John 12:6). So drunken was he with the passion that he betrayed the Lord of the world for thirty pieces of silver. What can be worse than this madness? Him to whom nothing is equivalent, nothing is equal, “before whom the nations are as nothing” (Isaiah 40:15), Him Judas betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. A man is not so beside himself through drunkenness as through love of money; not so much from madness and insanity as from love of money.”

“For tell me, Judas, why did you betray Him? He called you, when you were a man unmarked and unknown. He made you one of the Twelve; He gave you a share in His teaching; He promised you ten thousand good things; He caused you to work wonders. You were sharer of the same table, the same journeys, the same company, the same discussions, as the rest. Were these things not sufficient to restrain you? For what reason did you betray Him? What had you to charge Him with, O wicked one? Rather, what good did you not receive at His hands? He knew your mind, and ceased not to do His part. He often said, ‘One of you shall betray Me’ (Matthew 26:21, John 6:64). He often pointed you out, and yet spared you; and though He knew you would betray Him, yet He didn't cast you out of the band. He still bore with you; He still honored you, and loved you, as a true disciple, and as one of the Twelve. Last of all (oh, for your vileness!), He took a towel, and with His own unsullied hands He washed your polluted feet, and even this did not restrain you. You stole the things for the poor, and that you might not go on to greater sin, He bore this too. Nothing persuaded you! If you had been a beast, or a stone, wouldn't you have been changed by these kindnesses towards you, by these wonders, by these teachings? Though you were beastly, yet still He called you, and by wondrous works He drew you; you were more senseless than a stone to Him. Yet for none of these things did you become better.”

“We wonder at such folly of the traitor; let us dread therefore that which wounded Judas. He became such from avarice, from the love of money. Cut out this passion, for to these diseases it gives birth; it makes us impious, and causes us to be ignorant of God, though we have received ten thousand benefits at His hands. Cut it out, I beg you; it is no common disease; it knows how to give birth to a thousand destructive deaths. We have seen Judas’ tragedy. Let us fear lest we too fall into the same snares. For this is it written, that we too should not suffer the same things. All four Evangelists related the account of Judas, that they might restrain us. Flee far from it! Covetousness consists not alone in the love of much money, but in loving money at all. It is grievous avarice to desire more than we need. Was it hundreds of pounds of gold that persuaded the traitor? For thirty pieces of silver he betrayed his Lord. Covetousness is not shown in receiving much, but rather in receiving little things. Notice how great a crime Judas committed for a little gold; rather not for gold, but for pieces of silver.”

“It cannot, it cannot be that an avaricious man will ever see the face of Christ! This is one of the things which are impossible. It is a root of all kinds of evils, and if he that possesses one evil thing, falls from that glory, where shall he stand who carries with him the root of evil? He who is the servant of money cannot be a true servant of Christ. Christ Himself has declared that this is impossible. He says, ‘You cannot serve God and Mammon’, and, ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24), for they lay on us contrary orders.”

John Cassian noted⁴³ that Judas’ name was written in the Book of Life at one time after he had been chosen by Christ as an Apostle. But because he was corrupted by the plague of covetousness, his name was blotted out from the Book of Life⁴⁴.

“David, when complaining in prophetic spirit of Judas and the Lord’s persecutors, said, ‘Let them be blotted out of the book of the living’. Because they did not deserve to come to saving penitence because of the guilt of their great sin, he adds, ‘And let them not be written among the righteous’ (Psalm 68:29). Finally in the case of Judas himself the meaning of the prophetic curse was clearly fulfilled, for when his deadly sin was completed, he killed himself by hanging, that he might not after his name was blotted out be converted, repent and deserve to be once more written among the righteous in heaven. We must therefore not doubt that at the time when he was chosen by Christ and obtained a place in the Apostolate, the name of Judas was written in the book of the living. He heard as well as the rest the words, ‘Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven’ (Luke 10:20). But because he was corrupted by the plague of covetousness and had his name struck out from that heavenly list, it is suitably said of him and of men like him by the prophet, ‘O Lord, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You shall be ashamed. Those who depart from Me Shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters’ (Jeremiah 17:13). And elsewhere, ‘they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the

⁴³ John Cassian, *Second Conference of Abbot Joseph*, III, xvii, 25.

⁴⁴ There are different names for the “Book of Life” throughout the Scriptures. Some other terms used here are: “The book of the living”, “Written among the righteous”, “Written in heaven”, “Written in the writing of the house of Israel”.

record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 13:9).

John Chrysostom noted⁴⁵ that Judas had the same opportunity that Paul did, except that Judas got to spend a long time with Christ. Jesus knew Judas was a thief, so He entrusted Judas with the money for the poor so that Judas’ greed might be softened; but this didn’t help Judas.

“Judas also was one of the Twelve, and he too was called of Christ; but neither his being of the Twelve nor his call profited him, because he had not a mind disposed to virtue. Paul, although struggling with hunger, and at a loss to obtain necessary food, and daily undergoing such great sufferings, pursued with great zeal the road which leads to heaven. On the other hand Judas had been called before Paul, enjoyed the same advantages as Paul did, was initiated in the highest form of Christian life, and partook of the holy table and that most awesome of sacred feasts. He received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and often heard discourses concerning poverty. He spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself, and was entrusted with the money of the poor, so that his passion might be soothed thereby (for he was a thief). Even then he did not become any better, although he had been favored with such great condescension. Since Christ knew that he was covetous, and destined to perish on account of his love of money, he not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time, but with a view to softening down his passion he entrusted Judas with the money of the poor. In order that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin, checking the greater evil beforehand by a lesser one.”

John Cassian stated⁴⁶ that some people, like the Apostle Paul and Abbot Moses, came to know the Lord against their will, but their life afterwards was a model to others. Others like Judas had a great beginning to their service to God, but they fell into sloth and hardness of heart, and they were lost to the company of believers.

“Men are called to the Lord’s service in different ways. Sometimes those who would seem to be the enemies of God are called against their will, yet they become the foremost servants of God, having been made perfect and most earnest in spirit by the most laudable fervor of spirit. Others have started well but have grown cold, and often have come to a miserable end. It was no hindrance to the former enemies of God that they seemed to be converted not of their own free will, but by force and compulsion, in as much as the loving kindness of the Lord secured for them the opportunity for repentance. So to those who start well, it was ineffective that the early days of their conversion were so bright, because they were not careful to bring the remainder of their life to a suitable end. In the case of Abbot Moses⁴⁷, who lived in a spot in the wilderness called Calamus, nothing was lacking to his merits and perfect bliss, in consequence of the fact that he was driven to flee to the monastery through fear of death, which was hanging

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, 11.

⁴⁶ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Paphnutius, I, iii, 5.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom is referring to Venerable Moses the Black of Skete, who lived in the 4th century. This Moses was a robber and murderer at one time, but came to profound repentance. By the end of his life, Abbot Moses was a miracle-worker. For more details, see <http://oca.org/FSlives.asp August 28>

over him because of a murder. He made such use of his compulsory conversion that with ready zeal he turned it into a voluntary one and climbed the topmost heights of perfection. On the other hand, to very many, it has been ineffective that they entered the Lord's service with better beginning than this; afterwards sloth and hardness of heart crept over them, and they fell into a dangerous state of listlessness, and the bottomless pit of death. We see an instance of this clearly indicated in the call of the Apostles. For of what good was it to Judas that he had of his own free will embraced the highest grade of the Apostolate in the same way in which Peter and the rest of the Apostles had been summoned? He allowed the splendid beginning of his call to terminate in a ruinous end of covetousness, and as a cruel murderer even rushed into the betrayal of the Lord! Conversely of what hindrance was it to Paul that he was suddenly blinded, and seemed to be drawn against his will into the way of salvation? Afterwards he followed the Lord with complete fervor of soul; having begun by compulsion, he completed it by a free and voluntary devotion, and terminated with a magnificent end a life that was rendered glorious by such great deeds! Everything therefore depends upon the end; in which one who was consecrated by a noble conversion at the outset may through carelessness turn out a failure. And one who was compelled by necessity to adopt the monastic life may through fear of God and earnestness be made perfect."

John Chrysostom pointed out⁴⁸ that Judas worked miracles, raised the dead and cleansed lepers along with the rest of the Twelve. However, this did not help him because of his covetousness, and this only increased his punishment. When we neglect the poor man – which is Christ – or partake of the Mysteries unworthily, we do the same thing

"When Judas was numbered among the Twelve, he enjoyed so great a gift and worked miracles, for he too was with the others who were sent to raise the dead and to heal lepers (Matthew 10:8). When he was seized by the dreadful disease of covetousness and betrayed his Master, neither the favors, the gifts, the being with Christ, the attendance with Him, the washing the feet, the sharing His table, nor carrying the money box (John 12:6, 13:29) helped Judas. If these things rather served to increase his punishment, let us also fear lest we through covetousness imitate Judas. We may not betray Christ; but when we neglect the poor man wasting with hunger, or perishing with cold, that man draws upon us the same condemnation. When we partake of the Mysteries unworthily, we perish equally with the Christ-slayers. When we plunder, when we oppress those weaker than ourselves, we shall draw down upon us the severest punishment. And with reason; for how long shall the love of things present so occupy us, superfluous as they are and unprofitable? Wealth consists in things that are superfluous, which give us no advantage. How long shall we be nailed to vanities? How long shall we move away from heaven, be satiated with these fleeting things of earth, rather than learn by experience their worthlessness? Let us consider those who before us have been wealthy. Where is their wealth now? It has gone, and has perished. But the sins they committed by reason of obtaining the wealth stay with them, along with the punishment which is penalty of the sins. Consider the enormity of the fact that we feed pet dogs, bears, and different beasts in zoos, while we don't

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XLVII, 5.

care for a man perishing with hunger! Creatures alien to us are more valued than our kin, and our own family is honored less than creatures which are not related to us.”

Chrysostom further noted⁴⁹ how the tyranny of covetousness affected the Jewish leaders. When Judas confessed his sin and returned the thirty pieces of silver, they blamed Judas for the whole act. Intoxicated by their passion, they veiled themselves in pretended ignorance when they could have released Christ. They chose the murderer and insurrectionist Barabbas to be released instead of Christ (Matthew 27:16-26).

“The chief priests were troubled when Judas returned to confess his sin in betraying Jesus; that they knew Judas’ act was a transgression of the Law is clear, from their saying, ‘What is that to us? You see to it!’” (Matthew 27:4).

“Listen, the covetous, consider what happened to Judas; how he at the same time lost the money, committed the sin, and destroyed his own soul. Such is the tyranny of covetousness. He didn’t enjoy the money, nor the present life, nor that to come, but lost all at once, and having gotten a bad character even with those men, so hanged himself.”

“After the act, then some see clearly. Notice these men for a time not willing to have a clear perception of the fact, but saying, ‘You see to it!’, which thing of itself is a most heavy charge against them. This is the language of men bearing witness to their daring and their transgression, intoxicated by their passion, and not willing to abstain from their satanic attempts, but senselessly wrapping themselves up in a veil of pretended ignorance.”

“If indeed these things had been said after the crucifixion, and His being slain, even then the saying would have had no reasonable meaning; nevertheless it would not have condemned them so much. But now having Him yet in their hands, and having power to release Him, how could they be able to say these things? This defense would be a most heavy accusation against them. While throwing the whole blame upon the traitor, being able to have set themselves free from this murder of Christ, they left the traitor to fend for himself, and even pressed the crime further, adding the cross to the betrayal. What hindered them, when they said to him, ‘You see to it!’, themselves to abstain from the criminal act? But now they even do the contrary, adding to it the murder and in everything, both by what they do, and by what they say, entangling themselves in inevitable evil. After these things, when Pilate left it to them, they chose the robber to be released rather than Jesus; but Him that had done no wrong, but had even conferred on them so many benefits, they murdered.”

Covetousness is Cruelty to Ourselves

Covetousness amounts to ignoring what is really best for us, and cruelly hurting ourselves with actions that do us a lot of harm. From the Scriptures, there is the slave who owed his master 10,000 talents; his covetousness over 100 denarii cost him everything. There is also Achan at Jericho and Ananias & Sapphira. But we don’t have to succumb to this; we can avoid it and stop it from hurting us. All kinds of evils spring from covetousness and these evils end up affecting us. Covetousness is like drunkenness except worse; both have a strong desire: one for money,

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 2.

the other for alcohol. For the covetous, his lust for money ruins his soul; for the drunkard, his lust ruins his body (e.g. liver disease).

Jesus gave a parable about a slave who owed his master 10,000 talents⁵⁰. This slave showed his extreme covetousness in that he was forgiven an impossible debt, yet he refused to forgive a fellow-slave a small debt. Jesus' words were:

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The slave therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all’. Then the master of that slave was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow slave fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all’. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow slave, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:23-35).

John Chrysostom stated⁵¹ that the slave who owed the impossible debt was good and acceptable up to the point where his covetousness⁵² showed its head. The extreme contrast is the master's benevolence and the slave's cruelty. What is striking about this account is that by taking his fellow slave by the throat, the slave was doing this cruelty to himself. The words his fellow slave used were the same words he had used to his master. When the first slave owed his master 375 Tons of silver, his master did not call him “wicked”, this applied only after covetousness took over and he refused to learn by example. Whenever we are merciless, cruel and covetousness, we are doing this to ourselves and not to another.

“Up to the point when the slave had confessed his sins and asked for forgiveness, this slave was good and acceptable; he confessed, promised to pay the debt, fell down before him, entreated, condemned his own sins, and knew the greatness of the debt. But the sequel is unworthy of his former deeds. Going out immediately, not after a long time but immediately, having the benefit fresh upon him, he abused the gift in wickedness, even the freedom bestowed on him by his master. That slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a

⁵⁰ A talent was a measure of weight in silver. 10,000 talents were equal to about 375 Tons of silver.

⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXI, 4.

⁵² One might ask how it was possible for a slave to amass a debt of 375 Tons of silver. He had to have been a trusted slave who had a long history of covetousness using his master's wealth.

hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

"Notice the master's benevolence; notice the slave's cruelty! The second slave said, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all'. But the first slave did not regard even the words by which he had been saved⁵³. He did not recognize so much as the harbor by which he escaped shipwreck; the gesture of supplication did not remind him of his master's kindness, but he put away from him all these things, from covetousness, cruelty and revenge, and was more fierce than any wild beast, seizing his fellow-slave by the throat."

"What are you doing man? Don't you notice that you are making the demand on yourself; you are thrusting the sword into yourself, and revoking the sentence and the gift? None of these things did he consider, neither did he remember his own state, neither did he yield; although the entreaty was not for equal objects."

"The first slave asked regarding ten thousand talents, the other asked regarding a hundred denarii⁵⁴. The first slave received entire forgiveness; the other asked for delay, and not so much as this did he give him, for 'he cast him into prison'".

"But when his fellow-slaves saw it, they accused him to their Lord. Not even to men is this well-pleasing, much less to God. They therefore who did not owe, participated in the grief."

"What did their Lord say? 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow slave, just as I had pity on you?'"

"Notice again the Lord's gentleness. It was not he that revoked the gift, but the one who had received it rejected the gift. Even if this seems hard to us; yet we should look at the gain, what has been, what is to be. Even if the master's injunction is galling to us, we ought to consider the reward. It's not that the Master has grieved us, but that we have provoked God, whom by mere prayer we have been reconciled. But even if this is a galling thing to us to become friends with him who has grieved us, to fall into hell is far more grievous. If we had compared this against that, then we would have known that to forgive is a much lighter thing."

"Whereas, when the first slave owed ten thousand talents, the master didn't call him wicked, neither reproached him, but showed mercy on him; when he had become harsh to his fellow-slave, then the master said, 'You wicked slave!'"

"Let us listen, the covetous, for even to us is the word spoken. Let us listen also, the merciless and the cruel, for not to others are we cruel, but to ourselves. When we consider being revengeful, consider that against ourselves are we revengeful, not against another; we are binding up our own sins, not our neighbors. Whatever we may do to a man, we do as a man and in the present life; but God not so, but more mightily will He take vengeance on us, and with the vengeance hereafter."

⁵³ The first servant himself on saying these same words was delivered from the ten thousand talents.

