

THE MYSTERY OF HELL
And How to Avoid It
PAUL’S REVELATIONS

November 03, 2024
5th Sunday of Luke
Revision E

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

In the West today’s Gospel lesson is used at about the same time in the Church year as in the East.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31.....1234
 Introduction.....1234
 What is Abraham’s Bosom and How Are Souls There?.....1235
 What Souls Experience in Hades.....1236
 Christ Emptied Abraham’s Bosom at His Resurrection.....1240
 What is It Like After Death?.....1245
 The Eternal Hopelessness in Hades.....1250
 Final Thoughts.....1254
 Where Did Purgatory Come From?.....1255
 The Importance of Moses and the Prophets.....1258
 Living in Luxury Can Be Dangerous.....1258
 Blessed Are the Poor.....1262
 Descriptions of Hell in the Scriptures.....1271
 Another View of the Soul after Death.....1274

Introduction

The Gospel lesson is one part of a series of teachings on the Kingdom of God (see below) that, except for the last two, is found only in Luke. This series contains a number of parables, events, and stories addressing various aspects of the Kingdom of God:

Luke 15	The Lost Sheep	Parable
Luke 15	The Lost Coin	Story
Luke 15	The Prodigal Son	Story
Luke 16	The Unjust Steward	Story
Luke 16	The Rich Man & Lazarus	
Luke 17	The Ten Lepers	Event
Luke 18	The Tenacious Widow	Parable
Luke 18	The Pharisee and the Publican	Parable
Luke 18, Matthew 19, Mark 10	The Rich Young Ruler	Event
Luke 18, Mark 10	The Blind Man of Jericho	Event

In this series, some are called parables, some aren’t. Parables are fictional “what-if” stories used to teach a moral lesson. Some of the stories in this series are not called parables, and since this one names Lazarus as a certain individual (rather than just “a poor man”), the implication is that this event actually happened.

Copyright © Mark Kern 2018

This series of kingdom teachings from Luke took place in late 29 AD and early 30 AD as Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem knowing He would be crucified. Two of these lessons – The Prodigal Son and the Pharisee and the Publican – are used in the Eastern Church during the weeks just prior to Lent. The Prodigal Son lesson is also used in the West during Lent. In addition, the Eastern lectionary covers the Ten Lepers, the Rich Young Ruler and the Blind Man of Jericho on successive Sundays: the 12th, 13th and 14th Sundays of Luke. The other four are used as weekday readings in the Eastern lectionary.

The Gospel lesson describes a conversation between a man in Hades and one in Abraham's bosom. The rich man in Hades may not have done anything grossly immoral or evil in the eyes of the world, but, like many people in our affluent Western society today, he lived to please himself in any way he could; pleasure was his god. We Americans are similarly obsessed with entertainment and sensual gratification. We seek to be entertained every minute, thus preventing the silence that allows one to pray or commune with God. Yet we are indeed accountable to Him. Since he created us with free-will that we might respond to His great love for us, He beckons us to love Him with all our being and our neighbor (made in God's image) as we love ourselves.

The beggar, Lazarus, who had been helpless and in misery in this life, was carried to a place of great love, comfort and glory – sitting with Abraham in "Abraham's bosom". The Lord, who told this story also said that people from all over the world would thus sit down with Abraham, while those who were his physical children, but unbelieving, would be left out (Matthew 8:11-12). In contrast the rich man was in a state of torment due to great heat from a flame and very thirsty to say the least!

What is Abraham's Bosom and How Are Souls There?

Lazarus and the rich man (often called "Dives", which is Greek for "rich man") were both in Hades, which is the place of the dead. In Greek mythology, Hades was ruled by the Greek god Hades¹. The deepest, darkest part of Hades was called "Tartarus". The Apostle Peter referred to Tartarus as being the place where the angels who sinned are kept. "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but consigning to Tartarus² in pits of gloom, delivered them kept for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 Greek text).

In the story about Lazarus and Dives, Christ said, "The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame'" (Luke 16:22-24).

Two different interpretations from the Church Fathers are presented in this Study. The majority opinion is covered as follows, while the minority opinion is included as Appendix B.

¹ In Roman mythology, the Greek god Hades is called "Pluto".

² Many English translations translate the Greek word *tartarosas* as "hell".

What Souls Experience in Hades

Both Lazarus and Dives did not have a physical body; their physical bodies were still in whatever grave they were buried in. Yet the souls of both Lazarus and Dives were still alive and were aware of their surroundings. One might ask, “How can the soul of Dives feel torment without a body?” “How can the soul of Lazarus feel comfort without a body?” We are not told this, and these are some of the mysteries of hell.

Other mysteries of hell are: Dives has eyes as he looks up to see Abraham, even though he has just a soul, but no physical body. Dives speaks to Abraham, who he can see across a great gulf. Dives asks Abraham to send Lazarus, whom he despised in his life, to help cool his tongue. How is it possible for disembodied souls to experience such things that we might think only apply to bodies? We are not told a great deal about how this can happen.

Tertullian of Carthage addressed³ the idea of Lazarus and Dives in Hades actually experiencing feelings such as comfort and torment. He stated that there must be something corporeal about the soul. The same argument applies to the angels who sinned and who are consigned to Tartarus. Angels are bodiless creatures, just like souls.

“In the Gospel itself there is the clearest evidence for the corporeal nature of the soul. In hell the soul of a certain man is in torment, punished in flames, suffering excruciating thirst, and imploring from the finger of a happier soul, for his tongue, the solace of a drop of water. Do you suppose that this end of the blessed poor man and the miserable rich man is only imaginary? Then why the name of Lazarus in this narrative, if the circumstance is not a real occurrence? But even if it is to be regarded as imaginary, it will still be a testimony to truth and reality. For unless the soul possessed corporeality, the image of a soul could not possibly contain a finger of a bodily substance; nor would the Scripture pretend a statement about the limbs of a body, if these had no existence. But what is that which is removed to Hades after the separation of the body; which is there detained; which is reserved until the day of judgment; to which Christ also, on dying, descended? I imagine it is the souls of the patriarchs. But why all this, if the soul is nothing in its subterranean abode? For *nothing* it certainly is, if it is not a bodily substance. For whatever is incorporeal is incapable of being kept and guarded in any way; it is also exempt from either punishment or refreshment. That must be a body, by which punishment and refreshment can be experienced. Therefore, whatever amount of punishment or refreshment the soul tastes in Hades, in its prison or lodging, in the fire or in Abraham’s bosom, it gives proof thereby of its own corporeality. For an incorporeal thing suffers nothing, not having that which makes it capable of suffering; else, if it has such capacity, it must be a bodily substance.”

Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁴ that souls preserve the same form that the body had in this life so that they are recognizable in Hades. The souls remember what they did in their lifetime in the body.

³ Tertullian of Carthage, [A Treatise on the Soul](#), I, ix, 7.

⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, [Against Heresies](#), II, xxxiv, 1.

“The Lord has taught with very great fullness, that souls not only continue to exist, but that they preserve the same form in their separate state as the body had to which they were adapted. They remember the deeds which they did in this state of existence, and from which they have now ceased, as is recorded in that narrative respecting the rich man and that Lazarus who found repose in the bosom of Abraham. In this account He states that Dives knew Lazarus after death, and Abraham in like manner, and that each one of these persons continued in his own proper position. Dives requested Lazarus to be sent to relieve him; Lazarus, on whom he did not formerly bestow even the crumbs which fell from his table. He tells us also of the answer given by Abraham, who was acquainted not only with what respected himself, but he knew Dives also. Dives enjoined those who did not wish to come into that place of torment to believe Moses and the prophets, and to receive the preaching of Him who was to rise again from the dead. By these things, then, it is plainly declared that souls continue to exist; that they do not pass from body to body; that they possess the form of a man, so that they may be recognized, and retain the memory of things in this world. Moreover, this tells us that the gift of prophecy was possessed by Abraham, and that each class of souls receives a habitation such as it has deserved, even before the judgment.”

Tertullian of Carthage pointed out⁵ that the soul has eyes, ears, a finger, a tongue, etc. These the soul received at Creation, and these are what characterizes the human body and by these we are known.

“Regarding the figure of the human soul, you can well imagine that it is none other than the human form; indeed, none other than the shape of that body which each individual soul animates and moves about. This we may at once be induced to admit from contemplating man’s original formation. Carefully consider, after God had breathed upon the face of man the breath of life, and man had consequently become a living soul, surely that breath must have passed through the face into the interior structure. It spread itself throughout all the spaces of the body; and as soon as by the divine inspiration it had become condensed, it must have impressed itself on each internal feature. By this densifying process, there arose a fixing of the soul’s corporeity; and by the impression its figure was formed and molded. This is the inner man, different from the outer, but yet one in the twofold condition. It, too, has eyes and ears of its own, by means of which Paul must have heard and seen the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:2-4); it has, moreover all the other members of the body by the help of which it effects all processes of thinking and all activity in dreams. Thus, it happens that the rich man in hell has a tongue and poor Lazarus a finger and Abraham a bosom (Luke 16:23-24). By these features also the souls of the martyrs under the altar (Revelation 6:9) are distinguished and known. The soul indeed which in the beginning was associated with Adam’s body, which grew with its growth and was molded after its form proved to be the germ both of the entire substance of the human soul and of that part of creation.”

⁵ Tertullian of Carthage, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 9.

Tertullian of Carthage also described⁶ how the soul needs to work in conjunction with the body of its flesh. The soul can think, will and desire, but it cannot accomplish any deeds without its body. At the Last Judgment, the whole man (body and soul) will be judged based on what the whole man has actually done. Souls in Hades are able to get a foretaste of what is in store for them at the Last Judgement, such as was the case with Dives and Lazarus.

“Some suppose that the flesh will have to be present at the *final* judgment, because otherwise the soul would be incapable of suffering pain or pleasure, as being incorporeal; for this is the common opinion. We, however, maintain, that the soul is corporeal, possessing a peculiar kind of solidity in its nature, such as enables it both to perceive and suffer. That souls are even now susceptible to torment and to blessing in Hades, though they have no body, and notwithstanding their separation from the flesh, is proved by the case of Lazarus. Someone may say: Since, then, the soul has a substance of its own, it will be sufficiently endowed with the ability to suffer and sense, so as not to require the presence of the flesh. No, no, is my reply. It will still need the flesh; not as being unable to feel anything without the help of the flesh, but because it is necessary that it should possess such a faculty along with the flesh. It has a sufficiency of its own for action, in so far as it likewise has a capacity for suffering. But the truth is, with respect to action, it labors under some amount of incapacity; for in its own nature it has simply the ability to think, to will, to desire, to dispose; for fully carrying out the purpose, it looks for the assistance of the flesh to actually do anything. In like manner, it also requires the conjunction of the flesh to endure suffering, in order that by its aid it may be as fully able to suffer, as without its assistance it was not fully able to act. With respect to those sins, such as concupiscence, thought, and wish, which it has a competency of its own to commit, it at once pays the penalty of them. If these were alone sufficient to constitute what it deserves without requiring the addition of deeds, the soul would suffice in itself to encounter the full responsibility of the judgment. The soul would be judged for those things in the doing of which it alone had possessed a sufficiency. Since deeds too are attached to what we deserve; and since deeds are affected by the flesh, it is no longer enough that the soul apart from the flesh be paid back with pleasure or pain for what are actually works of the flesh. The soul has a body of its own; although it has members of its own, these are insufficient for its full perception, just as they are also for its perfect action. Therefore, as it has acted in each instance, so proportionally does it suffer in Hades, being the first to taste of judgment as it was the first to induce to the commission of sin. But still it is waiting for the flesh in order that it may through the flesh also compensate for its deeds, inasmuch as it laid upon the flesh the execution of its own thoughts. This will be the process of that judgment which is postponed to the Last Great Day, in order that by the exhibition of the flesh the entire course of the divine vengeance may be accomplished. Besides, it is obvious that there would be no delaying to the end of time that doom which souls are already tasting in Hades, if it was destined for souls alone.”

⁶ Tertullian of Carthage, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 17.

Cyril of Jerusalem pointed out⁷ that the soul still can have a strong effect on the body even after they are separated at death. Examples of this are a dead man being raised by merely touching the bones of Elisha, and the aprons worn by Paul being used to heal the sick.

“Many Scriptures testify to the Resurrection of the dead; for there are many other sayings on this matter. But now, by way of remembrance only, we will make a passing mention of the raising of Lazarus on the fourth day (John 11:39-44). Because of the shortness of the time, we will allude to the widow’s son also who was raised (Luke 7:12-16), and merely for the sake of reminding you, let me mention the ruler of the synagogue’s daughter (Luke 8:49-56). Don’t forget the rending of the rocks, and how there arose many bodies of the saints which slept, their graves having been opened (Matthew 27:51-53) at the Resurrection of Christ. But specially remember that Christ has been raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). I speak but in passing of Elijah, and the widow’s son whom he raised (1 Kings 17:17-24). Elisha also raised the dead twice; once in his lifetime, and once after his death. For when alive he wrought the resurrection by means of his own soul (2 Kings 4:16-37). Not the souls only of the just are honored, but also that it might be believed that in the bodies of the just there lies a power. The corpse which was cast into the sepulcher of Elisha, when it touched the bones of the prophet, he revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21); the dead body of the prophet did the work of the soul. That which was dead and buried gave life to the dead, and though it gave life, yet continued itself among the dead. Why? Lest if Elisha should rise again, the work should be ascribed to his soul alone; and to shew, that even though the soul is not present, a virtue resides in the body of the saints. This is because of the righteous soul which has for so many years dwelt in it and used it as its servant. Let us not foolishly disbelieve, as though this thing had not happened. If handkerchiefs and aprons, which are from outside the body, touching the bodies of the diseased, raised up the sick (Acts 19:11-12), how much more should the very body of the Prophet raise the dead?”

Cyprian of Carthage stated⁸ that the punishments that souls suffer in Hades affect them most in the areas where they have sinned most. Thus, Dives suffers most in his tongue and mouth.

“Exaltation, puffing up, and arrogant and haughty boastfulness, spring not from the teaching of Christ who teaches humility, but from the spirit of Antichrist, whom the Lord rebukes by His prophet. ‘But you said in thine heart, I will go up to heaven, I will set my throne above the stars of heaven: I will sit on a lofty mount, on the lofty mountains toward the north. I will go up above the clouds: I will be like the Most High God. But now you shall go down to hell, even to the foundations of the earth. They that see you shall wonder at you’ (Isaiah 14:13-16 LXX). Scripture threatens a like punishment to such in another place, ‘For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and haughty, and upon every one that is high and towering, and they shall be brought down’ (Isaiah

⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVIII, 16.

⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, LIV, 3.

See also Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 19.

2:12 LXX). By his mouth, therefore, and by his words, is every one at once betrayed; and whether he has Christ in his heart, or Antichrist, is discerned in his speaking, according to what the Lord says in His Gospel. ‘Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things’ (Matthew 12:34-35). This describes that rich sinner who implores help from Lazarus, then laid in Abraham’s bosom, and established in a place of comfort, while he, writhing in torments, is consumed by the heats of burning flame. He suffers most punishment of all parts of his body in his mouth and his tongue, because doubtless in his mouth and his tongue he had most sinned.”

Christ Emptied Abraham’s Bosom at His Resurrection

Paul stated, “Therefore, He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men’ (Psalm 68:18). Now this, ‘He ascended’ -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:8-10).

Peter stated, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:18-20).

The Stichera for Holy Saturday read as follows. In these stichera, Hades is personified as picturing what happened to the realm of Hades as a result of Christ’s Cross and Resurrection. These stichera refer to Abraham’s bosom, not to the “lower regions” where Dives was held. Occupants of the lower regions will not be released until Judgment Day when Christ returns.

Today, Hades cries out groaning: “I should not have accepted the man born of Mary. He came and destroyed my power. He shattered the gates of brass. As God He raised the souls I held captive”.
Glory to Your Cross and Resurrection, O Lord!

Today Hades cries out groaning: “My dominion has been shattered. I received a dead man as one of the dead but I could not prevail against Him. I had ruled the dead from all ages. Behold, He raises all, and I perish”.
Glory to Your Cross and Resurrection, O Lord!

Today, Hades cries out groaning: "My power has been trampled down. The shepherd is crucified and Adam is raised. I have been robbed of those I ruled. Those whom I swallowed in my strength, I have given up. He who was crucified has emptied the tombs. The power of death has been vanquished”.
Glory to Your Cross and Resurrection, O Lord!

Thus, we can say that Christ descended into Hades after His Crucifixion, and that he pulled some of the residents of Hades out. Some of these even seem to include those who were disobedient before the Deluge of the days of Noah, and perhaps didn't know any better or were not going along with the Nephilim (Genesis 6:4).

Clement of Alexandria interpreted⁹ Peter's first Epistle to say that Christ preached the Gospel to the souls of those who died in the Deluge in the days of Noah. We might ask how it was possible for these souls to repent? Clement compares this to the repentance of the 3000 on Pentecost, where they had just recently crucified Christ in ignorance. This may imply that those pre-Deluge souls were in the Abraham's Bosom part of Hades and not in the flames with Dives and also that they were not part of the Nephilim (Genesis 6:4) before the Deluge.