⁵⁴ A denarius was equal to a day's wage for a laborer (), and 84 denarii were minted from 1 pound of silver.

Chrysostom also pointed out⁵⁵ that if there were no demons, there would still be a lot of covetousness. Many roads lead the lovers of money to hell; monastics have generally avoided this. Refusing to avoid covetousness is like having someone flinging filth from an upper story, yet standing below and receiving it all on our heads and not moving to avoid it. The demons fling the filth of covetousness at us, and we are stupid not to try to avoid it. Monastics have generally succeeded in avoided covetousness; we ourselves are totally to blame if we don't.

“Christ said, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me’ (Mark 10:21). When we give up our riches, we are not yet in a safe position, but still need more help. Much more, if we retain our riches, we shall we fail to achieve great things; and we will become a laughing-stock to the spectators, the demons. Even if there were no demons, though there were none to wrestle with us, yet ten thousand roads on all sides lead the lover of money to hell. Notice here the demons have no hand in the work; we do it all ourselves. Monastics might have a right to speak this way, who after they had given proof of their temperance, their contempt of wealth and disregard of all such things, have infinitely preferred to abandon father, houses, lands, wife, and children (Matthew 19:29). Yet they are the last to speak so; only people who have never done this speak this way. The monastics are indeed wrestling with the demons; these the demons do not think worth entering into. One might say, ‘But it is the demons that instill this same covetousness. Well, flee from it; don’t harbor it!’”

“Suppose you saw someone flinging out filth from some upper story, and at the same time you saw a person seeing it thrown out, yet standing there and receiving it all on his head. You not only do not pity him, but you are angry, and tell him it serves him right! Everyone calls out to him, ‘Do not be a fool’, and lays the blame not so much on the other for throwing out the filth, as on him for letting it come on him. But now, you know that covetousness is of the demons; you know that it is the cause of ten thousand evils; you see him flinging out his noisy imaginations, like filth. Don’t you see that you are receiving on your bare head his nastiness, when you could just turn aside a little to escape it altogether? Just as our man by shifting his position would have escaped; so we may refuse to admit such imaginations in order to ward off the lust. How are we to avoid coveting riches? Tell me, if gold and precious stones were set before you, and I were to say, ‘Desire lead’, would we hesitate? For we would say, ‘How can I?’ But if I said, ‘Do not desire lead; this would be easier to understand. I do not marvel at those who despise riches, but at those who don’t despise riches. This is the character of a soul exceedingly full of stupidity, no better than flies and gnats, a soul crawling on the earth, wallowing in filth, destitute of all good ideas. Are you destined to inherit eternal life? And do you say, ‘how shall I despise the present life for the future?’ Can these things even be compared? You are to receive a royal vest; and you say, ‘How shall I despise these rags?’ You are going to be led into the king’s palace; and do you say, ‘How shall I despise this present hovel?’ We ourselves are to blame on every point; we who do not choose to let ourselves be stirred up ever so little. The willing have succeeded, and that with

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, VII, v. 47.

great zeal and facility⁵⁶. Would that we might be persuaded by this exhortation, and succeed too, and become imitators of those who have been successful.”

Chrysostom went on to compare⁵⁷ the sin of covetousness of Ananias and Sapphira with the good deed of Barnabas. Barnabas sold land and gave the entire proceeds to the Apostles; Ananias sold land but lied and said he was giving the entire proceeds. Ananias was under no compulsion to do this, and he would have been fine if he had not lied. Chrysostom calls this sacrilege and compared it to the man carrying sticks, to Achan at Jericho and to Judas. Sapphira was just as guilty as Ananias; but Peter pleaded for himself because he was called to be very stern. The problem is that Ananias and Sapphira were both very hardened in this act; Peter had to address the fact that many evils grow out of the sacrilege: covetousness, contempt of God, and impiety.

“There was so great a multitude all doing the same, so great grace, so great miracles; Ananias, taught by none of these, but blinded by covetousness, brought destruction upon his own head.”

“How did it come into the mind of this Ananias to commit this crime? Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?’ (Acts 5:3). Notice even in this, a great miracle was performed. ‘While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?’ (Acts 5:4). That is, ‘Was there any obligation and force? Do we constrain you against your will?’ ‘Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last’ (Acts 5:4-5). This miracle is greater than that of the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), regarding the death inflicted, and the knowing what was in the thoughts of the heart, even what was done in secret.

“If for gathering sticks a man is to be stoned (Numbers 15:32-36), much rather ought he for sacrilege; for this money had become sacred. He that has chosen to sell his goods and distribute them, and then withdraws them, is guilty of sacrilege. But if he is sacrilegious, who takes from his own, much more he who takes from what is not his own. Do not think that because the consequence is now not the same, the crime will go unpunished. Do you see that this is the charge brought against Ananias, that having made the money sacred, he afterwards hid it? Could you not, said Peter, after selling your land, use the proceeds as your own? Were you forbidden? Why after you had promised it? See how at the very beginning, the demons made their attack; in the midst of such signs and wonders, how Ananias was hardened! Something of the same kind had happened in the days of Joshua (Joshua 7). Achan coveted the devoted thing: for observe there also what vengeance accompanies the sin. Sacrilege is a most grievous crime, insulting, and full of contempt. We neither obliged you to sell nor to give your money when you had sold; of your own free choice you did it; why have you then stolen from the sacred treasury? ‘Why has Satan filled your heart?’” (Acts 5:3)

“Peter proves him guilty, and shows that the deed was not hidden from him, and then pronounces the sentence. Why have you done this? Did you wish to keep it? You ought to have kept it all along, and never to have claimed to give

⁵⁶ That is, in monasteries.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XII, vv. 4:36-5:10.

it. The sacrilege is a grievous one. Another may have coveted what was not his own; but it was at your discretion to keep what was your own. Why then did you first make it sacred, and then take it back? Out of excessive contempt have you done this. The deed does not admit of pardon, it is past pleading for. Therefore let it not be a stumbling-block to any, if at present there are also sacrilegious people. If there were such persons then, there are many more now, when evils are many. But let us 'rebuke those who are sinning in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear' (1 Timothy 5:20). Judas was sacrilegious, but it was not a stumbling-block to the disciples. Do you see how many evils spring from love of money?"

"Luke relates with wonder even, when he says, 'Not knowing what had happened, Sapphira came in. And Peter answered her' (Acts 5:8-9). She might have perceived even from this that Peter knew the secret. Why, having questioned nobody else, does he question you? Was it not clear that he asked because he knew? But so great was her hardness, it would not let her attempt to evade the guilt; and with great confidence she replied; for she thought she was speaking only to a man. The aggravation of the sin was that they committed it as with one soul, just as upon a settled agreement between them. 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out' (Acts 5:9). First he makes her learn the sin, and then shows that she will justly suffer the same punishment with her husband, since she has committed the same wickedness. 'Then immediately she fell down at his feet', for she was standing near him, 'and breathed her last' (Acts 5:10). So entirely by their own act had they invited vengeance upon themselves!"

"Peter all but pleads for himself, when at the point of inflicting the punishment, and at the same time gives a lesson to the rest. Because the act would seem exceeding stern, therefore it is that he does so much in the case. With respect to the woman also the process of judgment was terrible. But notice how many evils grow out of the sacrilege: covetousness, contempt of God, impiety. About these too Peter pleaded for himself before the assembly, in that he did not immediately proceed to punishment, but first exposed the sin. None groaned, none lamented, all were terrified. As their faith increased, the signs were multiplied, and great was the fear among their own company. For the things which are from outside do not so threaten our peace, as do the acts of our own people."

Chrysostom took the time⁵⁸ to detail how covetousness hates us and is the enemy of mankind. Murders, lawsuits and all kinds of evil result from covetousness. Even convicted prisoners who work all day in the mines are better off. The miners may be there involuntarily, but the covetous work their trade voluntarily like swine in the mud. Avarice is a worse jailer than the director of the mines, since he also chains the souls of the covetous. The darkness of the covetous is worse than in the mine since the eye of their soul has been put out. At least for the miners, they can take a break at the end of the day; the covetous don't get any breaks. It is impossible to love both money and our souls! Nothing is so apt to cause war as avarice; nothing is so apt to produce beggary, whether it shows itself in wealth or in poverty. Let us flee

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIII, 8.

covetousness, the maker of beggars, the destroyer of souls, the friend of hell, the enemy of the kingdom of heaven, the mother of all evils together.

“Let me show you how covetousness hates you, how many swords she sharpens against you, how many pits she digs for you, how many nooses she ties for you, how many precipices she prepares for you; you may come to see that she is not so charming. Where do we find this knowledge? From the highways, from the wars, from the sea, from the courts of justice! Covetousness has both filled the sea with blood; the swords of the judges she often reddens contrary to law. She arms those who on the highway lie in wait day and night, and persuades men to forget nature, and makes parricides and matricides; she introduces all sorts of evils into man’s life. Which is the reason why Paul entitles her ‘a root of all *kinds of evil*’ (1 Timothy 6:10). She doesn’t allow her lovers to be in any better condition than those who work in the mines. The miners, perpetually shut up in darkness and in chains, labor unprofitably; so also these buried in the caves of avarice. No one uses any force with them; they voluntarily draw on their punishment, binding on themselves fetters that cannot be broken. Those condemned to the mines, at least when evening comes on, are released from their labors; but the covetous both by day and night are digging in these wretched mines. To the miners there is a definite limit of that hard labor, but the covetous know no limit, but the more they dig so much the greater hardship do they desire. The miners may do it unwillingly, but the covetous do it of their own free will. This is the most grievous part of the disease that it is almost impossible for them to get rid of it, since they do not hate their wretchedness. But as a swine in the mud, so also do the covetous delight to wallow in the noisy mire of avarice, suffering worse things than those condemned to the mines.”

“The malefactor, condemned to labor in the mines, takes for that purpose an oil lamp and a pick, and carries with him a jar to drop oil into the lamp, because there is darkness even by day, without a ray of light. When the time of day calls him to his wretched evening meal, the miner is ignorant of the time, but his jailor from above striking violently on the cave, by that clattering sound declares to those who are at work below the end of the day. Do you not shudder when you hear all this? Let us see now whether there are things worse than these in the case of the covetous. The covetous, in the first place, have a more severe jailor; that is, avarice. Besides their body he chains also their soul. This darkness also is worse than that in the mine. For it is not subject to sense, but the covetous produce the darkness within, wherever they go, carrying it about with themselves. For the eye of their soul has been put out; this is the reason why Christ calls them wretched, saying, ‘But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!’ (Matthew 6:23). The miners have at least a lamp shining, but the covetous are deprived even of this beam of light; therefore every day they fall into countless pitfalls. Those condemned to the mines have a respite when night overtakes them, sailing into that calm port which is common to all the unfortunate, I mean the night. But against the covetous even this harbor is blocked up by their own avarice.”

“For it is impossible at the same time to love both money and your soul. Let us be convinced that wealth is dust and ashes, that it leaves us when we

depart, or rather that even before our departure it often darts away from us, and injures us both in regard to the future and in respect of the present life. For before hell fire, even here it surrounds us with innumerable wars, and stirs up strife and contests. Nothing is so apt to cause war as avarice; nothing is so apt to produce beggary, whether it shows itself in wealth or in poverty. In the souls of poor men this grievous disease also arises, and aggravates their poverty the more. If there is found a poor covetous man, such a one suffers not punishment in money, but in hunger. For he doesn't allow himself to enjoy his moderate means with comfort, but both racks his belly with hunger and punishes his whole body with nakedness and cold, and everywhere appears more squalid and filthy than any prisoners. He is always wailing and lamenting as though he were more wretched than everyone, though there were ten thousand poorer than he."

"All these things not the poor man only, but the rich also, will suffer, who falls into this disease, and so much more than the poor, inasmuch as the tyranny presses more vehemently on him, and the intoxication is greater. The rich man he will account himself poorer than everyone; or rather, he is poorer. For riches and poverty are determined not by the measure of the substance, but by the disposition of the mind. He is the poorest of all, who is always hungering after more and is never able to stay this wicked lust."

"On all these accounts then let us flee covetousness, the maker of beggars, the destroyer of souls, the friend of hell, the enemy of the kingdom of heaven, the mother of all evils together. Let us despise wealth that we may enjoy wealth, and with wealth may enjoy also the good things laid up for us; unto which may we all attain."

Chrysostom went on to compare⁵⁹ drunkenness with covetousness, and the similarities are many, but covetousness is worse. Drunkards are pitied and laughed at by everyone, but they are not aware of this because they are blinded to their own condition. During the day, after the hangover wears off, the drunkard may be aware that people are laughing at him. Covetousness is an even worse intoxication where both the covetous man and the drunkard are alike possessed with an exorbitant desire. With a drunkard, the more he drinks, the more he longs for; he that is in love with money, the more he acquires, the more thirsty he is for more. For the covetous man as well as the drunkard has an ignorance of all, friend or foe. And like the drunkard, though his eyes are open, he is blind. It is not food that he vomits (like the drunkard), but words of abuse, and that draws upon his own head bolts of lightning without number from above. The drunkard may sober up after the night is over but the covetous man is always drunk day and night. The drunkard abuses his body, but the covetous man abuses body and soul. The covetous man suffers more than prisoners in chains or someone nailed to a lingering disease; part of this suffering is hating and being hated by everyone.

"One may look on drunkenness as much the same as if one were to permit a woman, beautiful, chaste, free-born, of good family to be trampled on, and every way insulted by a serving woman, that was savage, disgustful, and impure; drunkenness is something of this sort. Who, being in his senses, would not choose to die a thousand deaths, rather than live a single day in this way? For even if at daylight he were to get up, and seem to be sober from that reveling of his, even then it is not the clear brightness of temperance which he enjoys, since

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIII, v. 11.

the hangover from the storm of drunkenness still is hanging before his eyes. Even if we were to grant him the clearness of sobriety, how would he be better? This soberness would be of no use to him, except to let him see his accusers. When he is in the midst of his drunkenness, he doesn't perceive those that laugh at him. But when it is day he loses this comfort even; while his servants are murmuring, his wife is ashamed, his friends accuse him, and his enemies make fun of him, and he knows it too. What can be more miserable than a life like this, to be laughed at all day by everybody; and when it is evening to do the same drunken behavior all over again. But let me compare the covetous as an even a worse intoxication. If it's intoxication, then it must be a worse death by far than drunkenness, since the intoxication is worse. It is not as sad to be drunk with wine as with covetousness. For with drunkenness, the penalty ends with the sufferings, results in a slow death, and the drunkard's own ruin. But with covetousness the evil passes on to thousands of souls, and kindles wars of many kinds upon all sides. Come then, let us compare covetousness with drunkenness and see what are the points they have in common, and which is worse. What then have they in common, and in what are they like each other? It is in the very nature of the disease. Drunkenness is different, as it comes from wine and covetousness from money, but its way of affecting people is similar, both being alike possessed with an exorbitant desire. With a drunkard, the more glasses he has drunk, the more he longs for; and he that is in love with money, the more he acquires, the more he kindles the flame of desire, and the more thirsty he is for more. In this point then they resemble each other. But in another the covetous man has the advantage (in a bad sense). The drunkard's affection is a natural one. For the wine adds to one's natural dehydration, and so makes drunkards thirsty. But what is there to make the covetous man always keep desiring more? How is it that when he has increased in riches, then he feels like he is in the deepest poverty? This complaint is a perplexing one, and has more of paradox about it. But let us look at both of them after the drunkenness has worn off. Or rather, there is no such thing as ever seeing the covetous man after his drunkenness, so continual a state of intoxication is he in. Let us then view them both in the state of drunkenness, and let us get a distinct notion which is the most ridiculous, and compile a correct sketch of them. We shall see the man who dotes with his wine at evening with his eyes open, seeing no one, but moving about haphazardly, stumbling against such as are in his way, barfing, convulsing, and exposing his nakedness in an embarrassing manner⁶⁰. If his wife is there, or his daughter, or his maidservant, or anybody else, they will laugh at him heartily."

"Now let us bring forward the covetous man. Here what happens does not deserve laughter only, but even a curse, exceeding wrath and thunderbolts without number. First let us look at the ridiculous part, for this man as well as the drunkard has an ignorance of all, friend or foe. And like the drunkard, though his eyes are open, he is blind. As the drunkard takes all he sees for wine, so does the covetous man take all for money. His barfing is even more disgusting. It is not food that he vomits, but words of abuse, insolence, war, death, that draws upon his own head bolts of lightning without number from above. Just as the body of

⁶⁰ See Habakkuk 2:16.

the drunkard is dissolving⁶¹, so also is the covetous man's soul. Even his body is not free from disorders; it makes out even worse, care eating it away worse than wine does (as do anger too and lack of sleep), and by degrees exhausting it entirely. He that is seized with illness from wine, after the night is over may get sober. But the covetous man is always drunk day and night, watching or sleeping, so paying a more severe penalty for it than any prisoner or person at work in the mines. Isn't this a fate more wretched than any death? For death gives the body rest, and sets it free from ridicule, as well as disgrace and sins. But these drunken fits plunge it into all these, stopping up the ears, dulling the eyesight, keeping down the understanding in great darkness. For it will not bear the mention of anything but interest, interest upon interest, shameful gains, odious trafficking, ungentlemanly and slave-like transactions, barking like a dog at everybody, hating everybody, averse to everybody, at war with everybody, without any reason for it, rising up against the poor, grudging at the rich and civil to nobody. If he has a wife, children, or friends, if he can't use them all towards getting more profit, these are to him more his enemies than natural enemies. What can be worse than madness of this sort, and what can be more wretched?"

"If I were to tell you of those who pass their days in chains, or of one nailed to a lingering disease, or of one struggling with famine, or of any other thing whatever, I could point out no one who suffers so much as they do who love money. For what more severe evil can befall someone than being hated by all men, than hating all men, than not having kindly feeling towards any, than being never satisfied, than being in a continual thirst, than struggling with a perpetual hunger? He has pain day by day, is never sober and is continually in worries and harassment. All these things, and more than these, are what the covetous set their shoulder to. In the midst of their gaining, they have no perception of pleasure, though scraping to themselves from all men, because of their desiring more."

Chrysostom also pointed out⁶² that covetousness is like falling into a thorn bush. One will be wounded and pierced by the thorns of covetousness for doing so.

"What are the foolish and hurtful lusts that the covetous fall into (1 Timothy 6:9)? These are when men live unlawfully; when they desire what is their neighbor's; when they do their utmost in luxury; when they long for drunkenness; when they desire the murder and destruction of others. From these desires many have aimed at absolute power and perished. Surely to labor with such views is both foolish and hurtful. Well has Paul said, 'They have strayed from the faith in their greediness' (1 Timothy 6:10). Covetousness attracting their eyes to herself, and gradually stealing away their minds, doesn't allow them to see their way. Just as one walking on a straight road, with his mind intent on something else, proceeds on his way indeed, but, often without knowing it, passes by the city to which he was hastening, his feet plying on at random and to no purpose; covetousness is like that. 'They have pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (1 Timothy 6:10). What does he mean by the word 'pierced'? Desires are thorns, and when one touches thorns, he gores his hand, and gets wounds; so he that falls into these lusts will be wounded by them, and pierces his

⁶¹ That is, with liver disease, etc.

⁶² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XVII, v. 12.

soul with grief. What cares and troubles accompany those who are thus pierced, it is not possible to express. Therefore he says, 'Flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness' (1 Timothy 6:11); for meekness springs from love."

Chrysostom further pointed out⁶³ that the covetous are like those afflicted with dropsy, where they keep drinking water but remain thirsty. Like the rich man in the parable of Lazarus, they want that one drop of water but can't seem to get it.

"To show that this sort of thing is not pleasure but punishment, take another case, and so let us search it out. When we are thirsty, do we not therefore feel pleasure in drinking because we quench our thirst; and is it not therefore a pleasure to drink because it relieves us from a great torment, the desire, I mean, of drinking? Everyone can see this. But were we always to remain in such a state of desire, we should be as badly off as the rich man in the parable of Lazarus in his punishment; for his punishment was just this: that vehemently desiring one little drop, he couldn't obtain it. All covetous persons seem to me continually to suffer this same thing, and to resemble that rich man where he begs that he may obtain that one drop, and can't obtain it. For their soul is more on fire than his."

"Well indeed has one said, that all lovers of money are in a sort of dropsy⁶⁴; bearing much water in their bodies, they are the more burnt up. So also the covetous; they carry with them great wealth, but are greedy for more. The reason is that neither does the one afflicted with dropsy keep the water in the parts of the body where it should be; nor does the covetous keep their desire in the limits of this strange and craving disease."

Being in Need is Better than Being Covetous

If murders, lawsuits and all kinds of evil result from covetousness, we would do well to do anything to avoid covetousness. Even being in great need seems better than the effects on of covetousness.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶⁵ that Paul was often in need of others for necessities. Yet sometimes we think it disgraceful to be in need of anything. It is much better to be in need than to be covetous. We see Christ Himself in need through the poor man; as much as we can, we ought to be compassionate to Him.

"By compulsion God has subjected us one to another, and every day we are in collision one with another. If He had removed this curb, who is there who would readily have longed after his neighbor's love? Let us not consider this to be disgraceful, nor pray against it and say, 'Grant us not to stand in need of anyone'; but let us pray, 'Allow us not, when we are in need, to refuse those who are able to help us'. It is not standing in need of others that is grievous; seizing the things of others is what is grievous. We have never prayed to need others nor said, 'Grant that I don't covet other men's goods'. To stand in need, we think a fit subject to pray to avoid. Yet Paul stood in need many times, and was not

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XIV, 9.

⁶⁴ That is, the swelling of soft tissues due to holding too much water.

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XVII, v. 15.

ashamed; he even prided himself on it, and praised those that had ministered to him. ‘You sent *aid* once and again for my necessities’ (Philippians 4:16); and again, ‘I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you’ (2 Corinthians 11:8). It is a mark of weakness and of a low minded and senseless spirit, to be ashamed of this. It is even God’s decree that we should stand in need one of another. Someone said, ‘I cannot stand a man to whom people beg for help often and doesn’t comply’. But how shall God stand you when He begs you, and yet you don’t obey; and He begs you about things that are to your advantage? ‘Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God’ (2 Corinthians 5:20). And yet, I am His servant, he said. What of that? When you, the servant, are drunk, while He, the Master, is hungry and has not even necessary food, how shall your name of servant give you any credit? No, this will weigh you down more, when you live in a nice three-storied house while He doesn’t even own a decent shelter; when you lie on soft couches while He doesn’t even have a pillow. ‘But’, said one, ‘I have given’. But you ought not to stop doing so. You will only have an excuse when you have nothing to give, when you possess nothing; but so long as you have, and there are others hungry, there is no excuse for you. But when you store up grain, then raise the price, and devise other unusual business tricks; what hope of salvation shall you ever have? You have been asked to give freely to the hungry, but you do not give at a suitable price even. He emptied Himself of so great glory for your sake, but you do not count Him deserving even of a loaf? Your dog is fed and full while Christ wastes away with hunger; your servant bursts from overeating while your Lord is lacking necessary food. How are these deeds of friends? ‘Be reconciled to God’ (2 Corinthians 5:20); for these are the deeds of enemies and people hostile to each other.”

Jerome summarized⁶⁶ some places in the Scriptures where we are warned to beware of covetousness. We don’t have to live covetously in order to care for ourselves adequately. There is a better way.

“‘The love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*’ (1 Timothy 6:10), and Paul speaks of covetousness as being idolatry (Colossians 3:5). ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). The Lord will never allow a righteous soul to perish of hunger. ‘I have been young’, the psalmist says, ‘and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his descendants begging bread’ (Psalm 37:25). Elijah is fed by ministering ravens (1 Kings 17:4-6). The widow of Zarephath, who with her sons expected to die the same night, went without food herself that she might feed Elijah. He who had come to be fed then turned feeder, for, by a miracle, he filled the empty barrel (1 Kings 17:9-16). The Apostle Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk’ (Acts 3:6). But now many, while they do not say it in words, by their deeds declare: ‘Faith and pity have I none; but such as I have, silver and gold, these I will not give you’. ‘Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content’ (1 Timothy 6:8). Listen to the prayer of Jacob: ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and

⁶⁶ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, XXII, 32.

clothing to put on, then shall the Lord be my God' (Genesis 38:20-21). He prayed only for things necessary; yet, twenty years afterwards, he returned to the land of Canaan rich in substance, and richer still in children (Genesis 32:5-10). Numberless are the instances in Scripture which teach men to 'Beware of covetousness'" (Luke 12:15).

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶⁷ how someone who lives in darkness – such as covetousness – doesn't recognize things as they are. Someone who practices self-denial or someone in poverty is much better able to see things as they are.

"But how shall we instruct someone who is in darkness? For the love of money is darkness, permitting nothing that is to appear as it really is, but in some other manner. Just as one in total darkness, though he should see a golden vessel, though a precious stone, though purple garments, supposes them to be nothing, for he doesn't see their beauty; so also he that is in covetousness, doesn't know as he should the beauty of those things that are worthy of our care. Disperse then I beg you the mist that arises from this passion, and then you will see the real nature of things."

"These things appear so plainly to someone in poverty; to someone practicing self-denial, his eyes are opened and those things are disproved which seem to be good, and are not."

The Covetous Do Not Know Peace

Covetousness also has the effect on people to take away their ability to be at peace. Their grasping desire inhibits their ability to love, and if it weren't for others, they would devour each other. This applies to the poor as well as the rich.

John Chrysostom noted⁶⁸ that the covetous can never be at peace, so long as they continue in covetousness, since they do not have love. The virtuous are quite the opposite because they do not have the grasping desire for money. It is only because there are virtuous people around that the covetous don't devour one another.

"The covetous man can never possibly be at peace with the covetous. Were there not just and good persons, even though wronged by them, to stand between the covetous, the whole race of them would be torn to pieces. When two wild beasts are famished, if there is not something put between them to consume, they will devour one another. The same would be the case with the covetous and the vicious. It is not possible there should be peace where virtue is not already put in practice beforehand. Let us form a city entirely of covetous men, give them equal privileges, and let no one bear to be wronged, but let all wrong one another. Can that city possibly hold together? It is impossible."

"There is no other reason for this except that 'the love of many has grown cold' (Matthew 24:12); and the cause why love has grown cold, is that 'lawlessness abounds'. This leads to selfishness, and divides and severs the body, and tears it to pieces. But where virtue is, it does the reverse. Because the man that is virtuous is also above money; so that if there were ten thousand such in

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXXIII, 3.

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, IX, vv.1-3.

poverty they would still be peaceable; while the covetous, where there are but two, can never be at peace. Thus then if we are virtuous, love will not perish, for virtue springs from love, and love from virtue. The virtuous man does not value money above friendship, nor does he remember injuries, nor does wrong to his neighbor; he is not insolent, he endures all things nobly. Of these things love consists. He who loves submits to all these things, and thus they reciprocally produce one another. That love springs from virtue, appears from the Lord's words when He said, 'because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold' (Matthew 24:12). That virtue springs from love, Paul tells us, 'Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the Law' (Romans 13:10). So then a man must be one of the two, either very affectionate and much beloved, or else very virtuous; for he who has the one, of necessity possesses the other. On the contrary, he who doesn't know how to love, will therefore commit many evil actions; and he who commits evil actions, doesn't know what it is to love."

John Cassian stated⁶⁹ that the sin of covetousness can destroy a poor man as well as a rich man. The poor man is blessed in that he doesn't have all the temptations and the responsibilities as a rich man. But if he continually lusts in his heart for wealth, he is just as bad. Judas Iscariot was an example of this. He had left any wealth he had behind when he was called as a Apostle, but then he stole what was in the money bag for the poor; living in a downward spiral, he eventually sold the Lord for 30 silver coins. This illustrates the tyranny of covetousness; the only way to beat it is to strip ourselves of wealth.

"It is possible even for one who has no money to succumb to the malady of covetousness. The blessing of poverty⁷⁰ will do him no good, because he has not been able to root out the sin. He may delight in the advantages of poverty, not in the merit of the virtue; he may be satisfied with not having the burden of necessity, but with coldness of heart. Just as the Gospel declares that those who are not defiled in body, that they are adulterers in heart (Matthew 5:28); so it is possible that those who are in no way pressed down with the weight of money may be condemned with the covetous in disposition and intent. It was just the opportunity of possessing which was lacking in their case and not the will for it; and the will to avoid sin is always crowned by God, rather than compulsion to avoid it. We must use all diligence lest the fruits of our labors should be destroyed to no purpose. It is a wretched thing to have endured the effects of poverty and want, but to have lost their fruits, through the fault of a shattered will."

"Notice how dangerous and harmful covetousness shoots up for the destruction of its owner, and puts forth all sorts of branches of different sins. Look at Judas, reckoned among the number of the Apostles, and notice how because he would not bruise the deadly head of this serpent it destroyed him with its poison. When he was caught in the snares of coveting, it drove him into sin and a headlong downfall, so that he was persuaded to sell the Redeemer of the world and the author of man's salvation for thirty pieces of silver. He could never have been impelled to this heinous sin of the betrayal if he had not been

⁶⁹ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 22-24.

⁷⁰ Poverty can be a blessing if one is never tempted toward grasping and coveting material things.

contaminated by the sin of covetousness. He would not have made himself wickedly guilty of betraying the Lord, unless he had first accustomed himself to rob the bag entrusted to him” (John 12:6).

“This is a sufficiently dreadful and clear instance of the tyranny of covetousness; when once the mind is taken prisoner by it, covetousness keeps no rules of honesty, nor is satisfied with any additions to its gains. We must seek to put an end to this madness, not by riches, but by stripping ourselves of them. When Judas had received the bag set apart for the distribution to the poor, and entrusted to his care for this purpose, he had a plentiful supply of money, but this did not set a limit to his avarice. His plentiful supply only broke out into a still greedier incitement of desire, so that he was ready no longer secretly to rob the bag, but actually to sell the Lord Himself. The madness of this avarice is not satisfied with any amount of riches.”

What to Do with the Covetous: Avoid Them

John Chrysostom pointed out⁷¹ how Paul’s admonition to Timothy was to withdraw from the covetous. They are incorrigible; don’t bother with them; they are just like heretics and Timothy won’t be able to change them.

“Paul asked Timothy to withdraw himself from those who are covetous. He did not say, engage and contend with them, but ‘withdraw yourself’, turn away from them; as elsewhere he says, ‘Reject a heretic after the first and second admonition’ (Titus 3:10). He shows that they do not so much go astray from ignorance, as they owe their ignorance to their unwillingness to follow the Faith. Those who are contentious for the sake of money you will never persuade. They will only be persuaded so long as you give them money, and even so you will never satisfy their desires. For, ‘The covetous man’s eye is not satisfied with a portion’ (Ecclesiasticus 14:9). From such then, as being incorrigible, it is right to turn away. If he who had much obligation to fight for the truth (i.e. Timothy), is advised not to engage in contention with such men, much more should we avoid it, who are in the situation of disciples.”

“Having said, ‘They think that godliness is a means of gain’, Paul adds, ‘There is great gain in godliness with contentment’ (1 Timothy 6:5-6), not when it possesses wealth, but when it doesn’t. In order that Timothy may not be despondent on account of his poverty, Paul encourages and revives his spirit. The covetous think that godliness is a means of profit, and so it is; only not in their way, but in a much higher way.”

Job is a Prime Example of a Lack of Covetousness

Job was a descendant of Esau and he lived in Mt. Seir (Genesis 36:1-8), on the borders of Idumea and Arabia (Job 42:17), Southeast of the Dead Sea, during the years that Israel was in Egypt. According to tradition⁷², after the death of his father, Zerah, Job traveled to Egypt to marry Rahme⁷³, the daughter of Ephraim and granddaughter of Joseph, who was second in command to Pharaoh. It was Rahme who had inherited Joseph’s “Robe of Beauty” (Genesis

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, XVII, vv.2-7.

⁷² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, v. 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1996, p. 708.

37:3) that Jacob had made for him. After returning to his home country, Job became a prophet to his countrymen, and was later the governor of that region. Israel passed by Mt. Seir⁷⁴ during the Conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:4-6), where the descendants of Esau still lived.