"The Lord preached the Gospel to those in Hades. Accordingly, the Scripture says, 'Hades says to Destruction, we have not seen His form, but we have heard His voice' (Job 28:22). It is not plainly the place, which heard the voice, but those who have been put in Hades, and have abandoned themselves to destruction, as persons who have thrown themselves voluntarily from a ship into the sea. They are those that hear the divine power and voice. For who in his senses can suppose the souls of the righteous and those of sinners in the same condemnation, charging Providence with injustice? Do not the Scriptures show that the Lord preached the Gospel to those that perished in the flood in the days of Noah? (1 Peter 3:19-20). For it was suitable that those possessed of greater worth in righteousness, on repenting of their transgressions, yet being confessedly of the number of the people of God Almighty, should be saved, each one according to his individual knowledge."

"As I think, the Savior also exerts His might because it is His work to save; which accordingly He also did by drawing to salvation those who became willing, by the preaching of the Gospel, to believe on Him, wherever they were. If the Lord descended to Hades for no other end but to preach the Gospel, then all who believe shall be saved, although they may be of the Gentiles, on making their profession there. Since God's punishments are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion, He chooses rather the repentance than the death of a sinner (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11). Especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because of their being no longer obstructed by the flesh."

"One righteous man, then, differs not from another righteous man, whether he be of the Law or a Greek. For God is not only Lord of the Jews, but of all men, and more nearly the Father of those who know Him. For if to live well and according to the Law is to live, also to live rationally according to the Law is to live; and those who lived rightly before the Law were classed under faith (Romans 3:29, 10:12). If they were judged to be righteous, though they are in Hades and in prison (1 Peter 3:19), on hearing the voice of the Lord, they may have turned and believed."

"Did not the same dispensation occur in Hades, so that even there, all the souls, on hearing the proclamation, might either exhibit repentance, or confess that their punishment was just, because they believed not? It was not

⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 6.

arbitrariness, for those who had departed before the Advent of the Lord to obtain either salvation or punishment. For it is not right that these should be condemned without trial, and that those alone who lived after the Advent should have the advantage of the divine righteousness. But to all rational souls it was said from above, ‘Whatever one of you has done in ignorance, without clearly knowing God, if, on becoming conscious, he repents, all his sins will be forgiven him’ (Acts 3:17, 19). ‘I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life’ (Deuteronomy 30:19). And in another Scripture, He says, ‘If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken’” (Isaiah 1:19-20).

“If, then, He preached the Gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not for the same cause preach the Gospel to those who had departed this life before His Advent? ‘For the Lord *is* righteous and loves righteousness; his face beholds uprightness’ (Psalm 11:7 LXX). ‘But he that loves unrighteousness hates his own soul’ (Psalm 11:5 LXX). If, then, in the deluge all sinful flesh perished, punishment having been inflicted on them for correction, we must first believe that the will of God, which is disciplinary and beneficent, saves those who turn to Him.”

Paul stated, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

That is, first the dead in Christ rise, which means those on the earth in Hades waiting in Abraham’s bosom. After this, those Christians who are still alive and remain get caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. All this occurs at the Second Coming of Christ. What this means is that Abraham’s bosom began filling up again after the Lord’s Resurrection, such that there are “the dead in Christ” still on earth who will rise first.

Tertullian of Carthage stated¹⁰ that while Abraham’s bosom in Hades was emptied when the Lord rose from the dead, others who have died since then have filled up Abraham’s bosom again. Christ entered Hades at His death in the form and condition of a dead man – that is, with His human soul, where His human body in the grave was still wrapped in 100 pounds of linen, myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40). Some people indignantly stated that they will not go to Abraham’s bosom when they die, but to heaven. However, heaven may be reserved for just the martyrs until the Second Coming.

“Christ in His death spent three days in the heart of the earth; that is, in the secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth, enclosed by the earth, and superimposed on the abysmal depths which lie still lower down. Now although Christ is God, yet, being also man, ‘He died for our sins according to the Scriptures’, and ‘according to the same Scriptures was buried and rose again the third day’ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). With the same law of His being He fully complied, by remaining in Hades in the form and condition of a dead man. Nor

¹⁰ Tertullian of Carthage, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 55.

did He ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself (1 Peter 3:19). This being the case, you must suppose Hades to be a subterranean region, and keep at arm's length those who are too proud to believe that the souls of the faithful deserve a place in the lower regions. These persons, who are 'disciples above their Teacher, and servants above their Master' (Matthew 10:24), would no doubt spurn to receive the comfort of the resurrection, if they must expect it in Abraham's bosom. But it was for this purpose, say they, that Christ descended into hell, that we might not ourselves have to descend there. Well, then, what difference is there between heathens and Christians, if the same prison awaits them all when dead? How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father's right hand, when as yet the archangel's trumpet has not been heard by the command of God? (1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16) Those, whom the Lord is to find on the earth when He comes, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). To no one is heaven opened; the earth is still safe for him; yet I would not say it is shut against him. When the world shall pass away, then the kingdom of heaven shall be opened. We shall sleep in Paradise, you tell me, where already the patriarchs and prophets have already been removed from Hades in the retinue of the Lord's resurrection. How is it, then, that the region of Paradise, which as revealed to John in the Spirit lay under the altar (Revelation 6:9), displays no other souls as in it besides the souls of the martyrs? How is it that the most heroic martyr Perpetua¹¹ on the day of her passion saw only her fellow-martyrs there? In the revelation which she received of Paradise, the sword which guarded the entrance permitted none to go in there, except those who had died in Christ and not in Adam? Observe, then, the difference between a heathen and a Christian in their death. If you have to lay down your life for God, as the Comforter counsels, it is not in gentle fevers and on soft beds, but in the sharp pains of martyrdom. You must take up the cross and bear it after your Master, as He has Himself instructed you (Matthew 16:24). The sole key to unlock Paradise is your own life's blood."

We need to be clear that "Abraham's Bosom" is not heaven, but it is not hell either. For Lazarus, it was obviously a place of comfort, just as we pray for the departed that they might be sheltered¹² "in a place of brightness, a place of verdure, a place of repose, whence all sickness, sorrow and sighing has fled away, and where the sight of Thy Countenance rejoices all the Saints from all the ages".

Tertullian of Carthage also noted¹³ that the Scripture makes a distinction between Abraham's bosom and hell, with a great gulf in between. Since the rich man had to lift up his eyes to see Abraham's bosom, this implies that hell is down lower. Abraham's bosom is designed for the reception of Abraham's children, who are of the same Faith as Abraham, where

¹¹ See the Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, February 1.

¹² Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, A Pocket Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians, Englewood, NJ, 1956, p. 26.

¹³ Tertullian of Carthage, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 34.

this place is not heaven, but is higher than hell. This place must be a large, but temporary location to contain the seed of Abraham, which is numberless as the stars of heaven.

“The Scripture itself expressly distinguishes between Abraham’s bosom, where the poor man dwells, and the infernal place of torment. ‘Hell’, I take it, means one thing, and ‘Abraham’s bosom’ another. ‘A great gulf’ is said to separate those regions, and to hinder a passage from one to the other. Besides, the rich man could not have ‘lifted up his eyes’ (Luke 16:23) and from a distance too, except to a superior height; this implies the said distance up to a vast immensity of height and depth. It must therefore be evident to every man of intelligence who has ever heard of the Elysian fields¹⁴, that there is some determinate place called Abraham’s bosom. It is designed for the reception of the souls of Abraham’s children, even from among the Gentiles, since he is ‘the father of many nations’ (Romans 4:17-18), which must be classed among his family. They are of the same faith as he himself, where he believed God (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23), without the yoke of the law and the sign of circumcision. This region, therefore, I call Abraham’s bosom. Although it is not in heaven, it is yet higher than hell, and is appointed to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous, until the consummation of all things. The resurrection of all men shall complete the ‘full recompense of their reward’” (Compare Hebrews 2:2, 10:35, 11:26).

“Now, although this everlasting abode is promised, and the ascending steps to heaven are built by the Creator, who further promises that the seed of Abraham shall be even as the stars of heaven. Because of the heavenly promise, why may it not be possible, without any injury to that promise, that by Abraham’s bosom is meant some temporary receptacle of faithful souls. In this is delineated an image of the future, and where some foresight is given of the glory of both judgments. If so, you have here, O heretics, during your present lifetime, a warning that Moses and the prophets declare one only God, the Creator, and His only Christ. Both awards of everlasting punishment and eternal salvation rest with Him, the one only God, who kills and who makes alive. Well, Marcion says that our God from heaven has commanded us not to listen to Moses and the prophets, but Christ; listen to Him *is the* command from the Father (Luke 9:35). This is true enough. For the apostles had by that time sufficiently heard Moses and the prophets, for they had followed Christ, being persuaded by Moses and the prophets. For even Peter would not have been able to say, ‘You are the Christ’ (Luke 9:20) unless he had beforehand heard and believed Moses and the prophets, by whom alone Christ had been announced. Their faith, indeed, had deserved this confirmation by such a voice from heaven as should ask them to listen to Him, whom they had recognized as preaching peace, announcing glad tidings, promising an everlasting abode, building for them steps upwards into heaven” (Isaiah 52:7, 33:14 LXX, Amos 9:6).

¹⁴ In Classical Mythology, the Elysian Fields were the abode of the blessed after death.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁵ that it is not possible for a soul to go anywhere but Hades after the death of its body. If this were possible, the rich man would not have asked Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers, but he would have gone himself.

“It is not possible for a soul, torn away from the body, to wander here anymore. For ‘the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God’ (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1). If of the righteous, then those children’s souls¹⁶ also; for neither are they wicked; and the souls too of sinners are straightway led away hence. And it is evident from Lazarus and the rich man; and elsewhere too Christ said, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you’ (Luke 12:20). It may not be that a soul, when it is gone forth from the body, should wander here; nor is the reason hard to see. We, going about on the earth which is familiar and well known to us, and having a body, when we are journeying in a strange road, know not which way to go unless we have someone to lead us. How should the soul, being rent away from the body, and having gone out from all her accustomed region, know where to walk without one to show her the way?”

“From many other things too one might perceive, that it is not possible for a disembodied soul to remain here. For Stephen said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’ (Acts 7:59); and Paul said, ‘Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ (Philippians 1:23). Of the patriarch Abraham too the Scripture said, that ‘you shall depart to your fathers in peace, nourished in a good old age’ (Genesis 15:15 LXX). And as to the proof, that neither can the souls of sinners continue here; hear the rich man making much entreaty for this, and not obtaining it. Had it been at all possible, he would have come back, and told what had come to pass there (Luke 16:27-28). Therefore, it is evident that after their departure hence our souls are led away into some place, having no more power of themselves to come back again, but awaiting that dreadful day.”

What is It Like After Death?

Many times, the Scriptures speak about the wrath of God. It is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18) and abides on him who does not believe (John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6). Those with hard and unrepentant hearts treasure up for themselves wrath on Judgment Day (Romans 2:5), while those justified by His Blood are saved from wrath (Romans 5:9). When the Wrath of God comes at the end times, it will be fierce (Revelation 16:19) and has been compared to a winepress squeezing out the last bit of juice (Revelation 14:19, 19:15). Those on the receiving end of the Wrath of God will get it full strength and will be tormented forever (Revelation 14:10-11). With these events at the end times, the Wrath of God is described as being complete (Revelation 15:1).

Appendix A summarizes Scriptural descriptions of “hell.” Some descriptive characteristics are: flame, heat, wailing, gnashing of teeth, but yet also black darkness. How this can be is somewhat of a mystery. Its location is also a mystery. It is described as just outside the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11), where the righteous will be able to see and be

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 3.

¹⁶ Chrysostom was addressing a practice in his day where sorcerers take children and slay them in order to have the child’s soul to assist them in their sorcery. This is just stage-play and demonic deceit.

abhorred at the place of the ungodly (Isaiah 66:24; compare Mark 9:43-48). This image of the so-near-yet-so-far is reinforced from the use of the term “Gehenna,” the eternally smoldering garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:29-33).

Hippolytus of Rome outlined¹⁷ in length what it is like after death when the soul enters Hades. The angels escort the souls in and direct them to the right or to the left, to Abraham’s bosom and a place of light and refreshment, or to the place of torment, where they are dragged on against their will. The righteous are hymned by the angels as they enter and delight with the face of the fathers and the righteous, who are always smiling, as they wait for the eternal rest that follows this location. The unrighteous are reproached and threatened by the angels as they are led to the lower parts, hear the incessant agitation, feel the hot smoke, and shudder in horror at the expectation of future judgment. At the Second Coming of Christ, all of Hades will be emptied and all will receive their physical bodies back in an immortal form. This will be great joy to the righteous, who will receive their physical bodies healed of any sickness and deformity that they had when they died. The unrighteous will receive their physical bodies back immortal, but unchanged from any suffering and disease they had when they died. All will then appear before Christ and all will agree that they are receiving what is just according to their works. The righteous will remember only the righteous deeds by which they reached the heavenly kingdom. The unrighteous will see the righteous no longer but will be led away to the unquenchable fire and the fiery worm.

“We must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained. Hades is a place in the created system, rude, a locality beneath the earth, in which the light of the world does not shine; and as the sun does not shine in this locality, there must necessarily be perpetual darkness there. This locality has been destined to be as it were a guard-house for souls, at which the angels are stationed as guards, distributing according to each one’s deeds the temporary punishments for different characters. And in this locality, there is a certain place set apart by itself, a lake of unquenchable fire, into which we suppose no one has ever yet been cast. This is prepared for the day determined by God, in which one sentence of righteous judgment shall be justly applied to all. The unrighteous, and those who didn’t believe God, who have honored as God the vain works of the hands of men, idols fashioned by themselves, shall be sentenced to this endless punishment. But the righteous shall obtain the incorruptible and unfading kingdom, who indeed are at present detained in Hades, but not in the same place with the unrighteous. To this locality there is one descent, at the gate whereof we believe an archangel is stationed. When those who are conducted by the angels have passed through this gate, they do not proceed on one and the same way; but the righteous, being conducted in the light toward the right, and being hymned by the angels stationed at the place, are brought to a locality full of light. There the righteous from the beginning dwell, not ruled by necessity, but enjoying always the contemplation of the blessings which are in their view and delighting themselves with the expectation of others ever new and deeming those ever better than these. That place brings no toils to them. There, there is neither fierce heat, nor cold, nor thorn; but the face of the fathers and the righteous is seen to be

¹⁷ Hippolytus of Rome, “Against Plato, On the Cause of the Universe”, in Extant Works and Fragments, Part II.

always smiling, as they wait for the rest and eternal revival in heaven which succeed this location. We call this place by the name *Abraham's bosom*. But the unrighteous are dragged toward the left by angels who are ministers of punishment, and they go of their own accord no longer, but are dragged by force as prisoners. The angels appointed over them send them along, reproaching them and threatening them with an eye of terror, forcing them down into the lower parts. When they are brought there, those appointed to that service drag them on to the confines of hell. Those who are confined there hear incessantly the agitation and feel the hot smoke. When that vision is so near, as they see the terrible and excessively glowing spectacle of the fire, they shudder in horror at the expectation of the future judgment, already feeling the power of their punishment. Where they see the place of the fathers and the righteous, they are also punished there. For a deep and vast abyss is set there in the midst, so that neither can any of the righteous in sympathy think to pass it, nor any of the unrighteous dare to cross it.”

“The souls of all are detained until the time which God has determined; and then He will accomplish a resurrection of all, not by transferring souls into other bodies, but by raising the bodies themselves. The Greeks refuse credit to this because they see these bodies decayed in the grave; they need to learn not to be incredulous. They believe that the soul is originated and is made immortal by God, according to the opinion of Plato; they ought not to refuse to believe that God is able also to raise the body, which is composed of the same elements and make it immortal. We therefore believe that the body also is raised. If it became corrupt in the grave, it is not destroyed. That which is sown is sown indeed, bare grain; but at the command of God the Artificer it buds, and is raised arrayed and glorious, but not until it has first died, and been dissolved, and mingled with earth. Not without good reason do we believe in the resurrection of the body. If it is molded again anew, it is not raised the same thing as it is now, but pure and no longer corruptible. To each body its own proper soul will be given again; and the soul shall not be grieved, but shall rejoice together with it, abiding itself pure with it also pure. When the body is reunited with the soul, it will receive it again with great joy. But the unrighteous will receive their bodies unchanged, and not ransomed from suffering and disease, and unglorified, and still with all the ills in which they died. Whatever manner of persons they were when they lived without faith, as such they shall be faithfully judged.”

“For all, the righteous and the unrighteous alike, shall be brought before God the Word. For the Father has committed all judgment to Him; and in fulfillment of the Father's counsel, He comes as Judge whom we call Christ. It is not Minos and Rhadamanthus¹⁸ that are to judge the world, as you fancy, O Greeks, but He whom God the Father has glorified, of whom we have spoken elsewhere more in particular, for the profit of those who seek the truth. He, in administering the righteous judgment of the Father to all, assigns to each what is righteous according to his works. Being present at His judicial decision, all, both men, angels and demons, shall utter one voice, saying, ‘Righteous are Your judgments’ (Psalm 119:137). Of which voice the justification will be seen in the

¹⁸

Minos and Rhadamanthus were two of the three judges of the dead in the underworld of Greek mythology.

awarding to each that which is just; since to those who have done well shall be assigned righteously eternal bliss, and to the lovers of iniquity shall be given eternal punishment. The fire which is unquenchable and without end awaits these latter, and a certain fiery worm which doesn't die, and which does not waste the body, but continues bursting forth from the body with unending pain. No sleep will give them rest; no night will soothe them; no death will deliver them from punishment; no voice of interceding friends will profit them. Neither are the righteous seen by them any longer, nor are they worthy of remembrance. But the righteous will remember only the righteous deeds by which they reached the heavenly kingdom, in which there is neither sleep, pain, corruption, care, night, nor day measured by time."

John Chrysostom reminded¹⁹ his people that the unrepentant will be dragged into the everlasting fire. No one can help us then, so it is imperative that we repent now.

"Consider therefore who they are who shall then be in dismay, who will be in grief, who dragged away to the fire, while the others are crowned. 'Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25:34). And again, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41).

"Let us not merely hear the words but write them also before our sight and let us imagine Him to be now present and saying these things, and that we are led away to that fire. What heart shall we have? What consolation? And what, when we are cut in two? (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46). And what when we are accused of rapacity? What excuse shall we have to utter? What specious argument? None: but of necessity bound, bending down, we must be dragged to the mouths of the furnace, to the river of fire, to the darkness, to the never-dying punishments, and entreat no one. For it is not possible, He says, to pass across from this side to that: for 'there is a great gulf fixed between us and you' (Luke 16:26). It is not possible even for those who wish it to go across and stretch out a helping hand. But we need to burn continually, no one aiding us, even should it be father or mother, or any whoever, even though he has much boldness toward God. For, it says, 'A brother does not redeem; shall man redeem?' (Psalm 49:7 LXX)

John Cassian noted²⁰ that no one praises God while they are sinning, as does no one who is in torment with Dives. On the other hand, the souls of those in Abraham's bosom bless God and praise Him. The souls of those who have died are not idle; they are capable of feeling as the account of Dives and Lazarus shows. Just as the thief on the Cross entered Paradise that same day in his soul, so did Lazarus. In their changed condition they partake of some state which corresponds to their actions and what they deserve. The soul is the nobler part of man, in which as Paul shows, the image and glory of God consists. The soul contains in itself all the power of reason; it makes the dumb and senseless material flesh sensible, by participation with it. Paul recognized this such that he actually wished to depart from this flesh. By separation from the

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXI, 8.

²⁰ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Moses, I, i, 14.

body, he might be able to be joined more earnestly to the Lord! Still more clearly Paul speaks of this state of the souls as one that is very full of life.

“Everyone while still existing in this body should already be aware that he must be committed to that state and office, of which he made himself a sharer and an adherent while in this life. He should not doubt that in that eternal world he will be partner with him, whose servant he chose to make himself here. ‘If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him *My* Father will honor’ (John 12:26). For as the kingdom of the devil is gained by consenting to sin, so the kingdom of God is attained by the practice of virtue in purity of heart and spiritual knowledge. But where the kingdom of God is, there most certainly eternal life is enjoyed, and where the kingdom of the devil is, there without doubt is death and the grave. And the man who is in this condition, cannot praise the Lord. ‘The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down (to the grave) into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore’ (Psalm 115:17-18). ‘For in death *there is* no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?’ (Psalm 6:6) i.e., no one will. For no man even though he were to call himself a Christian a thousand times over, or a monk, confesses God when he is sinning. No man who allows those things which the Lord hates, remembers God, nor calls himself with any truth the servant of Him, whose commands he scorns with obstinate rashness. In this death Paul declares that the widow is involved, who gives herself to pleasure, saying ‘a widow who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives’ (1 Timothy 5:6). There are then many who while still living in this body are dead, lying in the grave and cannot praise God. On the contrary there are many who though they are dead in the body yet bless God in the spirit and praise Him. ‘Bless the Lord O spirits and souls of the righteous’ (Daniel 3:86 LXX); and ‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord’ (Psalm 150:6). In the Apocalypse the souls of those that are slain are not only said to praise God but to address Him also (Revelation 6:9-10). In the Gospel too the Lord says with still greater clearness to the Sadducees: ‘But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ God is not the God of the dead, but of the living’ (Matthew 22:31-32). For all do live unto Him. Of whom also Paul says: ‘Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them’ (Hebrews 11:16). For that they are not idle after the separation from this body, and are not incapable of feeling, the parable in the Gospel shows, which tells us of the beggar Lazarus and Dives clothed in purple, one of whom obtained a position of bliss, i.e., Abraham’s bosom, the other is consumed with the dreadful heat of eternal fire (Luke 16:19-25). But if you care to understand the words spoken to the thief, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:43). What do they clearly show but that not only does their former intelligence continue with the souls, but also that in their changed condition they partake of some state which corresponds to their actions and what they deserve? For the Lord would certainly never have promised him this, if He had known that his soul after being separated from the flesh would either have been deprived of perception or have been resolved into

nothing. For it was not the flesh of the thief but his soul which was to enter Paradise with Christ. At least we must avoid, and shun with the utmost horror, that wicked punctuation of the heretics. As they do not believe that Christ could be found in Paradise on the same day on which He descended into hell, thus punctuate ‘Verily, I say unto you today’, and making a stop apply. ‘You shall be with Me in Paradise’, in such a way that they imagine that this promise was not fulfilled at once after he departed from this life, but that it will be fulfilled after the resurrection. They do not understand what before the time of His resurrection He declared to the Jews, who fancied that He was hampered by human difficulties and weakness of the flesh as they were. He said, ‘No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven’ (John 3:13). By this He clearly shows that the souls of the departed are not only not deprived of their reason, but that they are not even without such feelings as hope and sorrow, joy and fear. They already are beginning to taste beforehand something of what is reserved for them at the last judgment, and that they are not as some unbelievers hold resolved into nothing after their departure from this life²¹. But they live a more real life and are still more earnest in waiting on the praises of God. To discuss a little about the nature of the soul itself, is it not beyond the bounds of the madness of all stupidity, even to have the slightest suspicion that the nobler part of man, in which as Paul shows, the image and glory of God consists? (1 Corinthians 11:7, Colossians 3:10). When the burden of the body with which the soul is oppressed in this world is laid aside, will the soul become insensible? The soul contains in itself all the power of reason; it makes the dumb and senseless material flesh sensible, by participation with it. Especially when it follows, and the order of reason itself demands that when the mind has put off the grossness of the flesh with which it is now weighed down, it will restore its intellectual powers better than ever. The soul will receive the flesh back in a purer and finer condition than it lost it. But so far did Paul recognize that what we say is true, that he actually wished to depart from this flesh. That by separation from it, he might be able to be joined more earnestly to the Lord! He said, ‘For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better’ (Philippians 1:23). And therefore ‘So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 5:6). ‘Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him’ (2 Corinthians 5:9); and he declares indeed that the continuance of the soul which is in the flesh is distance from the Lord, and absence from Christ. He trusts with entire faith that its separation and departure from this flesh involves presence with Christ. Again, still more clearly Paul speaks of this state of the souls as one that is very full of life. ‘But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect’ (Hebrews 12:22-23). Of which spirits he speaks again, ‘Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them*

²¹ Augustine referred to some heretics who had denied a visible Paradise and a future resurrection. These heretics also said that the soul died along with the body and would be revived at the end of the world.

respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" (Hebrews 12:9)

The Eternal Hopelessness in Hades

While the soul and the body recognize each other, even when the soul is separated from the body in Hades, the souls in torment with Dives have a certain hopelessness to them, knowing that this will be their place forever. Dives was able to communicate with the Patriarch Abraham, but Abraham was able to be of no help at all to Dives. Once we have departed this life, no repentance is possible anymore; however, the Righteous Judge will not overlook even small good things that we have done. But it gets even worse for the soul in torment after Judgment Day: then comes the "death of the soul" when the soul is eternally alienated from the Holy Spirit.

Gregory of Nyssa stated²² that the human soul clings to its body and they recognize each other. Some parts of our bodies vary, such as in growth or as a result of disease, while other parts stay constant, such as the part that was created in the likeness of God. When the soul separates from the body at death, the soul retains some signs of its identity. When our bodies rise again at the Last Judgment, it will have all the tokens of its previous identity and will reunite with the soul.

"You have seen surely somewhere among the habitations of men a common herd of some kind of animals collected from every quarter. Yet when the herd is again divided among its owners, acquaintance with their homes and the marks put on the cattle serve to restore to each his own. If you conceive of yourself also something like this, you will not be far from the right way. For as the soul clings to and longs for the body that has been wedded to it, there also attaches to it in secret a certain close relationship and power of recognition, in virtue of their commixture. It is as though some marks had been imprinted by nature, by the aid of which the community remains unconfused, separated by the distinctive signs. Now as the soul attracts to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it, what labor is involved for the Divine power to discern kindred things when they are urged to their own place by the unspeakable attraction of nature, whatever it may be? For that some signs of our compound nature remain in the soul even after the body is dissolved in the tomb is shown by the dialogue in Hades (Luke 16:24-31). The bodies had been conveyed to the tomb, but some bodily token still remained in the souls by which both Lazarus was recognized and the rich man was known."

"It is therefore easy to believe that in the bodies that rise again there will be a return from the common stock to the individual, especially for anyone who examines our nature with careful attention. For neither does our being consist altogether in flux and change, but according to the more accurate statement some of our constituent parts is stationary while the rest goes through a process of alteration. For the body is on the one hand altered by way of growth and diminution, changing, like garments, the vesture of its successive statures, while the form, on the other hand, remains in itself unaltered through every change. It

²² Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man", in *Philosophical Works*, III, xxvii, 2-5.

does not vary from the marks once imposed on it by nature but appears with its own tokens of identity in all the changes which the body undergoes.”

“We must except from this statement, however, the change which happens to the form as the result of disease. For the deformity of sickness takes possession of the form like some strange mask. When this is removed by the word, as in the case of the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5), or of those ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19), the form that had been hidden by disease is once more by means of health restored to sight again with its own marks of identity.”

“Now the element of our soul which is in the likeness of God is not that which is subject to flux and change by way of alteration. This stable and unalterable element in our composition is allied, and various differences of combination produce varieties of forms. The form necessarily remains in the soul as in the impression of a seal; those things which have been received from the seal (the impression of its stamp) do not fail to be recognized by the soul.”

John Chrysostom stated²³ that repentance makes us worthy to enter Abraham’s bosom. Once we have departed this life, no repentance will help and no call for help will be heard. The demons set in motion everything that will lead us to despair. But not even small items of good will be overlooked by the righteous judge.

“Hell has not been made for us but for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41); but the kingdom has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). Let us not then make ourselves unworthy of entrance into the bride-chamber: for as long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offenses. But once we have departed to the other world even if we display the most earnest repentance it will be of no avail, not even if we gnash our teeth, beat our breasts, and utter innumerable calls for help. No one with the tip of his finger will apply a drop to our burning bodies, but we shall only hear those words which the rich man heard in the parable, ‘Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed’ (Luke 16:26). Let us then, I beseech you, recover our senses here and let us recognize our Master as He ought to be recognized. Only when we are in Hades should we abandon the hope derived from repentance. While we are here even if it is applied in old age itself it exhibits much strength. The devil sets everything in motion in order to root in us the reasoning which comes of despair; for he knows that if we repent even a little we shall not do this without some reward. The man who gives even a cup of cold water has his recompense reserved for him (Matthew 10:42). So also, the man who has repented of the evils which he has done, even if he cannot exhibit the repentance which his offenses deserve, will have a commensurate reward. For not a single item of good, however small it may be, will be overlooked by the righteous judge. For if He makes such an exact scrutiny of our sins, as to require punishment for both our words and thoughts, much more will our good deeds, whether they be great or small, be reckoned to our credit at that day.”

23

John Chrysostom, Letters to Theodore After His Fall, I, 9.

Another aspect of “hell” is suggested by Basil the Great. He suggests²⁴ that the “cutting in half” of the ungodly on Judgment Day (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46) refers to the eternal alienation of the soul from the Holy Spirit.

“Those who were sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption and preserve pure and undiminished the first fruits which they received of the Spirit, are those who shall hear the words: ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord’ (Matthew 25:21). In like manner those who have grieved the Holy Spirit by the wickedness of their ways or have not done for Him Who gave to them, shall be deprived of what they have received, their grace being transferred to others. According to one of the evangelists, they shall even be wholly cut in two, — the cutting in two meaning complete separation from the Spirit (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46). The body is not divided, part being delivered to chastisement, and part let off. Nor is the soul cut in two; the whole soul possesses the sinful affection throughout and works the wickedness in co-operation with the body. The cutting in two, as I have observed, is the separation of the soul from the Spirit. For now, although the Spirit does not suffer mixture with the unworthy, He nevertheless does seem in a manner to be present with them that have once been sealed, awaiting the salvation which follows on their conversion. But then He will be wholly cut off from the soul that has defiled His grace. For this reason, ‘In Hell there is no man that makes confession; in death no man that remembers God’ (Psalm 6:5 LXX), because the aid of the Spirit is no longer present” (Matthew 16:17).

John Chrysostom makes a similar conclusion²⁵ in discussing the death of the soul. Just as the body dies when the soul is separated from it, so the soul dies when the energy of the Holy Spirit leaves it destitute in hell.

“I will show you (not just) the bodies of men, but the souls of men slaughtered in the other world. For it is possible for a soul to be slain with the slaughter peculiar to the soul. For as there is a death of the body, so there is also of the soul. ‘The soul that sins’, says the Prophet, ‘it shall die’ (Ezekiel 18:4). The death of the soul, however, is not like the death of the body; it is far more shocking. For this bodily death, separating the soul from the body...when the body has been in time dissolved and crumbled away, it is again gathered together in incorruption, and receives back its own proper soul. Such is this bodily death. But that of the soul is awful. For this death (of the soul), when dissolution takes place, does not let (the soul) pass or separate, as the death of the body does, but binds it down again to an imperishable body and consigns it to the unquenchable fire. This then is the death of the soul. And as therefore there is a death of the soul, so there is also a slaughter of the soul. What is the slaughter of the body? It is the being turned into a corpse, the being stripped of the energy derived from the soul. What is the slaughter of the soul? It is its being made a corpse also. And how is the soul made a corpse? Because as the body then becomes a corpse when the soul leaves it destitute of its own vital energy, so also does the soul then

²⁴ Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, XVII, 40.

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVIII, v. 14.

become a corpse when the Holy Spirit leaves it destitute of His spiritual energy” (Homily XVIII on Ephesians 5).

Jerome of Bethlehem wrote²⁶ to Marcella regarding the unexpected death of her friend, the Abbess Lea in Rome. He compared Lea with the poor man Lazarus and to the Roman Prefect Praetextatus, who died at about the same time. Just as Lazarus and Dives were in different parts of Hades, so are Lea and Praetextatus.

“Suddenly the news came that our most saintly friend Lea²⁷ had departed from the body. As was only natural, you turned deadly pale; for there are few persons, if any, who do not burst into tears when the earthen vessel breaks (2 Corinthians 4:7). But if you wept it was not from doubt as to her future lot, but only because you had not rendered to her the last sad offices which are due to the dead. Finally, as we were still conversing together, a second message informed us that her remains had been already conveyed to Ostia.”

“You may ask why we should repeat all this. I will reply in the apostle’s words, ‘much in every way’ (Romans 3:2). First, it shows that all must hail with joy the release of a soul which has trampled Satan under foot, and won for itself, at last, a crown of tranquility. Secondly, it gives me an opportunity of briefly describing her life. Thirdly, it enables me to assure you that the consul-elect²⁸, that detractor of his age, is now in Tartarus. Who can sufficiently eulogize our dear Lea’s mode of living? So complete was her conversion to the Lord that, becoming the head of a monastery, she showed herself a true mother to the virgins in it, wore coarse sackcloth instead of soft raiment, passed sleepless nights in prayer, and instructed her companions even more by example than by precept. So great was her humility that she, who had once been the mistress of many, was accounted the servant of all; and certainly, the less she was reckoned an earthly mistress the more she became a servant of Christ. She was careless of her dress, neglected her hair, and ate only the coarsest food. Still, in all that she did, she avoided ostentation that she might not have her reward in this world” (Matthew 6:2).

“Now, therefore, in return for her short toil, Lea enjoys everlasting felicity; she is welcomed into the choirs of the angels; she is comforted in Abraham’s bosom. And, as once the beggar Lazarus saw the rich man, for all his purple, lying in torment, so does Lea see the consul, not now in his triumphal robe but clothed in mourning, and asking for a drop of water from her little finger (Luke 16:19-24). How great a change we have here! A few days ago, the highest dignitaries of the city walked before him as he ascended the ramparts of the capitol like a general celebrating a triumph. The Roman people leapt up to welcome and applaud him, and at the news of his death the whole city was moved. Now he is desolate and naked, a prisoner in the foulest darkness, and not, as his unhappy wife²⁹ falsely asserts, set in the royal abode of the milky way³⁰.