Job's ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth, "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8). In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness. Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children, consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, he would curse God to His face (Job 1:11).

Satan recognized Job's godliness, just as he recognized that of Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). Yet Satan felt that all Job's righteousness could be attributed to the Lord's physical blessings in his life. Satan didn't allow for the possibility that Job would actually *want* to love God. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job's possessions in sifting him.

The way this happened is first the Sabeans⁷⁵ attacked and took all Job's oxen and donkeys, killing Job's herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, fire fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job's camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job's children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son "on his day" (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind (perhaps a tornado) came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Today's insurance industry would refer to the second and fourth as "acts of God" even though their source is an act of Satan.

Job's response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity "even though you incited Me against him⁷⁶ to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). When the Lord pointed out Job's righteousness, Satan challenged the Lord's judgment (Job 2:3-5). Satan was allowed to afflict Job with every evil imaginable (Job 1:13-19, 2:7-13). Yet Job's words were "Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁷, "If you give thanks when you are in comfort and in affluence, in success and in prosperity, there is nothing great, nothing wonderful in that. Compare this to a man giving thanks when he is in afflictions, in anguish, in discouragement". As an example, one

⁷³ We may presume that he had met Rahme and Joseph (Genesis 50:23) in traveling to Egypt to buy food, as many people had to do (Genesis 42:5).

⁷⁴ In Arab tradition, all the territory around Mt. Seir is still referred to as the "Land of Job". Job's tomb is located near the town of Nawa. The growth of legends has probably increased the boundaries of the "Land of Job", but this enduring tradition attests to the extraordinarily charismatic character of Job himself. For details of this, see Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, v. 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1996, p. 708-715.

⁷⁵ This is the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory approximates what is Yemen today. The LXX translates "Sabeans" as spoilers.

⁷⁶ We note here that Satan doesn't believe anything that God says, even though he had just been schooled in how correct the Lord's words were concerning Job.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX.

might recall Paul and Silas, broken and bleeding and sitting in a Philippian jail, but praying and singing hymns to God – at midnight (Acts 16:23-25).

In the life of Job, there was a larger event that was taking place: the building of Job's faith, and the proving to Satan that he is impotent in overthrowing the things God has established. The same is true in our lives.

The next "messengers from Satan" (compare 2 Corinthians 12:7) was a severe physical one: skin boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:7). Now destitute and unable to afford any medical attention, Job's only medical alternative was scrapping the pus off his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Completely disfigured by these diseases, Job's wife advised him: "Just say some word against the Lord, and die!" (Job 2:9 LXX). When three of his friends (kings from other countries) came to see him after hearing of his adversity, they didn't even recognize him at first because of his disfigurement. When they did, they openly wept (Job 2:11-12 LXX). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his affliction was dreadful and very great (Job 2:13 LXX). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

After the seven days of silence came the last messenger: the inquisition. Job's three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz, king of the Temanites⁷⁸, suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. When can he remember the pure in heart ever being utterly destroyed? (Job 4:7-8 LXX). Bilhad, sovereign of the Shuhites⁷⁹, suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job were pure and true, God would listen to his supplication, and would restore to him the habitation of righteousness. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor will he receive any gift of the ungodly (Job 8:4, 6, 20 LXX). Job claimed he was innocent. Zophar, king of the Mineans⁸⁰, suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. "If you have made your heart pure and lifted up your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let unrighteousness lodge in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14 LXX). The effect of all this on Job was that "the tents of the destroyers prosper while the just and blameless man is a joke (Job 12:4, 6). If Job had been a prophet to his countrymen, this would explain why he was sought out by the kings of neighboring countries.

Israel at this time consisted of just the extended family of Jacob (i.e. Israel), and they are all in Egypt. The above example of Job and his friends shows that the knowledge of God at this time was rather widespread, both to the North and South.

The result of this inquisition was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult aspect of Job's misery to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom commented⁸¹ that "the reproaches of Job's friends appeared more hurtful than the worms and the sores. There is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable

⁷⁸ Teman was the Southern portion of Idumea.

⁷⁹ The Shuhites were descendants of Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah. His descendants were an Arab tribe West of the Euphrates, 500 miles to the Northeast.

⁸⁰ The Mineans were a province of the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabaeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory is in Yemen today, 700 miles to the South.

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

of stinging the soul”. The message of the inquisition is exactly what Satan seeks to convince us of: that God is not faithful; that He doesn’t care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

Job, however, was a forerunner for Christ regarding suffering and patience (James 5:10-11). He grew spiritually because of all the evil (the Cross) that he had to bear, and he was rewarded for his efforts both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:1-17).

Gregory the Theologian stated⁸² that Job’s entire ordeal was for the revealing of his righteousness. This was also true of Christ’s ordeal at the Cross.

“What then of Him who answered Job out of the whirlwind and cloud, Who is slow to chastise and swift to help, Who does not allow the rod of the wicked to come into the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous should learn iniquity? At the end of the contests He declares the victory of the athlete in a splendid proclamation and lays bare the secret of his calamities. ‘Do you think that I have dealt with you for any other purpose than the revealing of your righteousness?’ This is the balm for his wounds; this is the crown of the contest; this is the reward for his patience. Perhaps his subsequent prosperity was small, great as it may seem to some, and ordained for the sake of small minds, even though he received again twice as much as he had lost”.

Ezekiel referred to Job as a model of intercession for his people, along with Noah and Daniel. This is a result of Job’s righteousness, where the Lord directed Job to intercede in prayer for his inquisitors and offer up sacrifices for them (Job 42:7-8). Similarly, Christ does the same for us (Hebrews 7:24-28). Ezekiel wrote:

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, if a land shall sin against me by committing a trespass, then will I stretch out my hand upon it, and will break its staff of bread, and will send famine on it, and cut off from it man and beast. Though these three men should be in the midst of it, Noah, and Daniel, and Job, they *alone* should be delivered by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:13-14 LXX).

The reproaches that Job received from the Lord (Job 38:1-23) had to do with his limited understanding of the Godhead that had existed prior to Creation and that had created the world. The Lord never questioned Job’s righteousness, and He said that what Job had spoken was right, and that his friends had not done so (Job 42:7-8). But Job still had to learn more about the majesty of God, as we all do. When Christ came as the ultimate intercessor, His Divinity was veiled by His flesh, and He didn’t have the weakness in understanding God that Job had.

John Cassian gave⁸³ a very good and detailed summary of what Paul meant by the right hand and the left hand (2 Corinthians 6:7). He defined things on the right hand as spiritual achievements, while things on the left hand are spiritual trials. Cassian used the term

⁸² Gregory Nazianzen, Oration On the Great Athanasius, XXI, 18.

⁸³ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Theodore, I, vi, 10.

See also Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 3.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 2-3.

John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, XI, 4.

John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Moses, I, ii, 16.

“ambidextrous” to refer to a man who could benefit equally well from either things on the right or things on the left. The Patriarchs Job is a good example of an “ambidextrous” man. The result of being “ambidextrous” is the acquisition of the weapons of righteousness (Ephesians 6:13-17).

“Blessed Job was rewarded for a victory on the right hand. He was the father of seven sons and walked as a rich and wealthy man, yet offered daily sacrifices to the Lord for their purification, in his anxiety, that they might prove dear to God rather than dear to himself. He did this when his gates stood open to every stranger, when he was ‘feet to lame and eyes to blind’ (Job 29:15), when the shoulders of the suffering were kept warm by the wool of his sheep (Job 31:20), when he was a father to orphans and a husband to widows (Job 29:12), when he did not even in his heart rejoice at the fall of his enemy (Job 31:29). With still greater virtue he triumphed over adversity on the left hand, when deprived in one moment of his seven sons he was not as a father overcome with grief, but as a true servant of God rejoiced in the will of his Creator. Instead of being a wealthy man he became poor, naked instead of rich, pining away instead of strong, despised and contemptible instead of famous and honorable. Yet he preserved his fortitude of mind unshaken, when robbed of all his wealth, and he took his place on the dunghill. Like some stern executioner of his own body, he scraped with a potsherd the pus that broke out, plunging his fingers deep into his wounds and dragging out on every side masses of worms from his limbs. In all this he never fell into despair and blasphemy or murmured against his Creator.”

Ambrose of Milan stated⁸⁴ that there are “ordinary duties” and “perfect duties”. “Ordinary duties” are keeping the Commandments; everyone should do this without even thinking about it. “Perfect duties” refer to loving our enemies and showing mercy to the poor, whereby we receive more than we give. The righteous Job is a good example of this.

“Further, he bestows more on you than you on him, since he is your debtor in regard to your salvation. How? If you clothe the naked, you clothe yourself with righteousness; if you bring the stranger under your roof, if you support the needy, he procures for you the friendship of the saints and eternal habitations. That is no small recompense. You sow earthly things and receive heavenly. Do you wonder at the judgment of God in the case of holy Job? Wonder rather at his virtue, in that he could say, ‘I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know’ (Job 29:15-16). Their shoulders were made warm with the fleece of my lambs (Job 31:20). The stranger dwelt not at my gates, but my door was open to everyone that came (Job 31:32). Clearly blessed is he from whose house a poor man has never gone with empty hand. Nor again is anyone more blessed than he who is sensible to the needs of the poor, and the hardships of the weak and helpless. In the Day of Judgment he will receive salvation from the Lord, Whom he will have as his debtor for the mercy he has shown.”

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁵ what occurred with the Patriarch Job: the reason that we count him blessed. It was his singular lack of covetousness! All his wealth was gone in a day, yet he

⁸⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, xi, 36-39.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XX, 8-9.

had no sense of covetousness over losing it! Satan tried to use the loss of wealth as a lever to get Job to curse God, but he found out that Job did not serve God for the wealth. The same is true with us; God may keep carnal things away from us until we begin to set a higher value on spiritual things.

“Tell me when do we account Job blessed? When he had so many camels, flocks and herds, or when he uttered that saying: ‘The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away?’ (Job 1:21 LXX) Therefore the demons also cause us losses, not that they may take away our goods only, for they know that is nothing, but that through them they may compel us to utter some blasphemy. So in the case of the blessed Job too, Satan did not strive after this only, to make Job poor, but also to make him a blasphemer. When he had stripped him of everything, observe what he says to him through his wife, ‘How long will you hold out? Say some word against the Lord, and die’ (Job 2:9 LXX). The accursed one had stripped him of everything. But this is not what Satan was striving for; for he had not yet accomplished his goal. He was striving to deprive Job of God’s help: for this cause he deprived Job of his goods also. If Satan didn’t accomplish this, Job not only has not been injured at all, but has even been benefited. You see that even that wicked demon knows how great is the loss in this matter?”

“We see him plotting the treachery through Job’s wife. Notice this, husbands, as many as have wives that are fond of money, and compel you to blaspheme God. Remember Job! But let us see Job’s great moderation, how he silenced her. ‘You have spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have received good things of the hand of the Lord, shall we not endure evil things?’ (Job 2:10 LXX) Truly ‘evil company corrupts good habits’ (1 Corinthians 15:33), at all times, but particularly in calamities: then they who give evil advice have strength. If the soul is of itself prone to impatience, how much more, when there is also an adviser. A wife can be a great good, and also a great evil. Because a wife is a great good, observe from what point Satan wishes to break through the strong wall. The depriving Job of his property did not break him; the loss has produced no great effect. Therefore Satan said, ‘If You touch his bone and his flesh, he will surely curse You to Your face!’ (Job 2:5 LXX) You see where he was aspiring. If then we bear losses thankfully, we shall recover even these things; and if we should not recover them, our reward will be greater. When Job had wrestled nobly, then God restored to him these things also. When He had shown the devil, that it is not for these things that Job serves Him, then He restored them also to him.”

“When God sees that we are not riveted to things of this life, then He gives them to us. When He sees that we set a higher value on spiritual things, then He also bestows on us carnal things. But not first, lest we should break away from spiritual things: and to spare us He does not give carnal things, to keep us away from them, even against our will.”

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁶ that God will protect the household that is generous with their possessions, just like he did with the Patriarch Job. It is not possible that that a house established by almsgiving should suffer any calamity and Job was a model for that kind of life. Satan complained to God that He had hedged Job in and that Satan didn’t dare attack Job. When God

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VII, Moral.

did allow Satan to persecute Job, the result was that Job's substance was doubled, his reward increased, his righteousness enlarged, his crown was splendid, his prize glorious.

"If you do not deserve wealth, nor seek to increase your present possessions, your burden will be light. To get riches is much more laborious than to take care of them. If therefore you cut off this one thing, accumulating, and supply the needy out of your substance, God will hold over you His protecting hand. If we say this from a real desire to preserve our children, and are not, under this pretense, possessed with covetousness, He who searches the heart knows how to secure their riches, even He who commanded you to bring up children."

"It is not possible that a house established by almsgiving should suffer any calamity. If it should be unfortunate for a time, in the end it will prosper. This will be more than spear and shield to the entire household. Listen to what the devil said concerning Job: 'Have not you made a hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he has on every side?' (Job 1:10). Why? Listen to Job himself saying, 'I *was* eyes to the blind, and I *was* feet to the lame. I *was* a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth' (Job 29:14-17). He who does not turn away from the calamities of others, will not suffer even in his own misfortunes, because he has learned to sympathize; so he who will not bear the grief of sympathy, will learn all sorrow in his own person. In the case of a bodily disease, when the foot is hurt, if the hand does not sympathize by cleaning the wound, washing away the discharge, and applying a bandage, it will suffer the same disease of its own. So she who will not serve another when she is not herself afflicted, will have to bear sufferings of her own. He that will not relieve others will be a sufferer himself. 'You have hedged him in', said Satan, 'within and without', and I dare not attack him! But Job suffered afflictions, you say. True. But those afflictions were the occasion of great good. His substance was doubled, his reward increased, his righteousness enlarged, his crown was splendid, his prize glorious. Both his spiritual and temporal blessings were increased. He lost his children, but he received, not these restored, but others in their place, and the ones he lost, were safely preserved for the Resurrection. Had his children just been restored, the number would have been diminished; but now having been given others in their place, he will present them also at the Resurrection. All these things happened to him, because of his openhandedness in almsgiving. Let us then do likewise, that we may obtain the same rewards by the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Alms Overcomes Covetousness

The giving of alms has a special benefit to the giver, where if it is forced and not from an open heart, it does no good at all. In this way almsgiving is the opposite of covetousness. We can be healed from the effects of our sins by practicing almsgiving. This is not a works program to substitute for faith, since almsgiving needs to be done by faith if it is done right.

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁷ that covetousness can be overcome by almsgiving. Giving alms is like food for the soul; without it, the soul becomes weak and nasty. Almsgiving is better than fasting, and he who practices this will soon cease from covetousness and other sins.

“I beg you not to bring loss on yourselves; don’t hold onto mire and rob yourselves of the treasures which are above, bringing your vessel to port laden with straw and chaff. Let each say what he will concerning us, let him be angry at our continual admonitions, let him call us silly, tedious, tiresome; still we will not desist from exhorting you on these matters continually. We will continually repeat to you the words of the Prophet, ‘Break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor’ (Daniel 4:27), and bind them upon your neck. Do not act in this way today and desist tomorrow. Our bodies need daily food; and so too do our souls, or rather that much more. If we don’t provide the soul with food, it becomes weaker and more vile. Let us not neglect it when it is perishing and choking. Many wounds it receives each day, by being lustful, angry, slothful, reviling, revengeful, envious. It is therefore necessary to prepare remedies for it, and no small remedy is that of almsgiving, which can be placed on every wound. The Lord said, ‘Give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you’ (Luke 11:41). Alms, not covetousness! That which proceeds from covetousness doesn’t endure, though you give to those who need. Almsgiving is that which is free from all injustice; this makes all things clean. This is a thing better even than fasting or asceticism; they may be more painful and laborious, but this is more profitable. It enlightens the soul, makes it sleek, beautiful, and vigorous. Olive oil doesn’t hold up athletes, as much as this oil recovers the combatants of piety. Let us then anoint our hands, that we may lift them up well against our adversary. He that practices showing mercy to him that needs, will soon cease from covetousness, he who continues in giving to the poor, will soon cease from anger and will never be high-minded. The physician who continually tends wounded persons is easily sobered, beholding human nature in the calamities of others. So we, if we enter upon the work of aiding the poor, shall easily become truly wise. If we don’t admire riches nor deem present things any great matter, but despise them all, we will soar aloft to heaven and easily obtain the eternal blessings.”