²⁶ Jerome of Bethlehem, Letter to Marcella, XXIII, 1-3.

²⁷ Lea was the head of a monastery in Rome.

²⁸ That is Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, the prefect of Rome. Praetextatus had told Pope Damasus that if he could hope to obtain the Papacy, he would immediately embrace the Christian religion.

²⁹ Praetextatus’ wife was Paulina, the chief priestess of Ceres.

³⁰ In Roman mythology, this was the abode of the gods and the heroes.

On the other hand, Lea, who was always shut up in her one closet, who seemed poor and of little worth, and whose life was accounted madness (Wisdom of Solomon 5:4), now follows Christ and sings, ‘As we have heard, so have we also seen, in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God’” (Psalm 48:8 LXX).

Isaac of Nineveh suggests³¹ that the love of God toward the ungodly in hell is a torment in itself. Gregory of Nyssa suggests³² that the gulf separating Lazarus and the rich man is made by decisions we make in this life and not necessarily by a parting of the earth.

Final Thoughts

When the New Jerusalem comes, there will be no night, nor will there be any sun or moon to give light (Revelation 21:22-25). The Glory of God illumines everything. This obviously refers to the uncreated light of God.

Similarly, the fires of hell are said to burn forever (Revelation 14:9-11, 21:8, 20:10). If this were physical fire, it would eventually burn itself out when all its fuel was consumed. Thus, the fires of hell must be uncreated fire. God Himself is often described as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29, Exodus 24:17, Isaiah 33:14), and the Throne of God is pictured as being in the midst of fire (Ezekiel 1).

Could the uncreated light of God that illumines the earth and the uncreated fire from His Presence also cause the fires of hell? The Scriptures speak of how God will not be angry forever (Psalm 85:5, Isaiah 57:16). But yet God cannot change Who He is either. Perhaps another aspect to the torment of hell is for the unrighteous to live forever in the light of God where they would be continually repelled by His Holiness.

In discussing the good things the rich man had in his life, versus the evil things Lazarus had (Luke 16:25), we are reminded of the suffering and groaning of Job, who complained that the wicked tend to live in ease and prosperity, often up to the very time of death, whereas others suffer so much. But Job was also aware that things would be quite different in the hereafter! (Job 21:7-16). Therefore, the Lord warns those who are rich, full of good earthly things, or well-spoken of by men in this life (Luke 6:24-26). James cries out that the rich would “weep and howl” if only they could see the eternal realities they face because of their life of wanton pleasure (James 5:1-6). This is covered in more detail in the Gospel lesson for the 9th Sunday of Luke (the rich Fool).

The Lord in His wisdom and mercy often does things deliberately to give us an opportunity to repent. Lazarus was “laid at the rich man’s gate” in order that the rich man might have an opportunity to do some good work (Luke 16:20). All Lazarus wanted was the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table (Luke 16:21). But what did he get? The only mercy that was showed to him was via the dogs who licked his sores (Luke 16:21). The saliva of dogs has some medicinal value, even if it isn’t very aesthetically pleasing. However, the rich man’s life was so focused on his own pleasure that he failed to take advantage of this opportunity at his gate.

³¹ Isaac of Nineveh, Homily 84.

³² Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection.

We might also ask, what about those people who never had a chance to repent or who never knew about God? What about the departed who the saints have prayed for over the centuries? They can't cross the "great gulf", but what happens to them? It is not reasonable to say that all the prayers of the saints are worthless! And we should never underestimate the mercy of God. These questions are part of the Mystery of Hell. A more extensive discussion of this subject is included under the heading "The Church Fathers on the Descent into Hell" in the Study on Holy Saturday.

Where Did Purgatory Come From?

Prayer for the dead has been part of the prayers of the Church from the beginning, and even dates to the time before Christ came. For example, consider the actions of Judas Maccabaeus:

“As Esdris and his men had been fighting for a long time and were weary, Judas (Maccabaeus) called upon the Lord to show himself their ally and leader in the battle. In the language of their fathers he raised the battle cry, with hymns; then he charged against Gorgias' men when they were not expecting it and put them to flight. Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the sabbath there. On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchers of their fathers. Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Maccabees 12:36-45).

Although prayer for the departed predates Christ's earthly ministry, some might say that the departed are either in heaven or hell and that there is nothing that we can do about it. Yet the Lord had a conversation with the Sadducees that has a bearing on this:

“Then *some* Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus; and they asked Him, saying: ‘Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves *his* wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were **seven** brothers.

The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the **seven** had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all **seven** had her as wife'. Jesus answered and said to them, 'Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burning bush passage*, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken'" (Mark 12:18-27).

As we saw previously with Lazarus and Dives, the departed are very much alive. Those in Abraham's bosom are able to even pray for us. It is questionable whether those in the flames with Dives are able to do that, since they are so distracted with the heat and flames. Those who might question praying for the departed generally do not question praying for one another among the living. Since the departed, especially those in Abraham's bosom, are still very much alive, there should be no question about praying for them and they for us.

However, Purgatory³³ is different than prayers for the dead; Purgatory is the intermediate state between one's death and the universal resurrection. The Orthodox Church admits of such an intermediate state, referred to as Hades but refrains from defining it very much. The Roman Catholic Church goes differently by defining the intermediate state, of the belief that sins can be purged by suffering in an afterlife, and that the purgation can be expedited by the intercession of the living.

While use of the word³⁴ "purgatory" as a noun appeared perhaps only between 1160 and 1180 AD, giving rise to the idea of purgatory as a place. The Roman Catholic tradition of purgatory as a transitional condition is claimed to have a history that dates back, even before Jesus Christ, to the worldwide practice of caring for the dead and praying for them and to the belief that prayer for the dead contributed to their afterlife purification. The same practice appears in other traditions, such as the medieval Chinese Buddhist practice of making offerings on behalf of the dead, who are said to suffer numerous trials. Roman Catholic belief in after-life purification is based on the practice of praying for the dead, and which, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, was adopted by Christians from the beginning. This practice presupposes that the dead are thereby assisted between death and their entry into their final abode. No mention is made regarding how the souls of the dead cross "the great gulf" mentioned in the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

Shortly before becoming³⁵ a Roman Catholic, the English scholar John Henry Newman argued that the *essence* of the doctrine is locatable in ancient tradition, and that the core consistency of such beliefs is evidence that Christianity was 'originally given to us from heaven'.

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_state.

³⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_state.

³⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_state.

Roman Catholics consider the teaching on purgatory, but not the imaginative accretions, to be part of the faith derived from the revelation of Jesus Christ that was preached by the Apostles. Of the early Church Fathers, Origen³⁶ is quoted as saying that ‘He who comes to be saved, comes to be saved through fire’ that burns away sins and worldliness like lead, leaving behind only pure gold. Ambrose of Milan speaks of a kind of ‘baptism of fire’ which is located at the entrance to Heaven, and through which all must pass, at the end of the world. This may be a reference to

“I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice *and* my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call *upon Him* as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol³⁷ laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!’” (Psalm 116:1-4)

To call this a reference to Purgatory, one has to take the text out of context. The Psalmist is still alive, yet he says that he is surrounded by the pangs of Hades (Sheol).

Something else that Ambrose could be referring to is the River of Fire that proceeds from the Throne of God at Judgment Day (Daniel 7:10). This is not really a reference to Purgatory either since we only see this River of Fire on Judgment Day and not now.

Gregory the Great said that³⁸ the belief in purgatory is ‘established’ and ‘to be believed’, insisting, however, that the purgatorial fire can only purify away minor transgressions, not ‘iron, bronze, or lead’ or other ‘hardened’ sins. By this he meant that attachments to sin, habits of sin, and even venial sins could be removed in purgatory, but not mortal sin, which, according to Catholic doctrine, causes eternal damnation. Over the centuries following Gregory, theologians and other Christians then developed the doctrine regarding purgatory, leading to the definition of the formal doctrine (as distinct from the legendary descriptions found in poetic literature) at the First Council of Lyon (1245), the Second Council of Lyon (1274), the Council of Florence (1438–1445), and the Council of Trent (1545–63). All these Councils were part of the Western Church, and this topic was never addressed by the Seven Ecumenical Councils, which are the basis for Orthodox Church teaching. Thus the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of Purgatory developed much later than the Early Church teachings, and its connection to the Early Church are not solid.

The Importance of Moses and the Prophets

In his torment, the rich man was remorseful and begged that his five brothers might be warned by Lazarus rising from the dead so that they might not find themselves in his predicament. Abraham stated that this would do no good (Luke 16:25-31). Throughout the Scriptures we are told that if a person sees and obeys Scripture, he will be saved. Thus, Isaiah warned the people not to listen to mediums and wizards, false sources of spiritual enlightenment, but to hear the Law and the Prophets (Isaiah 8:19-20). He insisted that every word of Scripture is spoken by God (Isaiah 34:16).

³⁶ Origen was declared to be a heretic by a Church Council in Alexandria in 400 AD and by the 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553 AD.

³⁷ “Sheol” is the Hebrew term for the Greek word “Hades”

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_state.

But the Apostle John and the Lord tell us how Scripture saves us: not by our obeying the letter of the Law, but by obeying the spirit of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40; Matthew 5:18), which brings us to Christ. That is, Moses himself accuses those who reject the Lord (John 5:39-40, 45-47); he is read in every synagogue, on every Sabbath, throughout many generations (Acts 15:21). Those in Berea are commended for honestly searching the Scriptures, leading them to faith in Christ (Acts 17:11-22). The Apostle Paul also says that the purpose of Scripture is to lead us to Christ and equip us for good works (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Faith itself is a gift (Ephesians 2:9); the written word is the chief visible means by which God gives us this gift of faith.

In the story of our Gospel lesson, Abraham stated that those who refused to heed these sacred writings would not believe even when confronted with someone rising from death (Luke 16:31). This was demonstrated by the chief priests who sought to kill Lazarus after he had been raised from the dead (John 12:10-11).

Living in Luxury Can Be Dangerous

Luxury and wealth can be a siren call that lulls us into thinking all is well when it really isn't. This is the trap, organized by the demons, that Dives fell into, and he never got out. If we always have a picture of hell before us, it will be less likely that we will fall into that trap. In this sense, wealth is like a snake that can coil around the hand that owns it and bite unexpectedly. On the other hand, virtue is much more valuable than wealth. This is why many people over the ages have given their wealth to the poor such that they might have treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22). By doing this, people have stored up their treasure in the age to come. From this point of view, wealth can be like a runaway, thankless servant; if we chain him up, he will still run away and drag his chains after him. A better way to look at wealth is that it is not our own, and that even our children are not our own. Both are gifts from God that we are given to use for His benefit. This was the accusation against Dives: he didn't use any of his wealth to help Lazarus.

While the study and contemplation of hell and eternal punishment may be difficult to bear and even frightening to consider, there are good purposes for doing so. As John Chrysostom said³⁹, if we fear hell, we won't fall into it.

“None of those who have hell before their eyes will fall into hell. No one of those who belittle hell will escape hell. If the Ninevites had not feared destruction, they would have been overthrown; but because they feared, they were not overthrown. If in the time of Noah, they had feared the deluge, they would not have been drowned. Nothing is so profitable as to converse concerning hell. It renders our souls purer than any silver. For hear the prophet saying, ‘Your judgments were always before me’ (Psalm 18:22). But when we are about to come before the Judgment-seat of Christ, it will be too late to entreat the Judge. And yet He grants a long season of forbearance. He does not snatch us away in the midst of our sins but permits us time to put them off”.

Clement of Alexandria pointed out⁴⁰ the danger of wealth, if our wealth is not stored above in heaven. Wealth is like a snake that will coil around the hand that owns it and bite, even

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, II, v. 8.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, III, 6.

if we know how to use the wealth. Virtue is much more valuable than wealth; he who can give up his worldly goods to the poor finds imperishable treasure.

“Riches are then to be partaken of rationally, bestowed lovingly, not sordidly, or pompously. The love of the beautiful is not to be turned into self-love and ostentation; lest perchance someone say to us, ‘His horse, or land, or domestic, or gold, is worth fifteen talents⁴¹; but the man himself is only worth three copper coins’”.

“Take away, then, the ornaments from women, and domestics from masters, and you will find masters in no respect different from the slaves that they bought. They walk the same, look the same, and speak the same; so alike are they to their slaves. But they differ in that they are feebler than their slaves and have a sicklier upbringing.”

“This best of maxims, then, ought to be perpetually repeated, ‘That the good man, being temperate and just’, treasures up his wealth in heaven. He who has sold his worldly goods, and given them to the poor, finds the imperishable treasure. ‘Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal’ (Matthew 6:19). Blessed truly is he, ‘though he be insignificant, feeble, and obscure’; he is truly rich with the greatest of all riches. ‘Though a man, then, is richer than Cinyras⁴² and Midas⁴³ and is wicked’ and haughty as he who was luxuriously clothed in purple and fine linen and despised Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21), he is miserable, and lives in trouble, and shall not live. Wealth seems to me to be like a serpent, which will twist round the hand and bite; unless one knows how to lay hold of it without danger by the point of the tail. And riches, wriggling either in an experienced or inexperienced grasp, are dexterous at adhering and biting; unless one despises them, uses them skillfully, so as to crush the creature by the charm of the Word, he won’t escape unscathed.”

“But, as is reasonable, he alone, who possesses what is worth most, turns out truly rich, though not recognized as such. It is not jewels, gold, clothing, or beauty of person, that are of high value, but virtue; which is the Word given by the Instructor to be put in practice. This is the Word, who renounces luxury, but calls self-help as a servant, and praises frugality, the progeny of temperance. ‘Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom *is* better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her’ (Proverbs 8:10-11). Again: ‘*It is* better to have my fruit than *to have* gold and precious stones; and my produce is better than choice silver’” (Proverbs 8:19 LXX).

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁴ that some people are rich in this present age, while others are rich in the world to come. The rich man who despised Lazarus became the poorest of mankind; when he sought to obtain just a drop of water, he did not get possession even of that, to such

⁴¹ A “talent” was approximately 75 pounds of silver.

⁴² See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinyras>. Cinyras was a king of Cyprus who was fabulously wealthy from having discovered copper mines on Cyprus.

⁴³ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midas>. Midas was the King of Phrygia in the 2nd millennium BC and had the “golden touch”, such that everything he touched turned to gold, including his daughter.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, II, 13.

extreme poverty had he come. Wealth is like a runaway, thankless servant, having no fidelity; should you throw over him ten thousand chains, he will run off dragging his chains after him. What can be more wretched than men devoted to this?

“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God’ (1 Timothy 6:17). When he says, ‘the rich in this present age’, he makes it clear, that there are others who are rich, that is, in the world to come. Such was that Lazarus, poor as to the present life, but rich as to the future; not in gold and silver, and such like perishable and transitory store of wealth; but in those unutterable good things: ‘which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). For this is true wealth and opulence, when there is good unmixed, and not subject to any change. Not such was the case of that rich man who despised Lazarus, but he became the poorest of mankind. Afterwards when he sought to obtain but a drop of water, he did not get possession even of that, to such extreme poverty had he come. For this reason, he calls them rich ‘in the present age’, to teach you that along with the present life, worldly wealth is annihilated. It goes no further, neither does it change its place with its migrating possessors, but it often leaves them before their end. Therefore, he shows by saying, ‘Neither trust in uncertain riches’; for nothing is so faithless as wealth. Wealth is a runaway, thankless servant, having no fidelity; should you throw over him ten thousand chains, he will run off dragging his chains after him. Frequently those who have possessed wealth shut him up with bars and doors, placing their slaves round about for guards. But he has persuaded over these very servants and has fled away together with his guards; dragging his keepers after him like a chain, so little security was there in this custody. What then can be more faithless than this? What can be more wretched than men devoted to it? When men endeavor with all eagerness to collect so frail and fleeting a thing, they do not hear what the Psalmist Korah said: ‘Woe unto them who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches. None *of them* can by any means redeem *his* brother, nor give to God a ransom for him’ (Psalm 49:6-7). Tell me why is this woe pronounced? ‘Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain. He heaps up riches and does not know who will gather them’ (Psalm 39:6). The labor is certain, but the enjoyment uncertain. Very often you toil and endure trouble for enemies. The inheritance of your wealth after your decease, coming as it does, in many instances, to those who have injured you, and plotted against you in a thousand ways. You are assigned the sins for acquiring the wealth, but the enjoyment of it goes to others!

John Chrysostom also stated⁴⁵ that our wealth and our children are not our own. Just as our bodies are not our own, since we have been bought with a price, so our children are His servants also. Our wealth is a gift He has given to us to help our fellow servants. This was the charge brought against Dives, that he didn’t use his wealth to help Lazarus.

“Let us lead strict lives; and we shall gain two of the greatest advantages. First, we shall be thankful both when we have and when we are bereaved; and we

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, X, 6.

shall not be enslaved to things which are fleeting by, and things not our own. For whether it is wealth that He takes, He has taken but His own; or honor, or glory, or the body, or the life itself. If He takes away your son, it is not your son that He has taken, but His own servant. We didn't form him, but He made him. We just served at our son's appearing; the whole was God's own work. Let us give thanks therefore that we have been counted worthy to be His servants in this matter. But what? Did you want to have him forever? This again proves you are holding a grudge and are ignorant that it was another's child which you had, and not your own. As those who part with resignation are aware that they have what was not theirs; so, whoever gives way to grief is in fact counting the King's property as his own. For, if we are not our own, how can our children be ours? For in two ways we are His, both on account of our creation, and also on account of the Faith. Therefore, David said, 'And now what *is* my expectation? Is it not the Lord? And my ground of hope is with You' (Psalm 39:7 LXX). David also said, 'I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made. Marvelous are Your works, and *that* my soul knows very well' (Psalm 139:14). And Luke too, 'For in Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). Plying the argument about the Faith, Paul says, 'Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price' (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). For all things are God's. When then He calls and chooses to take, let us not, like grudging servants, fly off the handle, or steal our Master's goods. Your soul is not yours; how can your wealth be yours? How is it then that you spend on what is unnecessary the things which are not yours? Do you not know that for this we are soon to be put on our trial, that is, if we have used our wealth badly? But seeing that they are not ours but our Master's, it is right to expend them upon our fellow-servants. It is worth considering that the omission of this was the charge brought against that rich man who despised Lazarus (Luke 16:21); and against those also who had not given food to the Lord" (Matthew 25:42).

Blessed Are the Poor

John Chrysostom had a great deal to say about how we should treat the poor. For example: Since poverty is like a furnace (Isaiah 48:10), we can compare the furnace of poverty to the Babylonian furnace into which the three young men were thrown (Daniel 3). Lazarus was like the three young men in the furnace; Dives was like those who worshipped the golden image, since his wealth was his god. Alms for the poor could have helped Dives immensely; instead his wealth became his jailor.

As we treat the poor, so shall we be treated. After death, Dives and Lazarus changed places, except that Dives' new place was much worse than Lazarus' former place. Lazarus' former place was the worst form of poverty, where he was infirm as well as poor. Yet Lazarus never vented a bitter word, and he is blessed forever for this.

It is possible for a soul to be dead before its body dies, and we can get clues of this from the actions of the body. The body may seem to be alive, but if it has no care for virtue, and if it acts no differently than animals, it is already dead. This is what happened to Dives.

Our life here in the flesh is very short compared with Eternity. Most people readily choose a short time of work in order to obtain a long rest. We have no excuse if sloth in our life causes us to draw upon ourselves unutterable punishment

John Chrysostom compared⁴⁶ helping the poor to the three young men in the Babylonian furnace, since poverty is also a furnace (Isaiah 48:10). In Babylon, there was a golden idol, where those who refused to worship it were thrown into a furnace. The furnace of poverty is created by those who have the gold and refuse to help the poor. Lazarus came from this furnace of poverty; Dives, who had the gold, refused to help Lazarus, and ended up in torment. Dives was like those who worshipped the golden idol; Lazarus was like the three young men who were protected in the furnace by the Son of God. For us, when we embrace poverty with thankfulness, like the three young men in the furnace rejoiced with thankfulness in the flames, we become like them.

Let us imitate the young men in the Babylonian furnace (Daniel 3). Because now there is also set up a golden image, even the tyranny of Mammon. But let us not pay attention to the timbrel, to the flutes, to the harps (Daniel 3:5-15), nor to the rest of the pomp of riches; though we must fall into a furnace of poverty (Isaiah 48:10), let us choose it, rather than worship that idol. There will be 'in the midst a dew-laden breeze' (Daniel 3:50 LXX⁴⁷). Let us not shudder at hearing of 'a furnace of poverty'. For so too at that time they that fell into the furnace were shown the more glorious, but they that worshipped the image were destroyed⁴⁸. Only then all took place at once, but in this case some part will be accomplished here, some there, some both here and in the day that is to come. For they that have chosen poverty, in order that they might not worship mammon, will be more glorious both here and then, but they that have been rich unjustly here, shall then pay the utmost penalty.

From this furnace Lazarus too went forth, not less glorious than those young men; but the rich man who was in the place of those that worshipped the image, was condemned to hell. For indeed what we have now mentioned was a type of this. In this instance they who fell into the furnace suffered no hurt, but they who sat outside were laid hold of with great fierceness (Daniel 3:22, 3:48 LXX), so likewise shall it be then. The saints walking through the river of fire (Daniel 7:10) shall suffer no pain; they will even appear joyous; but they that have worshipped the image, shall see the fire rest upon them fiercer than any wild beast, and draw them in. So that if anyone disbelieves hell, when he sees this furnace, let him from the things present believe things to come, and fear not the furnace of poverty, but the furnace of sin. For the furnace of sin is flame and

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, IV, 19-20.

⁴⁷ The references to Daniel beyond verse 30 are also found in the document called the "Song of the Three Children", which used to be part of Daniel.

⁴⁸ The strong soldiers that threw the young men into the furnace were themselves killed by the heat of the flames. See Daniel 3:22, 3:48 LXX.

torment, but the furnace of poverty is dew and refreshment; and by this stands the devil, by that, angels blowing aside the flame.

These things let them hear that are rich, that are kindling the furnace of poverty. For though they shall not hurt those others, “the dew” coming to their aid; yet themselves will be an easy prey to the flame, which they have kindled with their own hands.

Then, an angel went down with those young men; now, let us condescend with them that are in the furnace of poverty (Isaiah 48:10), and by alms-deeds let us make a “dewy air,” and blow the flame quite aside. Let us be partakers of their crowns also; that the flames of hell may likewise be scattered by the voice of Christ saying, ‘I was hungry and you gave Me food’ (Matthew 25:35). That voice shall then be with us instead of a ‘dew-laden breeze’ through the midst of the flame. Let us then go down with alms-giving, into the furnace of poverty; let us behold them that in self-restraint walk therein, and trample on the burning coals. Let us behold the marvel, strange and beyond thought, a man singing praise in a furnace, a man giving thanks in fire, chained to extreme poverty yet offering much praise to Christ. They, who bear poverty with thankfulness, really become equal to those young men. For no flame is so terrible as poverty, nor so apt to set us on fire. But those young men were not set on fire; rather, on their giving thanks to the Lord, their bonds too were at once loosed (Daniel 3:23, 92 LXX). So likewise, if when you have fallen into poverty, you are thankful, both the bonds are loosened, and the flame extinguished. If it is not extinguished, what is much more marvelous, it becomes a fountain stead of a flame; which, in Babylon, likewise came to pass, and in the midst of a furnace they enjoyed a pure dew. For the fire indeed was not quenched, but the burning of those cast in it was altogether hindered. This one may see in their case also who live by the rules of wisdom, for they, even in poverty, feel more secure than the rich. Let us not therefore sit down outside the furnace, feeling no pity towards the poor; lest the same befall us as then befell those executioners (Daniel 3:22, 3:48 LXX). For if we should go down to them, and take our stand with the young men, the fire will no longer work us any harm; but if we should sit above and neglect them in the flame of their poverty, the flame will burn us up. Go down therefore into the fire, that we may not be burned up by the fire; do not sit down outside the fire, lest the flame catch hold of us. If it should find us among the poor, it will depart from us; but if alienated from them, it will run upon us quickly, and catch us. Do not therefore stand off from them that are cast in. But when the devil gives command to cast them that have not worshipped gold into the furnace of poverty, do not be one of them that cast others in. But associate with those that are cast in; that we may be of the number of the saved, and not of the burned.

John Chrysostom also stated⁴⁹ that alms for the poor is a medicine that can cleanse and quench all sin. Zacchaeus is a good example of this. This was also an important item in Paul’s work with all the Churches. Alms can be given by deeds as well as by money, such as a physician or a counselor volunteering his/her time. If we see someone possessed with the love of money, we can try to quench his fire and warn him of the Judgment to come. In fact, he is in

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XXV, Recapitulation.

prison where his wealth is his jailor. If he refuses to listen to us, he shall bear the blame himself. We see people all the time who are naked and strangers, for they are naked and a stranger to heaven. We can bring them to our own inn and clothe them with the garment of virtue. When confronted with this, many people say, "Pray for me!" In saying this, they are admitting that they are naked and beggars just as Dives was in the flames of Hades.

"For great impieties can there be pardon? Yes. There is no sin, which alms cannot cleanse; none, which alms cannot quench; all sin is beneath this; it is a medicine adapted for every wound. What is worse than a publican? The very matter of his occupation is altogether one of injustice; and yet Zacchaeus washed away all these sins. Notice how even Christ shows this, by the care taken to have a purse, and to bear the contributions put into it (John 12:6). And Paul also says, 'They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do' (Galatians 2:10); everywhere the Scripture has much to say concerning this matter. 'A man's own wealth is the ransom of his soul: but the poor endures not threatening' (Proverbs 13:8); and with reason; for Christ said, '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, follow⁵⁰ Me' (Matthew 19:21). This may well be part of perfection. But alms may be done not only by money, but by deeds. For example: one may kindly stand by a person to aid and defend him; one may reach to him a helping hand; the service rendered by deeds has often done more good even than money. Let us set to work all the different kinds of almsgiving. Can you give alms by money? Don't be slack! Can you give alms by good offices? Do not say, 'because I have no money, this is nothing I can do'. This is a very great point; look on your deeds as if you had given gold. Can you do it by kind attention? Do this also. For instance, if you were a physician, give your skill; for this also is a great matter. Can you by counsel? This service is much greater than all. For in so doing you put away not starvation, but a grievous death. With such alms the Apostles above measure abounded: therefore, it was that the distribution of money they put into the hands of those after them, themselves exhibiting the mercy shown by words. Do you think it is small alms, to a lost, castaway soul, a soul in uttermost jeopardy, possessed by a burning fever, to be able to rid it of its disease? For example, do you see one possessed by love of money? Pity the man. Is he in danger of suffocation? Quench his fire. 'What if he will not be persuaded?' Do your part and don't be remiss. Have you seen him in bonds? For wealth is indeed bonds (Matthew 25:34-36). Go to him; visit him; console him; try to release him of his bonds. If he refuses, he shall bear the blame himself. Have you seen him naked, and a stranger? For he is indeed naked, and a stranger to heaven. Bring him to your own inn; clothe him with the garment of virtue; give him the city which is in heaven. 'What if I myself am naked?', you might say. Clothe yourself first; if you know that you are naked, assuredly you know that you need to be clothed; if you know what sort of nakedness this is. What numbers of women now wear silken apparel but are indeed naked of the garments of virtue! Let their husbands clothe these women. 'But they will not admit those garments; they choose to have the silk ones'. Then

⁵⁰ Jesus was offering the life of an Apostle to the rich young synagogue ruler (Luke 18:18-30), but the young ruler turned Jesus down because he preferred his wealth.

do this also first; induce them to have a longing for those garments of virtue; show them that they are naked; speak to them of judgment to come. Answer me, what is the clothing we shall need there? If you will bear with me, I also will show you this nakedness. He that is naked, when it is cold, shrinks and shudders, and stands there cowering, and with his arms folded; but in the summer heat, not so. If then I shall prove to you that your rich men, and rich women, the more they put on, the more naked they are, do not take it wrong. How then, I ask you, when we raise the subject of hell-fire, and of the torments there, do not these shrink and shudder more than those naked ones? Do they not bitterly groan and condemn themselves? When they come to this or that man, and say to him, 'Pray for me', do they not speak the same words as those naked beggars? Now indeed, after all that we can say, the nakedness is not yet apparent; but it will be plain enough there. How, and in what way? When these silken garments and precious stones shall have perished, and it shall be only by the garments of virtue and of vice that all men are shown, when the poor shall be clad with exceeding glory, but the rich, naked and in disgraceful sort, shall be carried away to their punishments! What was more naked than that rich man who arrayed himself in purple? What was poorer than Lazarus? Then which of them uttered the words of beggars? Which of them was in abundance? If one should deck his house with an abundance of tapestry, and himself sit naked inside, what would be the benefit? So, it is in the case of these women. Truly, the house of the soul, the body I mean, they hang round with plenty of garments; but the mistress of the house sits naked inside. Lend me the eyes of the soul, and I will show you the soul's nakedness. For what is the garment of the soul? Virtue, of course. And what its nakedness? Vice! For just as if one were to strip any decent person, that person would be ashamed, and would shrink and cower out of sight. Just so the soul, if we wish to see it; the soul which doesn't have these garments blushes for shame."

John Chrysostom further pointed out⁵¹ that as we treat the poor, so shall we be treated. If we get angry with them or laugh at them because of their poverty, there may come a time at the Last Judgment when we are in their place begging God for mercy. As we have done, so it will be done to us. Dives had this same interaction when he saw Lazarus across the "great gulf" and asked for a drop of water. The result was that Dives and Lazarus switched places, except Dives' new state was much worse than Lazarus' old state was.

"With respect to alms-giving, let us pity our fellow-men; let us not, I entreat, neglect them when perishing with hunger. How can it be otherwise than inappropriate, that we should sit at the table laughing and enjoying ourselves, when we hear others wailing as they pass through the street, and we don't even turn at their cries. Why should we get angry with them, and call them 'cheat'? 'What do we mean? Does anyone plan to cheat for a single loaf of bread?' 'Yes', said someone. Then in this case above all let him be pitied; in this case above all let him be delivered from his need. Or if you don't intend to give, don't insult either; if you will not save the wreck, don't thrust it into the gulf. Consider, when you thrust away the poor man who comes to you, who you will be when you call on God. He said, 'With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you'

⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVII, 4.

(Matthew 7:2). Consider how he departs, crushed, bowed down, lamenting; besides his poverty having received also the blow from your insolence. If you count the begging a curse, think what a tempest it makes for the poor man; he begs, but gets nothing, and goes away insulted. How long shall we be like wild beasts, and violate nature through greediness? Many people groan at these words; but I desire them always to have this feeling of compassion. Think of that day when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, when we shall beg for mercy, and Christ will bring them forward. He shall say, 'For the sake of a single loaf, of a single obol⁵², so great a surge did you raise in these souls!' What shall we reply? What defense shall we make? To show that He will bring them forward, hear what He said, 'Inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me' (Matthew 25:45). They will no more say anything to us, but God on their behalf will upbraid us. Since the rich man saw Lazarus too, and Lazarus said nothing to him, but Abraham spoke for him; thus, it will be in the case of the poor who are now despised by us. We shall not see them stretching out their hands in pitiful state but being in rest; and we shall take the state which was theirs (except much more grievous) as a punishment. The rich man didn't desire to be filled with crumbs 'there', but was scorched and tormented sharply, and was told, 'remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things' (Luke 16:25). Let us not then deem wealth any great thing; it will only help us on our way to punishment, if we don't pay attention. Conversely, if we pay attention, poverty also becomes to us an addition of enjoyment and rest. For we put off our sins if we bear it with thankfulness plus we gain great boldness before God".

John Chrysostom noted⁵³ that Lazarus was affected by the bitterest form of poverty, where he was infirm as well as having no one to look out for him. In his face several times each day were the excesses of Dives, where the parasites and flatterers of Dives were pampered beyond their need, while Lazarus couldn't even get a few crumbs from Dives' table. The point is that none of these things injured Lazarus; he never vented a bitter word; he was superior to all of them. He endured this trial bravely and with much fortitude.

"But poverty, someone will say, disposes men to be discontented and often to utter profane words, and condescend to mean actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul. For Lazarus also was very poor, and besides poverty he suffered from infirmity, a bitterer trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty more severely felt. In addition to infirmity there was a total absence of protectors, and difficulty in finding any to supply his wants, which increased the bitterness of poverty and infirmity. For each of these things is painful in itself, but when there are none to minister to the sufferer's wants, the suffering becomes greater, the flame more painful, the distress more bitter, the tempest fiercer, the billows stronger, the furnace hotter. And if one examines the case thoroughly there was yet a fourth trial besides these — the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who dwelt nearby. If you would find a fifth

⁵² An obol was 1/6 of a drachma.

⁵³ John Chrysostom, A Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does not Injure Himself, 10-11.

thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that he was upset by it. For not only was that rich man living luxuriously, but several times in the day he saw the poor man; for he had been laid at his gate, being a grievous spectacle of pitiful distress, and the bare sight of him was sufficient to soften even a heart of stone. Yet even this did not induce that unmerciful man to assist this case of poverty. He had his luxurious table spread, goblets wreathed with flowers, pure wine plentifully poured, grand armies of cooks, parasites and flatterers from early dawn, troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters. He spent all his time in devising every kind of dissipation, drunkenness, and in reveling in dress and feasting. But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by grievous hunger, the bitterest infirmity, the oppression of his many sores, by destitution, and the ills which result from these things, he never even gave him a thought. Yet the parasites and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their need; but the poor man, encompassed with so many miseries, was not even granted the crumbs which fell from that table. Yet none of these things injured him, he did not give vent to a bitter word, he did not utter profane speech; but he acted like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by excessive heat. Although oppressed by these sufferings, he was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which in many cases is produced by them. Generally speaking poor men are consumed with envy and racked by malicious ill-will, when they see rich men; they deem life not worth living, and this even when they are well supplied with necessary food. What would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble hearted, seeing that he was poor beyond all other poor men, and not only poor but also infirm. He was without anyone to protect or cheer him; he lay in the midst of the city as if in a remote desert; he wasted away with bitter hunger, and saw all good things being poured on the rich man as out of a fountain. He didn't have the benefit of any human consolation but lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of the dogs, for he was so enfeebled and broken down in body that he could not scare them away. Do you perceive that he who does not injure himself suffers no evil?"