Aristotle said⁸⁸, “The end, then, being what we wish for, the means what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning means must be according to choice and voluntary. Now the exercise of the virtues is concerned with means. Therefore virtue also is in our own power, and so too vice. For where it is in our power to act it is also in our power not to act, and vice versa”.

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁹ the details concerning what Jesus and Paul said. It is OK to be rich, so long as we can distance ourselves from the pride that goes with it. A covetous man is not rich, however, since he is a keeper, not a master of wealth. Similarly Jesus did not command the rich man to unload all his wealth; he just said, “If you want to be perfect”. Those that are rich have a great opportunity for doing good deeds and for obtaining relief for their sins.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXI, 3.

⁸⁸ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book III, Chapter 5, 1113b.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, II, 14, 20.

“It is worthy of inquiry, why does Paul not say, ‘Charge those who are rich in this present age, not to be rich’; or ‘charge them to become poor’; or ‘charge them to get rid of what they have’? Instead Paul says ‘Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty’ (1 Timothy 6:17). Paul knew that the root and foundation of riches is pride; and that if any man understood how to be unassuming, he would not make much ado about the matter. Paul knew that wealth is not forbidden if it is used for that which is necessary. Just as wine is not a bad thing, but drunkenness is. A covetous man is one thing, and a rich man is another thing. The covetous man is not rich; he is in need of many things, and while he needs many things, he can never be rich. The covetous man is a keeper, not a master, of wealth; a slave, not a Lord. He would prefer to give away a portion of his flesh, than give away his buried gold.”

“Paul is not accustomed to command everything for every man, but accommodates himself to the weakness of his hearers, just as Christ did. When that rich man came to him, and asked him concerning Life, he did not say at once, ‘Go, sell what you have’; but omitting this, he spoke to him of other commandments. Even afterwards, when the rich man challenged Jesus and said, ‘What do I still lack?’, Jesus did not simply say, ‘Sell everything you have’; but, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). ‘I lay it down for your determination; I give you full power to choose; I do not lay it on you as any necessity’. Paul said nothing to the rich concerning poverty, but concerning humility; as well because of the weakness of his hearers, as because he perfectly knew, that if he could bring them to exercise moderation, and to be free from pride, he would also free them from the eagerness about being rich.”

“That we may live securely, the sources of our daily needs have been made common. On the other hand, in order that we may have an opportunity for gaining crowns and good report, property has not been made common. By hating covetousness, following after righteousness, and freely bestowing our goods on the poor, we may by this method obtain a certain kind of relief for our sins. God has made us rich, why would we make ourselves poor? He has made us rich that we may assist the needy; that we may have release of our own sins, by liberality to others. He has given us money, not that we may shut it up for our destruction, but that we may pour it forth for our salvation. For this reason also He has made the possession of riches uncertain and unstable, that by this means he might lessen the intensity of our madness concerning it.”

Jerome summarized⁹⁰ some places in the Scriptures where we are warned to beware of covetousness. We don’t have to live covetously in order to care for ourselves adequately. There is a better way.

“‘The love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*’ (1 Timothy 6:10), and Paul speaks of covetousness as being idolatry (Colossians 3:5). ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). The Lord will never allow a righteous soul to perish of hunger. ‘I have been young’, the psalmist says, ‘and *now* am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread’ (Psalm 37:25). Elijah is

⁹⁰ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, XXII, 32.

fed by ministering ravens (1 Kings 17:4-6). The widow of Zarephath, who with her sons expected to die the same night, went without food herself that she might feed the prophet. He who had come to be fed then turned feeder, for, by a miracle, he filled the empty barrel (1 Kings 17:9-16). The Apostle Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk' (Acts 3:6). But now many, while they do not say it in words, by their deeds declare: 'Faith and pity have I none; but such as I have, silver and gold, these I will not give you'. 'Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content' (1 Timothy 6:8). Listen to the prayer of Jacob: 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God' (Genesis 38:20-21). He prayed only for things necessary; yet, twenty years afterwards, he returned to the land of Canaan rich in substance, and richer still in children (Genesis 32:5-10). Numberless are the instances in Scripture which teach men to 'Beware of covetousness'" (Luke 12:15).

John Chrysostom noted⁹¹ that if our covetousness is such that we overlook the needs of our neighbor, we will suffer ourselves for it. We are members one of another; if we neglect our neighbor, we have injured ourselves. If we are pious toward our fellow man, we will be still more pious toward God.

"He that is seized with the passion of arrogance is careless even about his own interests. When a man overlooks the concerns of his neighbor, and is careless about them, how will he regard his own? He that looks into his neighbor's affairs will in them order his own to his advantage; so he that looks down upon his neighbor's concerns will neglect his own. If we are members one of another (Romans 12:4), the welfare of our neighbor is not our concern only, but that of the whole body, and the injury of our neighbor is not confined to him, but distracts with pain everyone else as well. If we are a building, whatever part is weakened, it affects the whole, while that which is solid gives strength and support to the rest. So also in the Church, if you have slighted your neighbor, you have injured yourself. How? In that one of your own members has suffered no small hurt. If he who does not give of his possessions goes into Hell, much more will he be condemned, who sees a neighbor suffering more severe evils, and does not stretch out his hand, since in this case the loss is more grievous."

"Paul stated, 'For men will be lovers of themselves' (2 Timothy 3:1). He that loves himself may be said not to love himself; but he that loves his brother, loves himself in the truest sense. From self-love springs covetousness. The wretched stingy self-love squeezes down that love which should be widely expanded, and diffused on every side. From covetousness springs boastfulness; from boastfulness springs pride; from pride blasphemy; from blasphemy defiance and disobedience. He, who exalts himself against men, will easily do it against God. Thus sins are produced. Often they ascend from below. He that is pious towards men is still more pious towards God. He, who is meek to his fellow-servants, is meeker to his Master. He that despises his fellow-servants will end up despising God Himself."

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VII, vv. 1-7.

John Cassian noted⁹² how the first Apostles avoided covetousness and the problems that arise from it: they gave away all their property. This meant that the Jerusalem Church was impoverished, especially during the persecution by the Jews, where their property was further confiscated. The Gentile Churches took collections on several occasions to help support their brethren in Jerusalem.

“Paul was endowed with the privileges of a Roman citizen from his birth; he testifies that he was no common person according to this world’s rank (Philippians 3:3-7) and could have been supported by the property which formerly belonged to him! The other Apostles, who were possessors of lands and houses in Jerusalem sold everything, kept back nothing whatever for themselves, and brought the sale price and laid it at the feet of the Apostles (Acts 4:35-37). They might have supplied their bodily necessities from their own property, had this been considered the best plan by the Apostles, or had they deemed it preferable! But they gave up all their property at once, and preferred to be supported by their own labor, and by the contributions of the Gentiles. Paul speaks of this in writing to the Romans, declares his own office in this matter to them, and urges them on likewise to make this collection. ‘But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it has pleased those of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints who are at Jerusalem: it has pleased them indeed, and their debtors they are. If the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things’ (Romans 15:27). To the Corinthians also he shows the same anxiety about this, and urges them the more diligently to prepare before his arrival a collection, which he was intending to send for the needs at Jerusalem. ‘Concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem’. That he may stimulate them to make a larger collection, Paul adds, ‘But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me’ (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); meaning if your offering is of such a character as to deserve to be taken there by my ministration. To the Galatians too, he testifies that when he was settling the division of the ministry of preaching with the Apostles, he had arranged this with James, Peter, and John, that he should undertake the preaching to the Gentiles; but he should never repudiate care and anxious thought for the poor who were at Jerusalem, who for Christ’s sake gave up all their goods, and submitted to voluntary poverty. ‘When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should* go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do’ (Galatians 2:9-10). This was a matter which Paul testifies that he attended to most carefully, saying, ‘the very thing which I also was eager to do’. Who then are the more blessed: those in Jerusalem or those who but lately were gathered out of the number of the heathen, and being unable to climb to the heights of the perfection of the Gospel, clung to their own property? In the case of the Gentiles,

⁹² John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 17-18.

it was considered a great thing by Paul if at least they were restrained from the worship of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood, and had embraced the faith of Christ, with their goods and all? Those in Jerusalem lived up to the demands of the Gospel, carried the Lord's cross daily, and asked nothing out of their property to remain for their own use."

"Therefore if we want to obey the Gospel precept, and show ourselves the followers of Paul and the whole primitive Church, or of the fathers who in our own days succeeded to their virtues and perfection, we should follow their footsteps. We should by no means aim at looking after our own interests, but should seek out the discipline and system of a monastery, that we may in very truth renounce this world; preserving nothing of those things which we have despised through the temptation of lack of faith. We should look for our daily food, not from any store of money of our own, but from our own labors."

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹³ that everyone is affected by covetousness to a degree. Rich or poor, our own choices have caused this plague, and it must be this same choice that needs to be brought under control to master covetousness. Yet when compared to the wealth present in the Kingdom God, any wealth in this life pales in comparison.

"What kind of people is seized by the plague of covetousness? Everyone; some more, some less, but everyone is seized to some degree. Like a fire catching a forest that desolates and destroys all around, this passion has laid waste to the world. Kings, magistrates, private persons, the poor, women, men, children, are all alike affected by it. As if a gross darkness had spread over the earth, no one is in his sober senses. Yet we hear, both in public and private, many pompous sermons against covetousness, but no one is mended by them."

"What then is to be done? How shall we extinguish this flame? Though it has risen up to heaven itself, it can be extinguished. We only have to be willing, and we shall be able to master the conflagration. By our will covetousness has gotten its start, so it may be brought under control by our will. Did not our own choice cause it, and is not the same choice available to extinguish it? Only let us be willing! But how shall that willingness get aroused? We need to consider the vanity and the unprofitability of wealth: that it cannot depart this life with us, that even here it forsakes us and that while it remains behind, it inflicts upon us wounds that depart along with us. We need to consider that there are riches there, compared to which the wealth of this world is more despicable than dung. We need to consider that it is accompanied with numberless dangers, with pleasure that is temporary, pleasure mingled with sorrow. If we contemplate the true riches of eternal life, we shall be able to despise worldly wealth. If we remember that covetousness generates no profit for us either to glory, health or any other thing; but on the contrary it drowns men in destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:9). We need to consider that here we are rich, and have many under us, but when we depart this life, we will go naked and solitary. If we often keep these things in mind, and listen to them from others, there will perhaps be a return to a sound mind, and a deliverance from this dreadful punishment."

⁹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XVII, v. 12.

Leo the Great noted⁹⁴ that the landscape had changed since the reign of Constantine the Great. Persecution is no longer favored by the world rulers and animal sacrifice to demons has largely been discontinued. Instead the demons are now going after Christians with covetousness instead of with persecution.

“Because the stress of former blasts has lulled, and with a cessation of fighting a measure of tranquility has long seemed to smile upon us; however we must guard against new divergences which arise from the reign of peace. The adversary was proved ineffective in open persecutions, but now exercises a hidden skill in doing cruelty, in order to overthrow by the stumbling-block of pleasure those whom he could not strike with the blow of affliction. Seeing the faith of princes opposed to him and the indivisible Trinity of the one Godhead as devoutly worshipped in palaces as in Churches, he grieves at the shedding of Christian blood being forbidden, and attacks the mode of life of those whose death he cannot bring about. The terror of confiscations he changes into the fire of avarice, and corrupts with covetousness those whose spirit he could not break by losses. The malicious haughtiness which long use has ingrained into his nature has not laid aside its hatred; the demons have changed the character of their attacks in order to subjugate the minds of the faithful by flattery. He inflames those with covetous desires whom he cannot distress with tortures; he sows strife, kindles passions, sets tongues a-wagging, and, lest more cautious hearts should draw back from his lawless wiles, facilitates opportunities for crime. Since he is no longer worshipped with the sacrifice of cattle and goats, and the burning of incense, at least he might be paid the homage of diverse wicked deeds.”

⁹⁴ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, XXXVI, vi, 3.

Appendix A

Summary of the Mosaic Law

The Mosaic Law consisted of Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Testimonies. The core of the Law was what Jesus called the “Greatest Commandment”, and on this hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). The full text of the “Greatest Commandment” was “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 13:8-10). Tertullian described⁹⁵ the Greatest Commandment as having been given in embryo to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that if Adam and Eve had obeyed it, they would not have fallen. Thus the Gentiles had the Law prior to Moses. But the Mosaic Law bridged a gap until the coming of Christ when the Law would be written on men’s hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the Holy Spirit would take up residence in men’s bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Until then the Lord commanded that the Law should be written in stone on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry.

The Law is still useful today, especially for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), and early Apostolic teaching warned⁹⁶ people about speaking evil of the Law. When Christ came, He stated, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod⁹⁷ or one piece of a Hebrew letter (about the size of the dot of an i) will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). Tertullian stated⁹⁸,

“Plainly we assert that the Law has deceased in one sense, that its burdens, which not even the fathers were able to sustain, have wholly ceased. Such parts, however, as relate to righteousness not only permanently remain reserved, but even amplified, in order that our righteousness may be able to redound above the righteousness of the scribes and of the Pharisees”.

Commandments.

- The Ten Commandments, which give details of the Greatest Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
- Atonement for sin in anticipation of the work of Christ (Leviticus 4, Leviticus 5, Numbers 15)
- Separation from the world; no intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- Tithes and Alms to guard against greed (Deuteronomy 26, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
- The year of remission to teach forgiveness (Deuteronomy 15:1-18, Mark 11:25, James 2:13)
- Manna to teach about real food (Deuteronomy 8:1-10, John 6:31-58)
- Blessings for those who obey; curses for those who don’t (Deuteronomy 28, Matthew 25:14-46)

Statutes.

⁹⁵ Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

⁹⁶ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VI, IV, xix

⁹⁷ The yod is the smallest Hebrew letter.

⁹⁸ Tertullian, On Monogamy IV, vi, 7.

- The Major Festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles
- Portions for the priests (Leviticus 6:14-30, Leviticus 7, Leviticus 10:12-20, Numbers 18:8-24, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Duties of the priests before God in the House of God (Exodus 27-30, Leviticus 10:8-11)
- Maintain holiness and avoid uncleanness (Leviticus 20, Numbers 19, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 1 John 2:6)
- Evenhandedness for Jew and Gentile (Numbers 15:14-16, Leviticus 19:33-34, Ephesians 2:11-22)

Judgments.

The Judgments represent “case law” that resolved some uncertainty on how to interpret the Mosaic Law. Some examples are the question of inheritance brought by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11), and the question of working on the Sabbath during the 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 15:32-36). Difficult cases were brought to the Levitical judges in Jerusalem for a decision, and if the Levitical judges had difficulty, they brought the case before the Lord Himself in the Holy of Holies for a decision (Deuteronomy 17:8-13, Deuteronomy 19:15-21, Numbers 28:21, Deuteronomy 1:17).

Testimonies.

The Testimony or Witness (i.e. singular) was the Ark of the Covenant that was kept in the Holy of Holies, and upon which the Lord dwelt between the Cherubim (Numbers 7:89). Things associated with the Presence of God are also referred to as part of the Testimony. For example, there is the Ark of the Testimony, the Tent (or Tabernacle) of the Testimony (Numbers 1:53), the Veil of Testimony (Leviticus 24:3), and the Tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 31:18) which were in the Ark (Deuteronomy 10:5). The Testimonies or Witnesses (i.e. plural) are the recorded deeds and mercies of God among His people coming from His Presence on the Ark of the Testimony. Part of the Mosaic Law was teaching future generations what the Lord had done (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

THE LAW, FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

July 21, 2019
5th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision B

Epistle: Romans 10:1-10

A Zeal for God

The Epistle lesson begins with Paul's identification with and sympathy for the people of Israel. "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God" (Romans 10:2). Paul, himself, had been there and done that. He was "a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6) and "had advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries by being more exceedingly zealous for the tradition of the fathers" (Galatians 1:14, Acts 22:3). In his zeal, he had "persecuted the Church beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13, Acts 8:3, 9:1-3, 22:4-5, 26:10-11). But as Paul admits, his zeal "was not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2).