"For what harm was done to this hero by his bodily infirmity? Or by the absence of protectors? Or by the coming of the dogs? Or the evil proximity of the rich man with his great luxury, haughtiness and arrogance? Did it weaken him on behalf of virtue? Did it ruin his fortitude? Nowhere was he harmed at all, but that multitude of sufferings, and the cruelty of the rich man, rather increased his strength, and became the pledge for him of infinite crowns of victory. It was a means of adding to his rewards, an augmentation of his recompense, and a promise of an increased return. He was crowned not merely on account of his poverty, his hunger, his sores, or the dogs licking them. Having such a neighbor as the rich man, and being seen by him every day, and perpetually overlooked, he endured this trial bravely and with much fortitude. It was a trial which added no small flame, but in fact a very strong one to the furnace of poverty" (Isaiah 48:10).

John Chrysostom took a look at⁵⁴ what the soul is like when it departs from God. We can see signs of the soul's life by looking at the body. It may seem to be alive, but it may already be dead. When the soul has no care for virtue, but is grasping and transgresses the Law, it acts no differently than beasts. Dives had a dead soul, and this is obvious from what he did. He ate, drank and lived for pleasure only, just like the unmerciful and the cruel. Lazarus, however, wrestled with continual hunger, but he uttered no blasphemy against God, but endured everything nobly. If the demons can fall on a soul, striking and biting it, but it has no sense that this is happening, that soul is like a dead body that doesn't even feel this.

“Christ would like us to contribute something to our salvation from ourselves. Let us then contribute and preserve the life of the soul. What is life in a soul, we can learn from the body. For the body, we affirm it is alive, when it moves with a healthy kind of motion; but when it lies prostrate and powerless, or its motions are disorderly, though it retain the semblance of life or motion, such a life is more grievous than any death. Should it utter nothing sane but words of the crazy, and see one object instead of another, such a man again is more pitiful than those who are dead. Similarly, the soul, when it has no healthiness, though it retains a semblance of life, is dead. When it does not see gold as gold but as something great and precious; when it doesn't think of the future but crawls on the ground; when it does one thing in place of another. How is it clear that we have a soul? Is it not from its operations? When it does not perform the things proper to it, is it not dead? When, for instance, it has no care for virtue, but is grasping and transgresses the law; how can I tell that you have a soul? Because you walk? But even the irrational creatures do this as well. Because you eat and drink? But even the wild beasts do this. Well then, because you stand upright on two feet? This convinces me rather that you are a beast in human form. For when you resemble beasts in all other respects, but not in its manner of erecting itself, you do the more disturb and terrify me. I the more consider that which I see to be a monster. If I were to see a beast speaking with the voice of a man, I should not for that reason say it was a man, but even for that very reason a beast more monstrous than a beast. How then can I learn that you have the soul of a man, when you kick like the donkey, when you bear malice like the camel, when you bite like the bear, when you devour like the wolf, when you steal like the fox, when you are wily as the serpent, when you are shameless as the dog? How can I learn that you have the soul of a man? Would you like me to show you a dead soul and a living soul? Let us turn the conversation back to those men of old; and, if you will, let us set before us the rich man in the story of Lazarus, and we shall know what death in a soul is. He had a dead soul, and it is plain from what he did. Of the works of the soul he did not one but ate, drank and lived in pleasure only. Such are the unmerciful and the cruel, for these too have a dead soul as he had. All the warmth that flows out of the love of our neighbor had been spent, and it was deader than a lifeless body. But the poor man was not such but standing on the very summit of heavenly wisdom shone out. Though wrestling with continual hunger, and not even supplied with the food that was necessary, he spoke of no blasphemy against God, but endured all nobly. Now this is no trifling work of the soul; but a very high proof that it is well-strung and healthful. When

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VI, 3.

these qualities are not present, it is plainly because the soul is dead that they have perished. Shall we not pronounce that soul dead which the Devil falls upon, striking, biting, spurning it, yet it has no sense of any of these things, but lies deadened and doesn't grieve when being robbed of its wealth? When the devil leaps on it, and it remains unmoved, it is like a body when the soul has departed and doesn't even feel it!"

John Chrysostom summarized⁵⁵ our life in this age with our life in Eternity. Our life here is a short time of work compared to endless ages. In worldly matters, most people readily choose a brief time of work in order to obtain a long rest, even though this often doesn't happen the way they plan it. What excuse shall we have if we draw upon ourselves unutterable punishment just due to sloth in this life? Dives lived his whole life in sloth, when he could easily have left the crumbs from his table for poor Lazarus every day. Anything we endure in this age is just a shadow compared to the torments of the age to come.

"Let us not abuse God's long-suffering for a single moment, for such is this present life. If we live luxuriously, we draw on ourselves punishment through endless ages; but let us work for a moment, that we may be crowned forever. Notice that even in worldly things most men act in this manner; they choose brief work in order to obtain a long rest, even though the opposite often falls out to them! In this life there is an equal portion of work and reward; often, the work seems endless while the fruit is little, or not even a little. In the case of the kingdom of God conversely, the labor is little while the pleasure is great and boundless. For consider: the farmer who wearies himself the whole year through, and at the very end of his hope misses the fruit of those many labors. The shipmaster and the soldier, until extreme old age, are occupied with wars and labors. Often each of them has departed this life, the one with the loss of his wealthy cargoes, the other, along with victory, of life itself. What excuse then shall we have, if in worldly matters we prefer what is laborious in order that we may rest for a little? In spiritual things, if we do the converse of this, we draw upon ourselves unutterable punishment for a little sloth. Therefore, I beseech you all to recover from this frenzy. None shall deliver us in that day; neither brother, father, child, friend, neighbor, nor any other; if our works show us false, all will be over and we will perish. How many lamentations did that rich man make when he besought the Patriarch Abraham and begged that Lazarus might be sent! But listen to what Abraham said to him: 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us' (Luke 16:26). How many petitions did those virgins make to their fellows for a little oil! But listen to what they said; 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves' (Matthew 25:9). And no one was able to bring them into the bridal chamber. Thinking then on these things let us also be careful of that which is our life. For mention all the work and bring forward besides all the punishment; all these combined will be nothing in comparison to the good things to come. Consider therefore, if you will, fire, steel and wild beasts, and if there is anything worse than these; but yet these are not even a shadow compared with those torments."

⁵⁵

John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, IX, 4.

Example of priest who prayed for the departed faithfully, even though he was not very devout in other things. Where were the people he was praying for?

APPENDIX A

Descriptions of Hell in the Scriptures

Words Used to Describe Hell

Hebrew

Sheol (7585): Hades, implying a subterranean location

Shakhat (7845): a pit or a trap used figuratively implying destruction

Abaddon (11): destruction, from the verb “to wander away”

Greek

Hades (86): lit. The unseen; in Greek Mythology, the subterranean abode of the dead corresponding to the Hebrew Sheol (Compare Philippians 2:10, Ephesians 4:9)

Tartaros (5020): In Greek Mythology, the deepest abyss in Hades for the worst offenders

Abussos (12): From negative participle plus buthos = sea; implies the ocean bottom and below; abyss. Note that in Revelation 21:1 there is no more sea.

Phrear (5421): a hole in the ground; a pit. Used to describe a shaft leading to the abyss

Gehenna (1067): Gay-Hinnom; Valley of Hinnom, a smoldering garbage dump outside Jerusalem. Besides trash, the Valley of Hinnom also included the effluent of all the latrines in Jerusalem

Limnen tou puros (3041 & 4442): Lake of Fire

Passages Describing Hell

Deuteronomy 32:21-22 – Sheol, as a subterranean place, includes fire

Isaiah 66:21-24 – For those in Sheol, their worm (lit. maggot) will not die and their fire shall not be quenched. This passage is amplified in Revelation 20-22, and is quoted in Mark 9:42-48

Job 33:17-18 – Sheol and shakhat are sometimes used together to imply hell

Proverbs 15:11 – Sheol and abaddon are also used together to imply hell

Job 31:12 – Fire is also associated with abaddon

Acts 2:27, 31 – In the Nicean Creed, we say that Jesus descended into hell. Here we see one place where that statement comes from: Jesus was not left in Hades.

Revelation 20:13-14 – The sea, death and Hades gave up the dead in them for judgment. Then, death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire and there was no more sea.

2 Peter 2:4 – God did not spare the angels who sinned but consigning to Tartarus delivered (them) in chains of gloom. They were being watched and guarded awaiting judgment.

Revelation 9:1-4 – A star fell from heaven and was given the key to the shaft (Gk *phrear*) of the abyss (abussos). Out of the shaft came smoke like from a great furnace and from the smoke came locusts (or demons) to torment unbelievers. Perhaps these are the ones consigned to “Tartarus” in 2 Peter 2:4.

Genesis 7:11 – (Septuagint) In the Greek rendering of the Old Testament (200 BC), it was the fountains of the great abyss (abussos) that burst open to create the major source of the flood water. Even today, the ocean bottoms are referred to as the “abyssal plains” (National Geographic World Atlas).

Matthew 13:41-43 – This is the conclusion of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Here Hell is described as a furnace where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Jude 13 – Here hell is described as “the black darkness.”

What is Abraham’s Bosom?

The Greek word for bosom, *kolpos*, is similar to the English word bosom and implies more than just physical anatomy.

John 13:23 – John leaned on Jesus’ bosom at the Last Supper. Here physical anatomy is obvious.

John 1:18 – The Only Begotten Son is in the bosom of the Father. More than physical anatomy is implied: “bosom” here implies a true oneness.

Luke 6:38 – The reward for generosity is “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom.” This is not an allusion to some type of trash compactor. “Bosom” here implies generally things within one’s control or possession.

Thus, Abraham’s bosom in our Gospel lesson implies (1) a oneness of Lazarus with Abraham and (2) a place that is under Abraham’s control as one of the Patriarchs of the Faith.

Luke 13:27-29 – A further aspect of Abraham’s bosom is the gathering of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the saints and the righteous in the Kingdom of God. With the eyes of faith in the Liturgy, we can get a tiny glimpse of this as we look through the windows of heaven (icons).

All this represents a bewildering array of terms: Hades, the abyss, the Lake of Fire, Abraham’s bosom, heaven. There is a mystery to this that we won’t know until the Lord returns.

Just as the New Jerusalem is the place prepared for the righteous (Revelation 21:2, John 14:2-34), so hell (in its various descriptive terms) is the place prepared for the devil and his legions (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4) and for the ungodly (Jude 13, 2 Peter 1:17). We are told hell will consist of darkness, flame, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that it will not be part of the New Jerusalem, but will be outside (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11, Isaiah 66:24). But how can Hades, much less death, be thrown into the Lake of Fire? This suggests that Hades (and consequently Abraham's bosom) are temporary abodes and that the Lake of Fire and the New Jerusalem are the final destinations. To consider such merely adds to the mystery.

APPENDIX B

Another View of the Soul after Death

Gregory of Nyssa, along with Macrina, the sister of Basil the Great, presented another view⁵⁶ of how the soul lives after the death of the body. This other view looks at the Scriptures in a more spiritual way and spiritualizes statements that we might normally interpret in a physical way.

1. The soul is “simple and uncompounded” and survives death including the dissolution of the composite body, whose scattered elements it will continue to accompany, as if watching over its property till the Resurrection, when it will clothe itself in them anew.
2. The soul is “an *intellectual* being.”
3. Hades is not a particular spot; it means the Invisible; those passages in the Bible in which the regions under the earth are alluded to are explained as allegorical.
4. Regarding the Rich Man and Lazarus: both were in the grave; and so all that is said of them is in a *spiritual* sense. But the *soul* can suffer still, being cognizant, not only of the elements of the whole body, but of those that formed each member, e. g. the tongue. By the relations of the Rich Man are meant the impressions made on his soul by the things of flesh and blood.
5. The degree of pain which must be endured by each one is necessarily proportioned to the measure of the wickedness.
6. What sort of eyes has the Rich Man to lift up in hell, when he has left his bodily eyes in that tomb? How can a disembodied spirit feel any flame? What sort of tongue can he crave to be cooled with the drop of water, when he has lost his tongue of flesh? What is the finger that is to convey to him this drop? What sort of place is the “bosom” of repose? The bodies of both of them are in the tomb, and their souls are disembodied, and do not consist of parts either. So, it is impossible to make the framework of the narrative correspond with the truth, if we understand it literally; we can do that only by translating each detail into an equivalent in the world of ideas. Thus, we must think of the gulf as that which parts ideas which may not be confounded from running together, not as a chasm of the earth. Such a chasm, however vast it was, could be traversed with no difficulty by a disembodied intelligence; since intelligence can in no time be wherever it will.
7. God divided the life of man into two parts, namely, this present life, and that “out of the body” hereafter; and He placed on the first a limit of the briefest possible time, while He prolonged the other into eternity. In His love for man He gave him his choice, to have the one or the other of those things, good or evil, I mean, in which of the two parts he liked: either in this short and transitory life, or in those endless ages, whose limit is infinity. Some soon use up on gluttony in this fleshly life the dividend of good which their constitution can claim, and they reserve none of it for the afterlife. But those who by a discreet and sober-minded calculation economize the powers of living are afflicted by things painful to sense here, but they reserve their good for the succeeding life, and so their happier lot is lengthened out to last as long as that eternal life. This, in my opinion, is the “gulf”; which is not made by the parting of the earth, but by those decisions in this life which result in a separation into opposite characters. This is the reason, I think, that the name of “Abraham’s bosom” is given to that good situation of the soul in which Scripture makes the athlete of endurance repose.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and Resurrection”, in Philosophical Works.

Abraham purchased future blessedness by present annoyance. Meanwhile the denial of these blessings, which they witness, becomes in the others a flame, which burns the soul and causes the craving for the refreshment of one drop out of that ocean of blessings wherein the saints are affluent; which nevertheless they do not get. If one, then, thinks of those atoms in which each detail of the body potentially inheres, and surmises that Scripture means a “finger” and a “tongue” and an “eye” and the rest as existing, after dissolution, only in the sphere of the soul, one will not miss the probable truth. Moreover, if each detail carries the mind away from a material acceptation of the story, surely the “hell” which we have just been speaking of cannot reasonably be thought a place so named; rather we are there told by Scripture about a certain unseen and immaterial situation in which the soul resides.

8. What then, I asked, is the doctrine here? Why, seeing that Lazarus’ soul is occupied with his present blessings and turns around to look at nothing that he has left, while the rich man is still attached, with a cement as it were, even after death, to the life of feeling, which he does not divest himself of even when he has ceased to live, still keeping as he does flesh and blood in his thoughts. For in his entreaty that his kindred may be exempted from his sufferings he plainly shows that he is not freed yet from fleshly feeling.

PAUL'S REVELATION⁵⁷

November 3, 2024
19th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

Today's Epistle is used in the West either on the 9th Sunday after Pentecost or two Sundays before Lent. In the Orthodox lectionary, today's Epistle lesson is also used for the Feast Day of Peter and Paul on June 29.

The lesson focuses on some of the visions and revelations that the Apostle Paul experienced. These visions were great revelations, but Paul had kept silent about them for 14 years (2 Corinthians 12:2). Since 2 Corinthians was written in 55 AD, this places the time of the revelations in 41 AD, which would be about 7 years after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Thus, the visions occurred while Paul was in Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30) and about 4 years before Barnabas brought him to Antioch to help out with the church there (Acts 11:25-26). For more details of this and for a history of the early life of Paul, see the Epistle lesson for the 20th Sunday of Pentecost.

Table of Contents

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9.....	1163
The Third Heaven.....	1164
Inexpressible Words, Not Lawful to Utter.....	1165
Paul's Thorn in the Flesh.....	1166
Messengers of Satan.....	1169
Strength Made Perfect in Weakness.....	1172

The Apostle John experienced similar visions and revelations (Revelation 1:10-11, 17, Revelation 4:1-2), which occurred on "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10) or Sunday⁵⁸. John did not say whether he was bodily translated to heaven (Revelation 4:1-2). Like Paul, he may not have known.

Why did Paul keep silent about these things so long? And why did he break silence at this time? He states that it is not profitable for him to boast of such things (2 Corinthians 12:1). However, the Corinthians had been putting up with others that had boasted (foolishly) of their own visions (2 Corinthians 11:18-20). While Paul was reluctant, he could also see that some of the flock in Corinth were in danger of perishing: those that had not repented from uncleanness, fornications and lewdness (2 Corinthians 12:31). He needed to get their attention regarding the things he had been saying and show them that the heretics they had been putting up with hadn't seen what he had seen.

Copyright © Mark Kern 2018

⁵⁷ See also the Feast Day for Peter and Paul (6/29), where this Epistle lesson is also used.

⁵⁸ Ignatius in 107 AD wrote the Christians no longer keep the Sabbath but live in accordance with the Lord's Day: Ignatius of Antioch, Magnesians, 9:1.

John Chrysostom adds⁵⁹ that Paul was caught up into Paradise – before the beginning of his apostleship – so that he might not be inferior to the rest of the Apostles or seem to be. For they had accompanied Christ but Paul had not.

“Great indeed was this revelation! But this was not the only one: there were many others besides, but he mentions one out of many. For that there were many, listen to what he says: ‘Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations’ (2 Corinthians 12:7). And yet, a man may say, if he wished to conceal them, he ought not to have given any intimation whatever or said anything of the sort; but if he wished to speak of them, to speak plainly. Why then is it that he neither spoke plainly nor kept silence? To show by this also that he resorts to the thing unwillingly. Therefore, also he has stated the time delay, ‘fourteen years’. He mentions this to show that he had refrained for so long a time and would not now have spoken out now, except the necessity for doing so had been great. But he would have still kept silence, had he not seen the brethren perishing. Now if Paul from the very beginning was such a one as to be counted worthy of such a revelation, when as yet he had not done such good works; consider what he must have grown to in fourteen years. Notice also how even in this very matter he shows modesty, by his saying some things, but confessing that of others he is ignorant. For that he was caught up indeed, he declared, but whether ‘in the body’ or ‘out of the body’ he says he does not know. Yet it would have been quite enough, if he had told of his being caught up and had been silent about the others; but as it is, in his modesty he adds this also. Was it the mind that he was caught up and the soul, while the body remained dead? Or was the body caught up also? It is impossible to tell. If Paul, who was caught up and who heard things unspeakable, so many and so great, had fallen into ignorance, much more we. That he was in Paradise he knew, and that he was in the third heaven he was not ignorant, but the manner he didn’t know clearly.”

The Third Heaven

The third heaven, which Paul and John saw in their visions, is a term used by 1st century Jews to describe heavenly realms. One can think of the atmosphere of the earth as the 1st heaven where birds fly, and which holds moisture for rain (Genesis 1:8, Revelation 8:13, 19:17). The sun is described as stopping in mid-heaven, or the second heaven, for Joshua (Joshua 10:13) and the lights in the heavens are located there (Genesis 1:14). The 3rd heaven then, would be the place where God dwells.

Methodius of Olympus stated⁶⁰ that Paul had at least two revelations: one of the third heaven and one of Paradise. Methodius was countering heretics of his day who said that life in Paradise was incorporeal; not true, people have fleshly bodies in Paradise.

“Paul had (at least) two revelations. Paul does not suppose paradise to be in the third heaven, when he says, ‘I know such a man caught up to the third heaven; and I know such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, God

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXVI, vv. 2-3.

⁶⁰ Methodius of Olympus, From the Discourse on the Resurrection, III, 9.

Jerome, Letters, LI, 5 says that the third heaven is in one place and Paradise is in another place.

knows, that was caught up into paradise' (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Here he signifies that Paul had seen two revelations, having been evidently taken up twice, once to the third heaven, and once into paradise. For the words, 'I know such a man caught up', make it certain that he was personally shown a revelation respecting the third heaven. And the words which follow, 'And I know such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, God knows, that he was caught up into paradise', show that another revelation was made to him respecting paradise. Now he was led to make this statement by his opponent's having laid it down from the apostle's words that paradise is a mere conception, as it is above the heaven, in order to draw the conclusion that life in paradise is incorporeal."

Jerome stated⁶¹ that Paul really did not know whether he was in the body or not when he was carried away to the third heaven.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁶² that Elijah only went to the first heaven⁶³, but Paul went to the third heaven and Paradise. Peter received the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul came back that he might also receive the crown of martyrdom.

"Note that a servant of Christ was caught up to the third heaven. For if Elijah attained as far as the first heaven, but Paul as far as the third; Paul, therefore, has obtained a more honorable dignity. Be not ashamed of your Apostles; they are not inferior to Moses, nor second to the Prophets; but they are noble among the noble. For Elijah truly was taken up into heaven; but Peter has the keys of the kingdom of heaven, having received the words, 'Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 16:19). Elijah was taken up only to heaven; but Paul both into heaven, and into paradise, for the disciples of Jesus received more manifold grace. Paul heard 'inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter' (2 Corinthians 12:4); but Paul came down again from above. Not because he was unworthy to stay in the third heaven, but in order that after having enjoyed things above man's reach, having descended in honor, having preached Christ, and having died for His sake, he might also receive the crown of martyrdom."

Inexpressible Words, Not Lawful to Utter

Paul said, "I know such a man how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:3-4). What is Paul referring to?

Clement of Alexandria stated⁶⁴ that Paul is intimating the impossibility of expressing God and indicating that what is divine is unutterable by human power.

⁶¹ Jerome, Preface to Daniel.

⁶² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIV, 26.

⁶³ If the first heaven is the sky where birds fly, then the Scripture only speaks of Elijah going up into the sky. He may well have attained the third heaven by the time of the Transfiguration.

⁶⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, V, 12.

Hippolytus of Rome stated⁶⁵ that what Paul saw and heard in the third heaven and in Paradise are the mysteries that Christians alone are acquainted with.

“Paul knew of the gate of heaven, partially opening it in a mystery, and stating ‘that he was caught up by an angel and ascended as far as the second and third heaven into paradise itself; and that he beheld sights and heard unspeakable words which it would not be possible for man to declare’ (2 Corinthians 12:4). These are what are by all called the secret mysteries. ‘These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him’ (1 Corinthians 2:13-14). These are ineffable mysteries of the Spirit, which (Christians) alone are acquainted with.”

Gregory the Theologian stated⁶⁶ that Paul may have learned something more about God's nature than has been revealed to us. Since Paul couldn't talk about it, we know only in part and see only as through a mirror dimly.

“If it had been permitted to Paul to utter what the Third Heaven contained, and his own advance, or ascension, or assumption there, perhaps we should know something more about God's Nature, if this was the mystery of the rapture. But since it was ineffable, we too will honor it by silence. This much we will hear Paul say about it, that we know in part and we prophesy in part (1 Corinthians 13:9). This and the like to this are the confessions of one who is untrained in speech (2 Corinthians 11:6), who gives proof of Christ speaking in him, the great doctor and champion of the truth. Therefore, Paul estimates all knowledge on earth only as through a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12), as taking its stand upon little images of the truth.”

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

In order that Paul might not get too conceited concerning his visions, the Lord also gave him a “thorn in the flesh”, “a messenger of Satan” to beat him up. (Greek: *kolaphizo* = to strike with the fist). Much speculation has been made concerning whether this was some physical problem or whether it refers to some people that Paul fought against. Some have implied a physical weakness; however, John Chrysostom shows that this refers to people who harassed Paul.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁷ that Paul's “thorn in the flesh” referred to people who vigorously opposed him, like Alexander the coppersmith and others with him. Since the word “satan” means an adversary in Hebrew, the term “messenger of satan” refers to the continuous persecution from Paul's enemies. The “thorn in the flesh” could not be a physical ailment from the devil since the devil submitted to all of Paul's bidding.

⁶⁵ Hippolytus of Rome, Refutation of All Heresies, V, 3.

⁶⁶ Gregory the Theologian, Second Theological Oration, XXVIII, 20.

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXVI, v. 7.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, V, v. 20.

“There are some who have said that Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a kind of pain in the head which was inflicted by the devil; but God forbid! For the body of Paul never could have been given over to the hands of the devil, seeing that the devil himself submitted to the same Paul at his mere bidding. Paul set laws and bounds for Satan, when he delivered over the fornicator for the destruction of the flesh (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), and Satan dared not transgress them. What then is the meaning of what is said? An adversary is called, in Hebrew, satan; and the Scripture has so termed such as were adversaries. Speaking of Solomon, it says, ‘In his days there was no satan,’ that is, no adversary, enemy, or opponent (1 Kings 5:4). What he says then is this: God would sometimes not permit the Preaching to progress, in order to check our high thoughts; but permitted the adversaries to set upon us. This indeed was enough to pluck down his high thoughts; not because of pains in the head. By the ‘messenger of Satan’, Paul means Alexander the coppersmith, the party of Hymenaeus and Philetus, all the adversaries of the word; those who contended with and fought against him, those that cast him into a prison, those that beat him, that led him away to death. For they did Satan’s business. As then Paul calls those Jews children of the devil (Acts 19:14-17), who were imitating his deeds, so also, he calls a ‘messenger of Satan’ everyone that opposes. He says therefore, ‘There was given to me a thorn to punch me; not as if God puts arms into such men’s hands, God forbid! Not that He chastises or punishes, but for the time allows and permits them.’”

John Chrysostom continued to say⁶⁸ that Paul eventually recognized that God’s grace was sufficient for him to raise the dead, heal the blind, cleanse lepers, etc. Paul didn’t need the luxury of preaching without annoyances. At first Paul and the Lord had a different viewpoint; Paul thought that his thorn was to keep him from being exalted; God said that He permitted this to show His power. This also makes it plain that Paul is not referring to pains in the head.

“When the Lord spoke to the Apostle Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’, He was saying, ‘It is sufficient for you that you raise the dead, that you cure the blind, that you cleanse lepers, that you work those other miracles. Don’t seek also exemption from danger and fear and the luxury to preach without annoyances. Are you dejected that it should seem to be that your God is weak, that there are many who plot against you, beat you, harass and scourge you? This very thing shows My power. ‘For My power’, He said, ‘is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). When being persecuted you overcome your persecutors; when being harassed you get the better of them that harass you; when being put in bonds you convert those that put you in bonds. Don’t seek then more than is needed! Notice how Paul assigns one reason, and God another? Paul says, ‘Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me’ (2 Corinthians 12:7); but Paul says that God said He permitted it in order to show His power. ‘You seek a thing which is not only not needed, but which also obscures the glory of My power’. By the words, ‘is sufficient for you’, God signifies that nothing else need be added, but the whole was complete. From this also it is plain that Paul is not referring to pains in the head. The Apostles did not preach when they were sick,

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXVI, v. 9.

for they could not preach when ill; but even though they were harassed and persecuted, they overcame all. After having heard this then, Paul says, ‘Most gladly therefore will I boast in my weaknesses’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). That Paul and his fellow Apostles may not sink down, when those false Apostles are boasting over their contrary lot and these are suffering persecution, Paul shows that he shines all the brighter for this. Thus, the power of God shines forth the brighter, and what happens is just matter for glorying. Therefore, he says, ‘Most gladly therefore will I boast’. Paul also hints at another thing also, namely, that in proportion as the trials grew in intensity, in the same proportion the grace was increased and continued.”

“Notice how Paul has now revealed it in the clearest manner? In mentioning the type of weakness, he spoke not of fevers, nor anything of that sort, nor any other bodily ailment, but of ‘injuries, persecutions, distresses’. Notice a single-minded soul? He longs to be delivered from those dangers; but when he heard God’s answer that this was not fitting, he was not only not sorry that he was disappointed by his prayer but was even glad. Therefore, he said, ‘I take pleasure’, I rejoice, I long to be injured, persecuted, distressed for Christ’s sake. And he said these things both to check those enemies, and to raise the spirits of these friends that they might not be ashamed at Paul’s sufferings. For what he said was enough to make them shine brighter than all men.”

Alexander the coppersmith was most likely the son of Simon of Cyrene, who had been pressed into service to carry Jesus’ cross at the crucifixion (Mark 15:21). Simon and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, were probably among those men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20) who had started the Church in Antioch.

Rufus was in Antioch when Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their First Missionary Journey and when Paul and Silas were sent off on the Second Missionary Journey. After the Second Missionary Journey, Rufus was sent to Rome by Peter and Paul and was there when Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13). Later Rufus was ordained Bishop of Thebes in Egypt; he was eventually martyred in 107 AD along with Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch.

Alexander chose a different path for himself, however. He was associated with the craftsmen such as Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24) who built small idols; he opposed Paul in about 54 AD (Acts 19:33). Later Paul referred to Alexander as a coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14). Yet he rejected the faith. Along with Hymenaeus, Paul felt it necessary to deliver them to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:19-20). They were part of a heresy that claimed that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:16-18); this overthrew the faith of some people. Finally, it was Alexander that was primarily responsible for Paul’s martyrdom in about 67 AD. Paul said, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words” (2 Timothy 4:14-15). The implication is that Alexander went out of his way to have Paul hunted down, arrested and accused before the Roman authorities. Since Alexander had inside knowledge of the beginnings of Christianity, this represented a serious betrayal. Alexander also had an ax to grind at Paul for Paul’s delivering him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶⁹ that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was not given to him to keep him humble; and Paul was not just being humble in mentioning it. The reason for the "thorn" was "That the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us".

"Listen to Paul, saying, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me' (2 Corinthians 12:7). This was not an expression of humility. Far from it! The thorn was not sent him that he might be humble, nor does he say this only out of humility. There are other causes besides to be assigned for it. Observe how God, accounting for it, says, 'My grace is sufficient for you'; not 'that you may not be exalted above measure'. 'For my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). Two ends therefore were answered at once; what was going on was made clear, and the whole was ascribed to God. For this cause, Paul has said elsewhere, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels'; that is, in bodies weak and liable to suffering. Why? 'That the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us' (2 Corinthians 4:7). If our bodies were not subject to infirmity, everything would be ascribed to our bodies. Elsewhere we see Paul grieving at the infirmity of Epaphroditus, concerning whom he writes, 'He was sick almost to death, but God had mercy on him' (Philippians 2:27). And many other instances there are of his ignorance of events, which was profitable both for him and his disciples."

Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this "thorn" (2 Corinthians 12:8). But each time, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul's example is a good lesson for us today. Whether we have had visions of the Lord in glory or not, the Lord will put limits on us so that we don't get too exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7). That way the Lord gets the glory for the achievements and His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). From Paul's point of view, he took pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 12:10). For being weak, then he was strong.

Messengers of Satan

The term "messenger of Satan" (or angel of Satan) needs further clarification. We note that Paul's "weakness", whether physical or personal was "a messenger from Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). The life of Job also contains illustrations of both physical and personal messengers from Satan. Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His 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). 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 doesn't believe anything God says and felt that if Job were poor and destitute, Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11). So the Lord allowed Satan to send several "messengers" his way.

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, X, v. 20.

First the Sabeans attacked and took all Job's oxen and donkeys, killing Job's herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, "the fire of God" 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 tornado came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Thus, these messengers were two personal ones (the Sabeans and the Chaldeans) and two miraculous ones (the fire of God and the tornado). Today's insurance industry would refer to these last two 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 him to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). Satan still didn't believe anything that God said, and replied that if Job were plagued with diseases on his bone and his flesh, he would curse God to His face (Job 2:5). So, the Lord allowed Satan to send more "messengers" to Job.

The next "messenger from Satan" was a physical one: "severe 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: "How long will you hold out, expecting the hope of your deliverance? Just say some word against the Lord and die!" (Job 2:9 LXX). When three of his friends 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). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his pain was very great (Job 2:13). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

Following this 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 the Temanite suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. The innocent and upright don't perish for no reason (Job 4:7-8). Bilhad the Shuhite suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job, himself were without guilt, surely God would have, by now, restored his righteous estate. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor will He support evil doers (Job 8:4, 6, 20). Job claimed he was innocent. Zephan the Naamathite suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. "If you would direct your heart right and spread out your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let wickedness dwell in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14). 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).

This last messenger from Satan was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom

commented⁷⁰ that “the reproaches of Job’s friends appeared more grievous than the worms and the sores. For there is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul”. This is exactly what the “messengers of Satan” seek to convince us of also: that God is not faithful, that He doesn’t care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

Paul reminds us that the usefulness of our “thorns in the flesh” or “messengers of Satan” are that we don’t get exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7). After all, we are to bear our crosses as our Lord bore His (Mark 8:34-37), and as He humbled Himself to death on the Cross, so should we. The Lord told Paul, and He tells us, “My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Going through all he went through, it’s hard to imagine the Lord’s grace being sufficient for Job; but it was. Paul also said, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

John Chrysostom pointed out⁷¹ how tribulation is profitable for the saints. David and Paul express the same gratitude for God doing this to them. Both were afflicted by men acting as “messengers of Satan”.

“Tribulation is profitable to the saints, that they may exercise moderation and lowliness, and that they may not be puffed up by their miracles and good works, God permits it for this end. We hear David the prophet, and Paul saying the same thing. David says, ‘*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*’ (Psalm 119:71). Paul said, ‘I was caught up to the third heaven’ and transported to Paradise; he goes on to say, ‘lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to punch me’ (2 Corinthians 12:7). What can be clearer than this? ‘That I might not be exalted above measure’, for this reason, he said, God permitted ‘the messengers of Satan to punch me’. By messengers of Satan, he means not particular demons, but men ministering for the devil, the unbelievers, the tyrants, the heathens, who perseveringly molested, and unceasingly worried him.”

Tertullian noted⁷² that King Saul was given an evil spirit from the Lord to terrify him and humble him. Paul was given a messenger of Satan to punch him, but perfect him in weakness. Paul turned around and delivered men over to Satan to chasten them for blasphemy.