The aim of Paul's and Israel's zeal was righteousness; the question is how does one obtain such. Zeal alone does not produce righteousness; righteousness begins with faith (or belief) in God. For example, "Abraham believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). This statement from Genesis 15:6 is pivotal and is quoted four times in the New Testament: three times by Paul, once by James. The context of these four quotes is summarized as follows:

Romans 4:1-5 Abraham was not justified by works of the Law before God but by believing in God. If he were justified by works of the Law, debt, not grace, would be involved.

Romans 4:20-24 Abraham did not waver in his belief but was fully convinced and strengthened in faith that God would deliver on His promise. This was not written down for Abraham's sake alone, but also for us.

Galatians 3:5-9 The work of the Spirit among the Galatians was by faith and not by works of the Law. Only those who are of faith are truly sons of Abraham and part of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

James 2:20-26 Abraham's faith was working together with his works; by this, the faith was made perfect. Thus deeds disclose one's faith. (Compare also John 14:15, Matthew 7:21, Matthew 25:31-46).

The leaders of Israel in Paul's day were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3). They certainly knew the above statement regarding Abraham, but they did not submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). This word "submit" is a dirty word in our culture because it implies humility not arrogance. However, no one achieves the righteousness of God with an arrogant, know-it-all heart.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹⁹ that a zeal for God is not enough. Paul had a zeal for God and used that zeal to persecute Christians. We are to be judged both for things we did willingly and unwillingly. We can't just laugh off our role in this life; by doing so we may provoke God more than by our sins.

“I speak seriously not to suppress all laughter, but to take away wasted use of the mind. Why are we luxurious and of loose morals, while we are still liable to such heavy charges and are to stand at a fearful judgment-seat to give a strict account of all that has been done here? We are to give an account both of when we have sinned willingly, and when against our will. Jesus said, ‘whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 10:33) — and surely such a denial is against our will. Nevertheless it does not escape punishment, but of it too we have to give account — both of what we know, and of what we do not know. Paul said, ‘It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes’ (1 Corinthians 4:3-5) — both for what we have done in ignorance and in knowledge. ‘For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge’ (Romans 10:2). Yet this is not sufficient as an excuse. Paul said, ‘I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 12:3-4).

“The things then being so great, for which we are to give account, should we sit laughing and joking, and giving ourselves up to luxury? One might ask, ‘If I didn't do this, but mourned, what would be the profit?’ Very great indeed! It is even so great, as it is not possible so much as to set it forth by word. Before temporal tribunals, even if our weeping were ever so abundant, we cannot escape punishment after being sentenced. Here, on the contrary, if we should only sigh, we have annulled the sentence, and have obtained pardon. This is why Christ speaks to us much of mourning, blesses those that mourn, and pronounces them that laugh¹⁰⁰ wretched (Luke 6:25). For this is not the theater for laughter, neither did we come together for this intent, that we may give way to immoderate mirth, but that we may groan, and by this groaning inherit a kingdom. If we were standing next to a king, we wouldn't dare so much as to smile. Having then the Lord of the angels dwelling in us, do we stand with trembling and all due self-restraint, or do we laugh it off, even when He is displeased? We should consider that we provoke Him in this way more than by our sins?”

Ignorance of God's Righteousness

Paul said, “For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Christ said, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:24-26).

righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:2-3). Paul was referring to the Jewish leaders of his day, but Paul’s words are more widely applicable. Many people are in a similar situation today. It is instructive to consider what God’s righteousness is.

Irenaeus of Lyons pointed out¹⁰¹ why God gave the Law to Moses and not earlier. The earlier fathers had no need of it because it was written on their hearts. However, when righteousness and love for God had fallen into oblivion in Egypt, then the Law was needed.

“Why, then, did the Lord not form the covenant for the fathers (prior to Moses)? Because ‘the Law is not made for a righteous person’ (1 Timothy 1:9)! But the righteous fathers had the meaning of the Ten Commandments written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the Law in themselves. But when this righteousness and love for God had fallen into oblivion, and became extinct in Egypt, God did necessarily, because of His great goodwill to men, reveal Himself by a voice, and led the people with power out of Egypt, in order that man might again become the disciple and follower of God. He afflicted those who were disobedient, that they should not condemn their Creator; and He fed them with manna, that they might receive food for their souls. As Moses says, ‘He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord’ (Deuteronomy 8:3). It commanded love to God, and taught just dealing towards our neighbor, that we should neither be unjust nor unworthy of God, who prepares man for His friendship through the medium of the Decalogue, and likewise for agreement with his neighbor. These are matters which did certainly profit man himself; God, however, stood in no need of anything from man.”

The Scriptures say a great deal about righteousness

Righteousness comes by faith:

- **Genesis 15:6:** Abraham believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.
- **Romans 1:16:** For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.
- **Romans 3:20:** Therefore by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the Law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

But yet righteousness always involves deeds or actions:

¹⁰¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

- **Genesis 18:19:** Abraham was commanded to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.
- **Leviticus 19:15:** You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.
- **Deuteronomy 6:25:** Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.
- **2 Samuel 22:21-23:** The Lord rewarded King David according to his righteousness; according to the cleanness of his hands He has recompensed him. For David has kept the ways of the Lord, and has not wickedly departed from his God. For all His judgments *were* before him; and *as for* His statutes, he did not depart from them.
- **Romans 6:12:** 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.
- **2 Corinthians 11:14** Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his servants also transform themselves into servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.
- **Matthew 25:31-46:** Everyone will be judged according to what they actually did, not according to what they said they believed.

The Sacrifices of the Old Covenant had to do with righteousness

- **Psalms 51:19:** Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness.
- **Isaiah 1:11-16:** When the animal sacrifices were not associated with righteousness, God hated them.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of the Throne of God

- **Psalms 89:13-14, Psalm 97:1:** You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, *and* high is Your right hand. Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Understanding righteousness is crucial:

- **Proverbs 2:7:** He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity *and* every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you.

Polycarp of Smyrna noted¹⁰² that love for God and neighbor is the mother of us all in that it fulfills the command for righteousness. This is a re-statement of the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40).

“These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can approach the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word

¹⁰² Polycarp, Epistle to the Philippians, 3.

of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. When absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbor, 'is the mother of us all'. For if anyone is inwardly possessed of these graces, he has fulfilled the command of righteousness, since he that has love is far from all sin."

John Chrysostom stated¹⁰³ that because many of the Jews were not conscious of their own sins and were ignorant of God's righteousness, the Law was given to school them in virtue. Those who disbelieved did so from having no sense of their own sins.

"Paul stated, 'The scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe' (Galatians 3:22). Since the Jews were not even conscious of their own sins, and in consequence did not desire remission, the Law was given to probe their wounds that they might long for a physician. The word 'shut up' means 'convinced' and conviction held them in fear. You see then the Law was given for the promises. Had the Law not been given, all would have been wrecked on wickedness, and there would have been no Jews to listen to Christ. But now being given, it has affected two things: (1) it has schooled its followers in a certain degree of virtue, and (2) it has pressed on them the knowledge of their own sins. This especially made them more zealous to seek the Son; for those who disbelieved, they disbelieved from having no sense of their own sins. As Paul shows, 'Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God'" (Romans 10:3).

Justin Martyr underlined and explained¹⁰⁴ how the Scriptures define a righteous man: according to the Greatest Commandment as Christ said.

"Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ spoke well when He summed up all righteousness and piety in two commandments. They are these: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22:37-40). For the man who loves God with all the heart, and with all the strength, being filled with a God-fearing mind, will reverence no other God; and since God wishes it, he would reverence that angel who is beloved by the same Lord and God. The man who loves his neighbor as himself will wish for him the same good things that he wishes for himself; and no man will wish evil things for himself. Accordingly, he who loves his neighbor would pray and labor that his neighbor may be possessed of the same benefits as himself. Now nothing else is neighbor to man than a man who is reasonable and of similar affections. Therefore, since all righteousness is divided into two branches, namely, in so far as it regards God and men, the Scripture says that whoever loves the Lord God with all the heart, and all the strength, and his neighbor as himself, would be truly a righteous man."

¹⁰³ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3, v. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Tyrpho, a Jew, 93.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹⁰⁵ that Christ was both the Lawgiver and the end of the Law, and He exhorted us to observe the Law. During His days, there were people who observed the Law without love and honored Him with their lips only. They had made the Law of God of no effect, since they were ignorant of God's righteousness.

“Christ therefore did not throw blame on that Law which was given by Moses, when He exhorted it to be observed, Jerusalem being as yet in safety. But He *did* throw blame on those persons, because they repeated the words of the Law, yet were without love. For this reason were they held as being unrighteous with respect to God, and with respect to their neighbors. Isaiah said, ‘These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me; and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men. Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people’ (Isaiah 29:13-14). He does not call the Law given by Moses commandments of men, but the traditions of the elders which they had invented; in upholding their traditions they made the Law of God of no effect, and were on this account also not subject to His Word. This is what Paul said concerning these men, ‘For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:3-4). And how is Christ the end of the Law, if He is not also the final Cause of it? For He who has brought in the end has Himself also wrought the beginning. It is He who does Himself say to Moses, ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them’ (Exodus 3:7-8). It was customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction.”

Irenaeus of Lyons also pointed out¹⁰⁶ how Christ supported the words of the Prophets that the keeping of the Law without righteousness was not His intent. His intent was for His people to hear His voice; all the details of sacrifices in the Law were set in place to teach His people what He was planning to do for them at the Cross. The important part of their lives was supposed to be righteousness, not just rote sacrifices.

Christ pointed out that He didn't lead them out of Egypt, that they might offer sacrifice to Him, but that they might forget the idolatry of the Egyptians and hear His voice, which was to them salvation and glory. Jeremiah said, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. Walk in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you”. They did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels *and* the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward’ (Jeremiah 7:21-24). And again, ‘But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth’ (Jeremiah

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xii, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xvii, 3-4.

9:24). He adds, ‘For in these I delight, says the Lord’; but not in sacrifices, nor in holocausts, nor in oblations. The people did not receive these precepts as of primary importance, but as secondary, and they omitted righteousness. ‘You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, nor wearied you with incense. You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened Me with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities’ (Isaiah 43:23-24). He says, therefore, ‘To whom will I have respect, but to the humble and meek, and the *man* that trembles *at my words*’ (Isaiah 46:2 LXX).

‘Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, “Here I am”’ (Isaiah 58:6-9). Zechariah also pointed out to the people the will of God, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother’ (Zechariah 7:9-10). And again, ‘These *are* the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these *are things* that I hate, says the Lord’ (Zechariah 8:16-17). Moreover, David also says in like manner: ‘Who *is* the man *who* desires life, and loves *many* days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”’ (Psalm 34:12-14).

From all these it is evident that God did not seek sacrifices and holocausts from them, but faith, obedience, and righteousness, because of their salvation. As God, when teaching them His will, said, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings’ (Hosea 6:6). Besides, our Lord also exhorted them to the same effect, when He said, ‘But if you had known what *this* means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless’ (Matthew 12:7). Thus Christ bore witness to the prophets, that they preached the truth.

Irenaeus of Lyons further pointed out¹⁰⁷ how sacrifice¹⁰⁸ without righteousness is not acceptable to God and never has been. By trying to offer sacrifice in sin, we only work to destroy ourselves by our hypocritical actions. Examples given of how unprofitable this is include Cain, Pontius Pilate and the Scribes & Pharisees. God always gives up the righteous one

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xviii, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Sacrifices today include our bodies (Romans 12:1, Paul’s ministry (Philippians 2:17, Epaphroditus’ gifts, the fruit of our lips and the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), and the Lord’s Table.

in this life to suffering, that he might be tested by what he suffers and endures, and may at last be accepted; but the evildoer, being judged by the actions he has performed, may be rejected.

“At the beginning God had respect for the gifts of Abel, because he offered with single-mindedness and righteousness; but He had no respect for the offering of Cain, because his heart was divided with envy and malice, which he cherished against his brother. God reproved Cain’s hidden thoughts, ‘Have you not sinned if you have brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it? Be still’ (Genesis 4:7 LXX), since God is not appeased by sacrifice. Someone may endeavor to offer a sacrifice merely to outward appearance. Even if done correctly and at the right time, while in his soul he does not assign to his neighbor that fellowship with him that is right and proper, nor is under the fear of God; he who cherishes such secret sin does not deceive God by that sacrifice which is offered correctly as to outward appearance. Such an oblation will profit him nothing, but only the giving up of that evil which has been conceived within him, so that sin may not render him more the destroyer of himself by means of the hypocritical action.”

“This is why the Lord declared, ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness’ (Matthew 23:27-28). While they were thought to offer correctly so far as outward appearance went, they had in themselves jealousy just like Cain; therefore they slew the Just One, slighting the counsel of the Word, as Cain did also. For God said to him, ‘Be at still’ (Genesis 4:7 LXX); but he did not assent. Now what else is it to ‘be at rest’ than to forego purposed violence? Saying similar things to these men, He declares, ‘Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also’ (Matthew 23:26). But they did not listen to Him. For Jeremiah said, ‘Your eyes and your heart *are* for nothing but covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and violence’ (Jeremiah 22:17). Again Isaiah said, ‘You take counsel, but not of Me, and you devise plans, but not of My Spirit’ (Isaiah 30:1). God ordered things that their inner wish and thought, being brought to light, may show that God is without blame, and works no evil; and that God reveals what is hidden in the heart. When Cain was by no means at rest, He said to him, ‘To you shall be his (Abel’s) submission, and you shall rule over him’ (Genesis 4:7 LXX). Thus did He in like manner speak to Pilate, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above’ (John 19:11). God always gave up the righteous one in this life to suffering, that he, having been tested by what he suffered and endured, may at last be accepted; but the evildoer, being judged by the actions he has performed, may be rejected. Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the one who offers that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure, and thus moves God to accept the offering as from a friend.”

Ignatius of Antioch wrote¹⁰⁹ to the Ephesians commending them for righteousness as a habit and for stirring themselves up via the Eucharist¹¹⁰. Doing this they perfectly accomplished their work. In their work, they obtained righteousness by believing and salvation by confessing with their mouth.

“I have become acquainted with your name, much-beloved in God, which you have acquired by the habit of righteousness, according to the faith and love in Jesus Christ our Savior. Being the followers of God, and stirring up yourselves by the blood of God, you have perfectly accomplished the work which was appropriate to you. You hastened to see me on hearing that I came bound from Syria for the common name and hope, trusting through your prayers to be permitted to fight with beasts at Rome, that by martyrdom I may indeed become the disciple of Him ‘who has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma’ (Ephesians 5:2). I received your whole multitude in the name of God, through Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love, and your bishop in the flesh, whom I pray that you would love by Jesus Christ, and that you would all seek to be like him. Blessed be He who has granted to you to obtain such an excellent bishop.”

It is better for a man to be silent and be a Christian, than to talk and not to be one. ‘The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power’ (1 Corinthians 4:20). Men ‘believe with the heart unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ (Romans 10:10). It is good to teach, if he who speaks also acts. ‘Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:19). Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, first did and then taught, as Luke also did, ‘We have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the Gospel throughout all the Churches’ (2 Corinthians 8:18). There is nothing which is hidden from the Lord, but our very secrets are near to Him. Let us therefore do all things as those who have Him dwelling in us that we may be His temples, and He may be in us as God. Let Christ speak in us, even as He did in Paul. Let the Holy Spirit teach us to speak the things of Christ in like manner as He did.

The Law as Our Tutor or Pedagogue

“For Christ is the end (or goal) of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). “Therefore the Law was our tutor until Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25). In ancient Israel, the “tutor” (Greek: *pedagogos*) was a trustworthy slave who acted as a guide and a guardian for the heirs of the family until they reached their maturity. Once the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), the Law became written on our heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 2:15) and the Spirit teaches us better than the Law ever could (John 14:26) in a way that transcends spoken languages (Romans 8:26).

¹⁰⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, 1, 15.

¹¹⁰ That is “the blood of God”.

As John Chrysostom stated¹¹¹, “The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. For if it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. And so does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a tutor or *pedagogue* makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure”.

Going back to the giving of the Law, the original commandment was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5) and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). This has been called the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28, Matthew 22:36-40). On one occasion, one of the scribes questioning Jesus admitted that this Greatest Commandment is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33). Jesus replied that he was not far from the Kingdom of God (Mark 12:34). All he needed to do was to follow through and do as he had just said and as Abraham did and as James wrote about. The Greatest Commandment as a concept is fine, but “judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:8-13). Deeds are necessary! They prove what we believe. For more discussion on The Greatest Commandment, see the Gospel lesson for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost.

Thus, Paul wrote that, “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law” (Romans 13:8-10). Jesus said the same thing. When questioned about the Greatest Commandment by a lawyer, the lawyer asked Him, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus proceeded with the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate faith and works, the concept and the doing. The Law as our tutor gives us some guidelines and specifics as to how we can love our neighbors as ourselves.

Clement of Alexandria stated¹¹² that the coming of Christ was prophesied by the Mosaic Law to everyone who believed. Moses prophesied that an unbelieving Israel will be provoked to jealousy by the believing Gentiles; Isaiah further elaborated on this.

“Paul bears witness to the Jews, ‘that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God’ (Romans 10:2-3). For they did not know and do the will of the Law; but what they supposed, that they thought the Law wished. And they did not believe the Law as prophesying, but the bare word; and they followed through fear, not through disposition and faith. ‘Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4), who was prophesied by the Law to everyone that believeth. Whence it was said to them by Moses, ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation (Romans 10:19, Deuteronomy 32:21); that is, by one that has become disposed to obedience’. Isaiah said, ‘I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, “Here I am, here I am”, to a nation that was not called by My name’ (Isaiah 65:1), — manifestly previous to the coming of the Lord; after which to Israel, the things prophesied, are now appropriately spoken: ‘I have stretched out My hands all day long to a

¹¹¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, III, vv. 25-26.

¹¹² Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, II, 9.

rebellious people' (Isaiah 65:2). Do you see the cause of the calling from among the nations, clearly declared, by the prophet, to be the disobedience and gainsaying of the people? Then the goodness of God is shown also in their case. For Paul says, 'But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles' (Romans 11:11), who are willing to repent."

John Chrysostom commented on¹¹³ what Jesus meant by 'I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill the Law' (Matthew 5:17). Jesus was opposing the Jewish leaders who taught as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9), but He was also the heretics who said that the Old Covenant was of the devil. Repeatedly the Gospel writers noted how Jesus fulfilled what the Prophets said. In addition, the Law tried to make man righteous, but didn't have the power; Jesus came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the Law desired.

"Jesus did not say just once, 'I do not abolish the Law', but He both repeated it again, and added another and a greater thing. To the words, 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets', He subjoined, 'I did not come to destroy but to fulfill'" (Matthew 5:17).

"This not only obstructs the obstinacy of the Jews, but stops also the mouths of those heretics, who say that the old covenant is of the devil. For if Christ came to destroy the tyranny of the devil, how is this covenant not only not destroyed, but even fulfilled by Him? For Jesus said not only, 'I do not destroy it'; though this had been enough; but 'I even fulfill it', which are the words of one so far from opposing himself, as to be even establishing it."

"And how, one may ask, did He not destroy it? In what way did He rather fulfill either the Law or the prophets? The prophets He fulfilled, inasmuch as He confirmed by His actions all that had been said concerning Him; therefore the evangelists used to say¹¹⁴ in each case, 'That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet'. Both when He was born (Matthew 1:22-23), and when the children sung that wondrous hymn to Him, and when He sat on the donkey (Matthew 21:5-16), and in very many more instances He worked this same fulfillment; all these things would have been unfulfilled, if He had not come. But the Law He fulfilled, not in one way only, but in a second and third way also. In one way, He fulfilled the Law by transgressing none of the precepts of the Law. That He did fulfill it all, listen to what He said to John the Baptist. 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15). And to the Jews also He said, 'Which of you convicts Me of sin' (John 8:46). And to His disciples again, 'The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me' (John 14:30). And the prophet too from the first had said that 'He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth'" (Isaiah 53:9).

"This then was one sense in which He fulfilled it. Another, that He did the same through us also; for this is the marvel that He not only Himself fulfilled it, but He granted this to us likewise. This Paul also declared saying, 'Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Romans 10:4). And he said also, that 'He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of

¹¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVI, 3.

¹¹⁴ There are many, many times in the four Gospels where the writer says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet".

the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Romans 8:3-4). And again, 'Do we then make void the Law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law' (Romans 3:31). Since the Law was laboring at this, to make man righteous, but had no power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the Law desired. What the Law could not do by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He said, 'I did not come to destroy the Law'" (Matthew 5:17).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹¹⁵ that Jesus came at the end of the ages to establish the Law that He had given at Mt. Sinai. He was so bold and in-your-face about this that He astonished people. The Prophets of old perceived this! They understood that the Scriptures did not refer to themselves, but to others. Jesus was different from everyone else; He didn't refer to others, but said that everyone must no longer drink from others, but from Himself.

"Why do we wait, and why do we delay, and not come with all eagerness and diligence to the feast¹¹⁶, trusting that it is Jesus who calls us? He is all things for us, and was laden in ten thousand ways for our salvation; He hungered and thirsted for us, though He gives us food and drink in His saving gifts. This is His glory; this the miracle of His divinity, that He exchanged our sufferings for His happiness. For, being life, He died that He might make us alive; being the Word, He became flesh, that He might instruct the flesh in the Word; and being the fountain of life, He thirsted our thirst, that thereby He might urge us to the feast. He said, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink' (John 7:37). At that time, Moses proclaimed the beginning of the feast, said, 'This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you' (Exodus 12:2). But the Lord, Who came down in 'the end of the ages' (Hebrews 9:26), proclaimed a different day, not as though He would abolish the Law, far from it, but that He should establish the Law, and be the end of the Law. 'For Christ *is* the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Romans 10:4); as the blessed Paul said, 'Do we then make void the Law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law' (Romans 3:31). Now these things astonished even the officers who were sent by the Jews, so that wondering they said to the Pharisees, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' (John 7:46). What was it then that astonished those officers, or what was it which so affected the men as to make them marvel? It was nothing but the boldness and authority of our Savior. For when of old time prophets and scribes studied the Scriptures, they perceived that what they read did not refer to themselves, but to others. Moses, for instance, said 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear' (Deuteronomy 18:15). Isaiah again, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). Others prophesied in different and various ways, concerning the Lord. But by the Lord, of Himself, and of no other, were these things prophesied; to Himself He limited them all, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink' (John 7:37) — not to any other person, but to 'Me.'

¹¹⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XIV, 4.

¹¹⁶ That is, the Feast of Pascha (Easter in the West).

A man may indeed hear from those concerning My coming, but he must not hereafter drink from others, but from Me.”

Clement of Alexandria pointed out¹¹⁷ how Jesus spoke to the Rich Young Ruler; He said it was good that he kept the Mosaic Law as preparatory discipline. But the Ruler had not yet come to true life. He needed to take on salvation as his own, not as a slave making slaves, but sons, brethren, and fellow-heirs, who perform the Father’s will.

“Jesus, accordingly, does not charge him with not having fulfilled all things out of the Law, but loves him, and fondly welcomes his obedience in what he had learned. He says that he is not perfect as respects eternal life, inasmuch as he had not fulfilled what is perfect, and that he is a doer indeed of the Law, but idle at the true life. Those things, indeed, are good. Who denies it? For ‘therefore the Law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good’ (Romans 7:12), as far as a sort of training with fear and preparatory discipline goes, leading as it did to the culmination of legislation and to grace (Galatians 3:24). But Christ is the fulfillment ‘of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4); not as a slave making slaves, but sons, brethren, and fellow-heirs, who perform the Father’s will.”

“Jesus said to the rich young ruler, ‘If you want to be perfect’ (Matthew 19:21). Consequently he was not yet perfect. And divinely the expression ‘if you want to’ showed the self-determination of the soul speaking with Him. For choice depended on the man as being free, but the gift on God as the Lord. He gives to those who are willing and are exceedingly earnest, and ask, that so their salvation may become their own. For God does not compel (for compulsion is repugnant to God), but supplies to those who seek, bestows on those who ask, and opens to those who knock” (Matthew 7:7).

Paul stated, ‘Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm’ (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

John Chrysostom stated¹¹⁸ that all heresies arise due to a lack of love among the brethren. From envy comes a desire for power; from a love of power come heresies. Christ as the end of the Law has to do with love, which is the antidote for heresies. The end of medicine is health; where there is health, no medicine is needed; so where there is love, there is no need of much commanding.

“Nothing is as injurious to mankind as to undervalue friendship, and not to cultivate it with the greatest care; as nothing, on the other hand, is so beneficial, as to pursue it to the utmost of our power. This Christ has shown, where He says, ‘Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven’ (Matthew 18:19); and again, ‘Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold’ (Matthew 24:12). This has been the occasion of all heresies. For men, because they didn’t love their brethren, have envied those who were in high repute, and

¹¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, On the Salvation of the Rich Man, 9-10.

¹¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, II, vv. 5-7.

from envying, they have become eager for power, and from a love of power have introduced heresies. On this account Paul told Timothy, ‘remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine’ (1 Timothy 1:3), now shows that the manner in which this may be effected is by love. When Paul says, ‘Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4), that is, its fulfillment, this is connected with love, so this is a commandment implied in love. The end of medicine is health, but where there is health, there is no need to make much ado; so where there is love, there is no need of much commanding. But what sort of love does he speak of? He speaks of that which is sincere, which is not merely in words but which flows from the inclination, sentiment and sympathy. ‘From a pure heart’, he says, either with respect to a right conversation or sincere affection. An impure life produces divisions. ‘For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed’ (John 3:20). There is indeed a friendship even among the wicked. Robbers and murderers may love one another, but this is not ‘from a good conscience’, not ‘from a pure’ but from an impure ‘heart’, not from ‘faith unfeigned’, but from that which is false and hypocritical. For faith points out the truth, and a sincere faith produces love, which he who truly believes in God cannot endure to lay aside.”

John Chrysostom stated¹¹⁹ that if someone had used a ladder to get up to a higher place, he would not need the ladder anymore, but he would be grateful for the ladder. If a poor man had silver, and then found gold, but couldn’t keep both, he would abandon the silver. The Law is like the ladder and the silver; its purpose is to lead us to Christ. When the sun has appeared, there is no point to sit by a candle.

“If the Law had not been, grace would not have been given. Why? Because it became a sort of bridge; for when it was impossible to mount on high from a state of great abasement, a ladder was formed. But he who has ascended no longer has need of the ladder; yet he does not despise it, but is even grateful for it. For it has placed him in such a position, as no longer to require it. Yet for this very reason, that he does not require it, it is just that he should acknowledge his obligation, for he could not fly up. Thus is it with the Law, it has led us up on high; therefore it was gain, but for the future we count it loss. How? Not because it is loss, but because grace is far greater. For as a poor man, that was hungry, as long as he has silver, escapes hunger, but when he finds gold, and it is not allowable to keep both, considers it loss to retain the silver, and having thrown it away, takes the gold coin. So also here! Not because the silver is loss, for it is not; but because it is impossible to take both at once, but it is necessary to leave one. The Law then is not loss, but it is loss for a man to cleave to the Law, and desert Christ. It is then loss when it leads us away from Christ. But if it sends us on to Him, it is no longer so. But why doesn’t the Law allow us to come to Christ? For this very cause, Paul tells us, the Law was given. And Christ is the fulfilling of the Law, and Christ is the end of the Law. It does allow us if we want to. ‘Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4). He, who obeys the Law, leaves the Law itself¹²⁰. It allows, if we

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, XI, vv. 7-10.

¹²⁰ That is, to go on to grace.

pay attention to it, but if we do not pay attention, it does not allow. ‘Paul said, ‘I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord’. Why, he means, do I say this of the Law? Is not the world good? Is not the present life good? But if they draw me away from Christ, I count these things loss. Why? Paul counts them loss ‘for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord’ (Philippians 3:8). For when the sun has appeared, it is loss to sit by a candle: so that the loss comes by comparison, by the superiority of the other.’”

Leo the Great stated¹²¹ that all the details of the Law testified of Christ in some way, since Christ is the “End of the Law”, not by annulling but by fulfilling it. Regarding moral precepts, no Old Testament decree is rejected, but many are amplified by the Gospel.

“There is no believer, dearly-beloved, to whom the gifts of grace are denied; so there is no one who is not a debtor in the matter of Christian discipline. Although the severity of the mystic Law is done away, yet the benefits of its voluntary observance have increased. As the Evangelist John says, ‘The Law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). For all things that, according to the Law, went before, whether in the circumcision of the flesh, or in the multitude of victims, or in the keeping of the Sabbath, testified of Christ, and foretold the grace of Christ. He is ‘the end of the Law’ (Romans 10:4), not by annulling, but by fulfilling its meanings. Although He is at once the Author of the Old and of the New, yet He changed the symbolic rites connected with the promises, because He accomplished the promises and put an end to the announcement by the coming of the Announced. But in the matter of moral precepts, no decrees of the earlier Testament are rejected, but many of them are amplified by the Gospel teaching. Thus the things which give salvation are more perfect and clearer than those which promise a Savior.”

The Law as a Rigid Rule Book

Some people try to keep the Law without loving the Lawgiver. From our Epistle lesson, “Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the Law shall live by that righteousness” (Romans 10:5). Here Paul is quoting loosely from Leviticus 18:5 which reads, “And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments which a man shall do them and he shall live by them.” These words of Moses are also quoted by Nehemiah and Ezekiel in a negative context where the people hadn’t kept the Lord’s statutes and judgments and were suffering or were about to suffer the consequences (Nehemiah 9:29, Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21).

Paul follows by quoting Moses loosely again to say that the righteousness of faith does not involve heroic efforts to bring Christ down from heaven or up from the abyss. It is not difficult, and is really very simple; it is near you in your mouth and in your heart (Romans 10:6-8). The full text of this as written by Moses reads, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it?’ But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and

¹²¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons, 63, v.

in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). Moses went on to say that the Lord’s people had a choice. If they loved the Lord and walked in His ways, they would have life and prosperity; if they were drawn away to worship other gods, they would have death and adversity (Deuteronomy 30:15-17).

Paul continued to clarify Moses’ words: Moses said, “The Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (Deuteronomy 30:14, Romans 10:8). Regarding this, Paul said, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). We note that Paul said, “With the heart man believes,” and not just with the head man believes.

Under the Old Covenant people did this also. Contained within the details of the sacrificial statutes and festivals was Jesus as the Lamb of God who would be raised on the third day. This is why Moses added, “That you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:12, 13, 14). Paul omitted “observing it,” since the sacrifice of the Lamb of God had by then been made once for all. In Moses’ day, the Law continually pointed forward to the Lamb of God. Thus Paul and Moses both taught righteousness by faith, but from different viewpoints in time. “But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Romans 3:21).

The purpose of the giving of the Law was to lead the people of God to Christ (Romans 10:4). As such, the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Adam knew major aspects of the Law. Tertullian expressed this¹²² as follows, “For in this law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself, etc.”. John Cassian added¹²³ that how else could Abel have known to offer to God a sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock using the fat thereof (Genesis 4:4), unless he had been taught by the Law (Exodus 13:12, Leviticus 3:7-10)? How could Noah have distinguished what animals were clean and what were unclean (Genesis 7:2), when the commandment of the Law (Deuteronomy 14) had not yet made a distinction?

John Chrysostom put it¹²⁴ this way, “For what was the object of the Law? To make man righteous! But it had not the power, for no one fulfilled it. This then was the end of the Law and to this it looked throughout; and for this all its parts were made: its feasts and commandments, and sacrifices, and all besides, that man might be justified. But this end Christ gave a fuller accomplishment through faith. Do not be afraid then, he says, as if transgressing the Law in having come over to the Faith. For then do you transgress it, when for it you do not believe Christ. If you believe in Him, then you have fulfilled it also, and much more than it commanded. You have received a much greater righteousness!”

¹²² Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, I, iii, 2.

¹²³ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, viii, 23.

¹²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 4.

Chrysostom went on¹²⁵ to refute the notion that Grace is easy and cheap while there is a virtue manifested in works. Included in faith is a requirement for a wakeful soul that does not yield to listlessness. “Thus when one is required to believe, there is reasoning which confuses and makes havoc of the minds of most men, and it takes a soul of some vigor to shake them thoroughly off. This is a soul that takes in things beyond expectation, and does not stumble at appearances.” The Jews opposing Paul not only ridiculed Grace as too easy, but even stressed that it was not possible to be justified by faith.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹²⁶ that everyone who was anxious about the Law ran to Christ, since the Law was our pedagogue. The Law never hindered anyone, but even exhorted people to do so.

“As many as feared God, and were anxious about His Law, these ran to Christ, and were all saved. He said to His disciples, ‘Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 10:6). Many more Samaritans believed, when the Lord had stayed with them two days, ‘He stayed there two days, and many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world”’ (John 4:40-42). Paul likewise declares, ‘And so all Israel will be saved’ (Romans 11:26); but he has also said that the Law was our pedagogue to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Let them not therefore ascribe to the Law the unbelief of certain among them. For the Law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God. The Law even exhorted them (Numbers 21:8) to do so, saying that men can be saved in no other way (Acts 4:12) from the old wound of the serpent than by believing in Him who, in the likeness of sinful flesh, is lifted up from the earth upon the tree of martyrdom (John 12:32), and draws all people to Himself (John 3:14), and raises the dead.”

Like them, some people have tried to keep the Law without honoring the Lawgiver. The result is usually the Law being perceived as a rigid rule-book unrelated to the Lawgiver. For example, the Jewish leaders were seeking the death penalty for Jesus because He healed people on the Sabbath (John 5:9-10). Doing good had been the intent of the Sabbath as a time for rest and concentration on the things of God (Luke 6:6-11, Exodus 20:10-11, 31:15, Numbers 10:10, Leviticus 24:5-9, Ezekiel 20:12, 20). One who loves and honors the Lawgiver can see this. The Jewish leaders, however, could only see the letter of the Law that demanded the death penalty for anyone “breaking” the Sabbath rest laws (Exodus 31:13-17). And the zeal of the Jewish leaders for the letter of the Law was very strong. After all, it was given by God!!

By not seeking the righteousness of faith that Moses (and Paul) taught, they were seeking to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3). But what did their own righteousness produce? They ignored the details of the Law when it conflicted with their personal agenda (John 7:45-52, 12:9-19; 11:43-53; Matthew 26:3-5). The ultimate example of this is the crucifixion of the Lawgiver.

¹²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, vv. 6-9.

¹²⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, ii, 7.

Isaiah wrote, “For all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isaiah 64:6). This was the reason the Law contained a detailed requirement for blood sacrifices and this is why Moses wrote “that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:12, 13, 14). One of the purposes of the Law was to identify what is sin in order that repentance and faith might be forthcoming (Romans 7:7ff).

When the Light of God (John 1:4-5) exposes sin in peoples’ lives (John 1:9-11) and they reject the light because they love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-21), they open themselves up for demonic activity such as in the Gospel lesson. Sometimes, as in the Gospel lesson and as in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, being given over to the demonic activity produced a gratitude for the things of God. King Nebuchadnezzar was given over to demons for seven years and lived like an animal, eating grass like a cow. Following that seven years, he repented and his kingdom was restored to him (Daniel 4:28-37). Similarly, Paul delivered one of the men of Corinth over to Satan in order that his spirit might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The man repented and was restored to the Church (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). In other cases, however, the demonic activity only produced blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:24, 31-32, Matthew 12:14, 1 Corinthians 2:8) and a continued zeal to establish one’s own righteousness apart from God (Romans 10:3).

Confessing with Our Mouth

Paul said, “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); 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” (Romans 10:6-9). Also: “Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). And: “For it is written: ‘*As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God*’” (Romans 14:11).

Paul was quoting loosely from Moses. “It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?’ The word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:12-14).

The Lord had said, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:8-12). Therefore confessing and acknowledging the Lord with our mouth is an important part of Christianity. And Paul defines this as “the righteousness of faith” (Romans 10:6).

Clement of Alexandria noted¹²⁷ that we are saved by the confession of our mouth, which is the perfect righteousness. But our righteousness does not stop there; we must also love in deed and in truth, and be an example with our lives.

“‘With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ (Romans 10:10). Wherefore the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’ (Romans 10:11); that is, the word of faith which we preach: ‘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’ (Romans 10:9). There is clearly described the perfect righteousness, fulfilled both in practice and contemplation. We are to bless those who persecute us; bless and do not curse’ (Romans 12:14). For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God’ (2 Corinthians 1:12). Paul respects knowledge; he also calls the common ‘teaching of faith’ the savor of knowledge. ‘But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart in the reading of the Old Testament’ (2 Corinthians 3:14), not being uncovered by turning to the Lord. To those capable of perceiving he showed resurrection, that of the life still in the flesh, creeping on its belly. Christ applied the name ‘brood of vipers’ to the voluptuous, who serve the belly and the pudenda, and cut off one another’s heads for the sake of worldly pleasures. John says, ‘My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth’ (1 John 3:18-19). If ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16), piety also is love; ‘there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear’ (1 John 4:18). ‘This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments’ (1 John 5:3). To him who desires to know, it is written, ‘But be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity’ (1 Timothy 4:12). For perfection in faith differs, I think, from ordinary faith.

Ambrose of Milan compared¹²⁸ confession with the mouth to silver trumpets, where one represents the Spirit (understood by the heart) and the other the understanding (expressed by the mouth). Both need to be in harmony. These trumpets call us to come to the Tabernacle of God, where the Lord is, to see the divine works.

“If anyone desires to see this Image of God, he must love God, that he may be loved by God. He must be no longer a servant but a friend, because he has kept the commandments of God, that he may enter into the cloud where God is (Exodus 24:15). Let him make for himself two silver trumpets of hammered work (Numbers 10:2-6), that is, composed of precious words, from which not a harsh shrill sound with dread-inspiring voice may be uttered, but from which high thanks to God may be poured forth with continuous exultation. For by the voice of such trumpets the dead are raised, not indeed by the sound of the metal, but aroused by the word of truth. Perhaps it is those two trumpets by which Paul, through the Divine Spirit, spoke when he said, ‘I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also

¹²⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 16.

¹²⁸ Ambrose of Milan, *Two Books on the Decease of His Brother Saytrus*, II, 110-112.

sing with the understanding' (1 Corinthians 14:15); for the one without the other seems by no means to have perfect pitch."

"Yet it is not everyone's business to sound each trumpet, nor everyone's business to call together the whole assembly. That prerogative is granted to the priests alone (Numbers 10:8), and the ministers of God who sound the trumpets, so that whoever shall hear will follow to where the glory of the Lord is. The trumpets call us to come to the tabernacle of witness, that we may be able to see the divine works, and that we may merit that appointed and eternal home for the entire succession of our posterity. Then is the war finished and the enemy put to flight, when the grace of the Spirit and the energy of the soul act together."

"These are beneficial trumpets also, if one believes with the heart, and confess with the mouth; 'For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation' (Romans 10:10). With this twofold trumpet man arrives at that holy land, namely, the grace of the resurrection. Let them always sound to us, that we may always hear the voice of God"

Ambrose of Milan compared¹²⁹ the declaring of our sins in confession with our mouth with the raising of Lazarus, who had been dead four days. Once we confess, we are freed from the darkness of prison, the stench of our sins is removed, our hands are unbound and our face-covering is removed which veiled the truth of the grace which we have received.

"The Lord Jesus, seeing the heavy burden of the sinner, weeps as He wept for Lazarus (John 9:35). He has compassion on His beloved, and says to him that is dead, 'Come forth' (John 9:43), that is, 'You who lie in darkness of conscience, and in the squalor of your sins, as in the prison-house of the guilty, come forth, declare your sins that you may be justified'. 'With the mouth confession is made unto salvation'" (Romans 10:10).

"If you have confessed at the call of Christ the bars will be broken, and every chain loosened, even if the stench of the bodily corruption is grievous. Lazarus had been dead four days and his flesh stank in the tomb; but He Whose flesh saw no corruption was three days in the sepulcher, for He knew no evils of the flesh. However great, then, the stench of the dead body may be, it is all done away as soon as the sacred ointment has shed its odor; and the dead rises again, and the command is given to loosen his hands who till now was in sin. The covering is taken from his face which veiled the truth of the grace which he had received. But since he has received forgiveness, the command is given to uncover his face, to lay bare his features. For he whose sin is forgiven has nothing to be ashamed of."

What is Salvation?

Paul said, "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" (Romans 10:9).

Yet the Apostle John rarely used the word "Salvation", and generally only used it to refer to the Second Coming of Christ. For example"

¹²⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Two Books Concerning Repentance*, II, vii, 57-58.

“A great multitude was crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:10)

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down’” (Revelation 12:10).

“After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord our God!’” (Revelation 19:1)

Instead the Apostle John spoke of “Salvation” in the following terms, where the emphasis is on what we do¹³⁰:

- 1 John 1:7-8: “Walk in the light as He is in the light”.
- 1 John 1:9-10: “Confess our sins; He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.
- 1 John 2:3-6: “By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him’, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”.
- 1 John 2:7: “I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning”.
- 1 John 2:8-10: Again, a new commandment I write to you; love one another”.
- 1 John 2:15: “Do not love the world or the things in the world”.
- 1 John 2:22-24: We must confess that Jesus is the Christ; otherwise we deny the Father also.
- Regarding the Second Coming

Clement of Rome pointed out¹³¹ that salvation begins with repentance; this has been the case from the beginning and is still true. In every age the Lord has granted a place for repentance for those who desire to be converted to Him.

“These things, beloved, we write to you, not merely to admonish you of your duty, but also to remind ourselves. We are both struggling in the same arena, and the same conflict is assigned to both of us. Let us give up vain and fruitless cares, and approach the glorious and venerable rule of our holy calling. Let us attend to what is good, pleasing, and acceptable in the sight of Him who formed us. Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God, which having been shed for our salvation has set the grace of repentance before the whole world. Let us turn to every age that has passed, and learn that, from generation to generation, the Lord has granted a place of repentance to all such as would be converted to Him. Noah preached repentance, and as many as listened to him were saved¹³². Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites (Jonah 3); but they repented of their sins, propitiated God by prayer, and obtained salvation, although they were aliens to the covenant of God.”

¹³⁰ A careful reading of Paul’s writings reveals the same thing.

¹³¹ Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 7, 18.

¹³² Genesis 7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5

“Concerning David, God said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22); and in everlasting mercy have I anointed him?’ (Psalm 89:20) Yet this very man said to God, ‘Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin *is* always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Your sight’” (Psalm 51:1-4).

Irenaeus of Lyons summarized¹³³ what it was to be saved. Christ, who was always present with the Father, became incarnate and was made man to recover us back to the image and likeness of God, which we had lost in the Fall of Adam. We who had fallen under the power of sin could attain salvation in no other way. Christ did these things that He might rule over the living and the dead.

“It has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind, was in these last days, according to the time appointed by the Father, united to His own workmanship, inasmuch as He became a man liable to suffering. It follows that every objection is set aside of those who say, ‘If our Lord was born at that time, Christ had therefore no previous existence’. I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning. When He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings (1 Corinthians 15:47), and furnished us in a brief, comprehensive manner with salvation. What we had lost in Adam — namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God — that we might recover in Christ Jesus.”

“It was not possible that the man who had once for all been conquered, and who had been destroyed through disobedience, could reform himself, and obtain the prize of victory. It was also impossible that we could attain to salvation when we had fallen under the power of sin. The Son affected both these things, being the Word of God, descending from the Father, becoming incarnate, stooping low, even to death, and consummating the arranged plan of our salvation. Paul, exhorting us unhesitatingly to believe, says, “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’ (Romans 10:6-7)? Then he continues, ‘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’ (Romans 10:9). Paul gives the reason why the Son of God did these things, saying, ‘For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living’ (Romans 14:9). Again, Paul declares, ‘But we preach Christ crucified’ (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul adds, ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?’” (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Irenaeus continued to say¹³⁴ that Christ fought for the fathers, bound the strong man and set the weak free. He caused man to become one with God and brought both God and man to

¹³³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, xviii, 1-2.

¹³⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, xviii, 6-7.

friendship and harmony. The Mosaic Law testified that sin was not a king, but a robber. The Law merely pointed out what sin was; it didn't destroy it. Sin had drawn man into bondage, where he was held by death, sin needed to be destroyed by man, in order that man should go forth from death.

“The Son of God is truly good and patient, the Word of God the Father having been made the Son of man. He fought and conquered; for He was man contending for the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely. He bound the strong man¹³⁵, and set free the weak (that is, us), and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. He is a most holy and merciful Lord, and loves the human race.”

“Therefore He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become one with God. Unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. Again, unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. Unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. Christ, the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, needed to bring both to friendship and harmony, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. In what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from the Father through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Christ passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God. Those who assert that He just appeared, and was neither born in the flesh nor truly made man, are as yet under the old condemnation, and are influenced by sin. By their showing, death has not been vanquished, which ‘reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam’ (Romans 5:14). The Mosaic Law testified of sin: it showed that it was not a king, but a robber; it revealed it as a murderer. It also laid a weighty burden upon man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death. Since the Law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out, but did not destroy it. Sin had no dominion over the spirit, just over man. He, who was to destroy sin, and redeem man from under the power of death, should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man. Man had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, sin needed to be destroyed by man, that man should go forth from death. Just as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally molded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners (Romans 5:19), and forfeited life. So was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: ‘*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He*’ (Deuteronomy 32:4). But if, not having been made flesh, He only appeared as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did was God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and revive man; and therefore His works are true.”

¹³⁵ That is, the demons and their leader. Matthew 12:29

Justin Martyr noted¹³⁶ that it is important that we make an effort to oppose the demons who are trying to lead us away from the Faith.

“We forewarn you to be on your guard, lest those demons that we have been accusing should deceive you, and quite divert you from reading and understanding what we say. They strive to hold you their slaves and servants; and sometimes by appearances in dreams, and sometimes by magical impositions, they subdue all who make no strong opposing effort for their own salvation. Since our persuasion by the Word, we stand aloof from the demons, and follow the only unbegotten God through His Son. We formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone; we formerly used magical arts, but now dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, but now bring what we have into a common stock, and give to everyone in need. We hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe. Now since the coming of Christ, we live as brothers with them, pray for our enemies and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ. Our desire is that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all.”

Justin Martyr wrote¹³⁷ about the contrast between what Christ taught about salvation and what the world of philosophy taught. Christ taught salvation for the whole man: body, soul and spirit; the world didn't include any hope for the body. The demons, on the other hand, sought to corrupt the teaching that Christ gave.

“The resurrection is a resurrection of the flesh which died. For the spirit doesn't die; the soul is in the body, and without a soul it cannot live. The body, when the soul leaves it, is not. For the body is the house of the soul; and the soul the house of the spirit. These three, in all those who cherish a sincere hope and unquestioning faith in God, will be saved. Consider such arguments as are suited to this world, that even according to them, it is possible that the flesh can be regenerated. Christ in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh; why do we endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments? We are backsliding when we listen to such an argument such as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? This we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Savior said this, and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing, beyond what we heard from Pythagoras and Plato and their entire band, did He bring us? But now He has come proclaiming the good news of a new and strange hope to men. Indeed it was a strange and new thing for God to promise that He would not just keep incorruption forever, but would make corruption into incorruption. Because the prince of wickedness could in no other way corrupt the truth, he sent his apostles (evil men who introduced pestilent doctrines), choosing them from among those who crucified our Savior. These men bore the Name of the Savior, but did the works of him that sent them, through whom the Name itself has been spoken against.”

¹³⁶ Justin Martyr, First Apology, 14.

¹³⁷ Justin Martyr, On the Resurrection, 10.