“‘The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him’ (1 Samuel 16:14). The design of the Lord was to humble Saul. As Paul tells us, there was given him a messenger of Satan, to punch him (2 Corinthians 12:7). Even this sort of thing is not permitted in the case of holy men, unless at the same time strength of endurance may be perfected in weakness. For Paul likewise delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan that by chastening they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20). You see, then,

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, I, 15.

⁷² Tertullian, De Fuga in Persecutione, IV, 2.

that the devil receives more suitably power even from the servants of God; so far is he from having it by any right of his own.”

The Lord saw His Cross (which itself was a messenger of Satan) as His Glory (John 12:23). Job wasn't aware of what was going on in heaven between the Lord and Satan, but eventually He realized that his ordeal was for his glory also. And as a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).

Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

Paul said, “The Lord said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’. Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul also said, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:2-5).

Paul also said, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:2-5).

John said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Matthew said, “Wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Paul said, “You seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. Though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Corinthians 13:3-4). John Chrysostom pointed out⁷³ that there are three meanings of the word weakness (or sickness): bodily sickness, weakness in the Faith, and susceptibility to persecution. It is this third definition of weakness that Paul refers to a lot.

“These words have much obscurity and give disturbance to the weaker sort. Therefore, it is necessary to unfold them more clearly, and to explain the significance of the expression where the obscurity exists, that no one may be offended. What then is that which is said here; what does the term “weakness” designate; and in what significance is it used? The term has many meanings.

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIX, vv. 3-4.

Bodily sickness⁷⁴ is called ‘weakness’. It is even said in the Gospel, ‘Behold, he whom You love is weak’ (John 11:3-4) concerning Lazarus, being sick near death; and He Himself said of Lazarus, ‘This weakness is not unto death’. Paul, speaking of Epaphroditus said, ‘For indeed he was weak almost unto death, but God had mercy on him;’ (Philippians 2:27) and of Timothy, ‘No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent weaknesses’ (1 Timothy 5:23). For all these foregoing examples denote bodily sickness. The not being established firmly in the faith is also called ‘weakness;’ the not being perfect and complete. And denoting this Paul said, ‘Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things’. And again, ‘One believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables’ (Romans 14:1-2), denoting him who is weak in the faith. In the foregoing then are two uses of the term ‘weakness;’ there is yet a third thing which is called ‘weakness’. What then is this? Persecutions, plotting, insults, trials, assaults. Denoting this Paul said, ‘Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”’ (2 Corinthians 12:8, 9). What does ‘in weakness’ mean? In persecutions, in dangers, in trials, in plotting, in deaths. Denoting this Paul said, ‘Therefore I take pleasure in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). Then showing what kind of weakness he means, he spoke not of fever, nor of doubt about the faith; but what? ‘in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). That is to say ‘when I am persecuted, when I am driven up and down, when I am plotted against, then am I strong, then rather I prevail over, and get the better of them that plot against me. Because that grace rests upon me. It is then in this third sense that Paul uses ‘weakness;’ and this is what he means by it; he seems to them to be humble and contemptible. He had no desire to boast, nor to seem to be what he really was, nor to display the power which he possessed of punishing and revenging.”

Chrysostom also pointed out⁷⁵ what the “weaknesses” were in Paul’s life: they were the persecutions that he had to endure everywhere he went. Paul dreaded these dangers, showing that he was but human after all.

“The believers were unlearned persons; the manner of the teaching was of an unlearned cast throughout; the thing preached was of itself enough to stagger people. For the cross and death were the message brought. Together with these there were also other hindrances, the dangers, the plots, the daily fear, and being hunted down. For the word ‘weakness’, with him in many places stands for the persecutions. ‘My weakness, which was in my flesh, you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God’ (Galatians 4:14); and again, ‘If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my weakness’ (2 Corinthians 11:30). What was the weakness? ‘In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the

⁷⁴ The Greek word *sthenoo* means to strengthen, and the Greek word *astheneo* means to be weak. *Astheneo* is used many times in the New Testament to refer to both bodily sickness and weaknesses. All the words in this quote translated “sickness” and “weakness” are forms of the same Greek word.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VI, 2.

king was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me' (2 Corinthians 11:32). And again, 'Therefore I take pleasure in weakness, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake' (2 Corinthians 12:10). Having said, 'I was in weakness', he did not stop at this point, but explaining the word 'weakness' makes mention of his dangers. He adds again, 'I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling' (1 Corinthians 2:3). What is Paul saying? Did Paul also fear dangers? He did fear, and he dreaded these dangers excessively; for though he was Paul, yet he was a man. But this is no charge against Paul but shows a weakness of his human nature; and it is to the praise of his fixed purpose of mind that even when he dreaded death and stripes, he did nothing wrong because of this fear."

Cyprian of Carthage stated⁷⁶ that Paul was not grieved by all the suffering that he endured, but he benefited from all this. His strength was made perfect in weakness. This means that adversity does not call us away from the Faith but strengthens us.

"The Apostle Paul, after shipwrecks, scourging, and many grievous tortures of the flesh and body, says that he is not grieved, but benefited by his adversity, in order that while he is sorely afflicted he might more truly be proved. 'A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to punch me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"' (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). When, therefore, weakness and inefficiency and any destruction seize us, then our strength is made perfect; then our faith, if when tried it shall stand fast, is crowned. As it is written, 'As a furnace tests the potter's vessels; so, the test of a man is the way he reasons' (Ecclesiasticus 27:5). This, in short, is the difference between us and others who don't know God, that in misfortune they complain and murmur. Adversity does not call us away from the truth of virtue and faith but strengthens us by its suffering."

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁷ that our affliction in the world is profitable to us. Job was more illustrious after than before his ordeal. Timothy had constant sickness most of his adult life. Paul never cured Timothy – even though he could have – but left him in the furnace of his sickness for his benefit. Paul himself endured a great deal of physical pain from the blows, chains and maltreatment from public executioners. But then he learned the benefit of this and rejoiced.

"Paul proved that we will not be confined to a condition of punishment, but that some profit will be derived from it, namely release from the penalties to which our sin is liable. Paul added: 'If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world' (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Moreover, that they who have lived very righteously derive much benefit from such chastisement is plain from the case of Job, who was more illustrious after it than before. Also, from the case of Timothy, who although he was such a good man, and entrusted

⁷⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, VII, 13.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Letters to Olympias, #2, 3.

with such an important ministry, and made the circuit of the world with Paul passed not two or three days, nor ten or twenty, or a hundred, but many in succession in ill health, his body being very seriously enfeebled. Paul shows this where he said, 'No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities' (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul, who raised the dead, did not cure Timothy's infirmity but left him in the furnace of his sickness so that he might therefrom contract a very great abundance of confidence. The lessons which Paul himself had enjoyed from his Master, and the training which he had received from Him, he imparted to his disciple. Although Paul was not subjected to bodily sickness, yet he was punched out by trials no less severe, which inflicted much physical pain. 'A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to punch me' (2 Corinthians 12:7), meaning by this the blows, bonds, chains, imprisonments, being dragged about, and maltreated, and tortured by the scourges of public executioners. Wherefore also being unable to bear the pain occasioned to the body by these things 'Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me' (2 Corinthians 12:8). And then when he did not obtain his petition, having learned the benefit of the trial, he kept quiet, and rejoiced at the things which happened to him."

John Cassian noted⁷⁸ that we sometimes pray for things that are not beneficial to us. Even the Apostle Paul did that when he asked that his "thorn in the flesh" be taken away. Christ Himself in the flesh did this also when He asked that His cup pass from Him. But what Paul and Christ also did is to seek the Will of the Father in all things.

"Paul said, 'We do not know what we should pray for as we ought' (Romans 8:26). We shall see that we sometimes ask for things opposed to our salvation and that we are most providentially refused our requests by Him who sees what is good for us with greater right and truth than we can. And it is clear that this also happened to Paul himself when he prayed that the messenger of Satan who had been for his good allowed by the Lord's will to punch him, might be removed. He said, 'Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"' (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). And this feeling even our Lord expressed when He prayed as a man, that He might give us a form of prayer as other things also by His example. He said, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will' (Matthew 26:39). Though certainly His will was not discordant with His Father's will, 'For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost, and to give His life a ransom for many' (Matthew 18:11, 20:28). As He Himself says: 'No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again' (John 10:18). In which character there is the following sung by the blessed David, of the Unity of will which He ever maintained with the Father: 'I delight to do Your will, O my God' (Psalm 40:9). For we read of the Father: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son' (John 3:16). We find none the less of the Son: 'Who gave Himself for our sins' (Galatians 1:4). And as it is said of the Father: 'He who did not

⁷⁸ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Isaac, I, ix, 34.

spare His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). And it is shown that the will of the Father and of the Son is in all things one, so that even in the actual mystery of the Lord's resurrection we are taught that there was no discord of operation. Paul declares that the Father brought about the resurrection of His body, saying: 'And God the Father, who raised Him from the dead' (Galatians 1:1). So also, the Son testifies that He Himself will raise again the Temple of His body, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). We being instructed by all these examples of our Lord which have been enumerated ought to end our supplications also with the same prayer, and always to subjoin this clause to all our petitions. 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:39).

John Chrysostom said the same thing and pointed out⁷⁹ how the Lord Himself prayed when He was on His way to the Cross. He taught us not to plunge into dangers, since that may lead to vainglory and pride. If the danger is unavoidable, however, He taught us to acquiesce in what seems good to God. Paul also learned to do this. He first asked that temptations might be removed from him. When God said 'No!', Paul understood, and from then on, he took pleasure in weakness, thus submitting his will to the Will of God.

"Since Jesus commanded us to pray 'Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one' (Luke 11:4), He instructs them in this very precept by putting it in practice Himself. He said, 'Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me' (Matthew 26:39). Thus, He taught all the saints not to plunge into dangers, not to fling themselves into them. Instead He asks us to wait for their approach, and to exhibit all possible courage, only not to rush forwards themselves, or to be the first to advance against terrors. Why so? Both to teach us lowliness of mind, and also to deliver us from the charge of vainglory. On this account it is said also that when He had spoken these words, 'He went a little farther and fell on His face and prayed' (Matthew 26:39). After He had prayed He spoke thus to His disciples, 'Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak' (Matthew 26:40-41). Notice He not only prays but also admonishes? Now this He said by way of emptying their soul of vanity, and delivering them from pride, teaching them self-restraint, training them to practice moderation. Therefore, the prayer which He wished to teach them, He Himself also offered, speaking after the manner of men, not according to His Godhead but according to His manhood. He prayed as instructing us to pray, and even to seek deliverance from distress; but, if this is not permitted, then to acquiesce in what seems good to God. Therefore, He said, 'Nevertheless not as I will but as You will, (Matthew 26:39). Not because He had one will and the Father another; but in order that He might instruct men even if they were in distress and trembling, even if danger came upon them, and they were unwilling to be torn from this present life. He taught them to postpone their own will to the will of God; Paul did this also, when he had been instructed; he exhibited both these principles. Paul asked that temptations might be removed from him, 'Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me' (2 Corinthians

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Against Marcionists and Manichaeans, 4.

12:8). Since it did not please God to remove it, he says ‘Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). But perhaps what I have said is not quite clear; therefore, I will make it clearer. Paul incurred many dangers and prayed that he might not be exposed to them. Then he heard Christ saying, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9). As soon then as he saw what the will of God was, he in the future submitted his will to God’s will. By means of this prayer then Christ taught both these truths, that we should not plunge into dangers, but rather pray that we may not fall into them. But if they come upon us we should bear them bravely and postpone our own will to the will of God. Knowing these things then let us pray that we may never enter into temptation: but if we do enter it let us beseech God to give us patience and courage. Let us honor His will in preference to every will of our own. For then we shall pass through this present life with safety and shall obtain the blessings to come.”

Chrysostom also mentions⁸⁰ that if we don’t understand what God is saying about strength being made perfect in weakness, it will affect our ability to pray effectively. Christ said, “If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20). But that doesn’t apply to just any two people; this refers to the virtuous, like the Apostles.

“Notice how He puts down our enmities, and takes away our petty dissensions, and draws us one to another! He puts here the great rewards of concord, if at least they who are of one accord manage to prevail with the Father, as touching the things they ask, and have Christ in the midst of them.”

“Are there indeed anywhere two of one accord? There are in many places, maybe even everywhere. How then do they not obtain all things? Because there are many causes of their failing.”

(1) “Some people often ask things inexpedient. We needn’t marvel at this, if this is the case with some others, since it was so even with Paul. Paul asked, but then he heard, ‘My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

(2) “Others are unworthy to be reckoned with the Apostles that heard these words, and don’t contribute their own part. He seeks such as are like the Apostles; therefore, He refers to the virtuous, those that show forth an angelic rule of life.”

(3) “Still others pray against those that have angered them, seeking for redress and vengeance. But this kind of thing is forbidden, since He said, ‘love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you’” (Matthew 5:44).

(4) “Others still have unrepentant sins; they ask mercy, which thing it is impossible to receive, not only if themselves ask it, but although others having much confidence towards God entreat for them. This is like Jeremiah praying for the Jews; he heard, ‘do not pray for this people, and intercede not for them in

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LX, 2.

supplication and prayer; for I will not hear in the day in which they call upon me, in the day of their affliction” (Jeremiah 11:14 LXX).

“But if all things are there, and you ask things expedient, contribute your own part, exhibit an apostolical life, and have concord and love towards your neighbor. Then you will obtain your entreaty; for the Lord is loving towards man.”

Chrysostom further stated⁸¹ that the Apostles considered it a greater honor to suffer for Christ’s sake than to be honored by Him. The Twelve rejoiced when they were beaten by the Jewish leaders for confessing Christ. Paul introduces many of his Epistles by referring to himself as either a prisoner or a slave. Christ emptied Himself of His glory to become man. To the world, this seems foolishness; but to those who understand the love of Christ, this is of all things the most blessed.

“Listen to what Luke says, ‘They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name’ (Acts 5:41). To all others indeed it seems to be foolishness, that to suffer dishonor is to be counted worthy, that to suffer dishonor is to rejoice. But to those that understand the love of Christ, this is esteemed of all things the most blessed. Were any to offer me my choice, the whole Heaven or Paul’s chain, that chain I would prefer. Were any to ask whether he should place me on high with the Angels, or with Paul in his bonds, the prison I would choose. Were any about to change me into one of those powers, that are in Heaven, that are around the throne, or into such a prisoner as this, such a prisoner I would choose to be. Nothing is more blessed than that chain. Would that I could be at this moment in that very spot, (for the bonds are said to be still in existence,) to behold and admire those men, for their love of Christ. Would that I could behold the chains, at which the devils fear and tremble, but which Angels reverence. Nothing is more noble than to suffer any evil for Christ’s sake. I count not Paul so happy, because he was ‘caught up into Paradise’ (2 Corinthians 12:4), as because he was cast into the dungeon. I count him not so happy, because he heard ‘unspeakable words’, as because he endured those bonds. I count him not so happy, because he was ‘caught up into the third Heaven’, (2 Corinthians 12:2) as I count him happy for those bonds’ sake. That the chains are greater than those experiences of Paradise, hear how even he himself knew this; he didn’t say, I who ‘heard unspeakable words’, beseech you: but ‘I, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you’ (Ephesians 4:1, 2 Timothy 1:8). We don’t need to wonder, that he didn’t inscribe this in all his Epistles, for he was not always in prison, but only at certain times. I consider it more desirable to suffer evil for Christ’s sake, than to receive honor at Christ’s hands. This is transcendent honor, this is glory that surpasses all things. If Christ Himself who became a servant for my sake, and ‘emptied’ (Philippians 2:7) His glory, yet thought not Himself so truly in glory, as when He was crucified for my sake, what ought not I to endure?”

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, vv. 1-2.

Chrysostom also noted⁸² that some unbelievers have a total misunderstanding of God. They think that Christians go through afflictions because their God is too weak to deliver them. In fact, the opposite is the case as illustrated by Paul in Philippi. There Paul and Silas were beaten very badly, handcuffed, with their feet in the stocks in the inner prison. By their prayers, Paul and Silas caused an earthquake that broke open all the doors and broke off everyone's chains. This was what illustrates perfecting strength in weakness.

“Some unbelievers think that God permits evil because He is some infirm being, and allows such persons to be continually afflicted, from not being able to deliver His own from dangers. Observe how Paul has demonstrated by means of events, showing not only that the events were far from accusing Him of weakness, but that they proved His power more strikingly to all. Paul said, ‘A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me’ (2 Corinthians 12:7), and thus listed his repeated trials. Paul added, ‘Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”’ (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Paul means, ‘God’s power is seen then when we are in weakness; and yet through us, who seem to grow weak, the word preached is magnified, and is sown in all quarters’. When Paul was led to the dungeon, after having received a great number of stripes, he took prisoner the keeper of the prison (Acts 16:22-24). His feet were in the stocks, and his hands in chains; and the prison shook at midnight while they were singing hymns. Notice how His power was perfected in weakness? If Paul had been at large, and had shaken that building, the thing would not have been so wonderful. ‘For this reason,’ God said, ‘remain bound; and the walls shall be shaken on every side, and the prisoners shall be loosed. In order that My power may appear the greater, when through you, confined and in fetters, all that are in bonds shall be loosed’. This very circumstance then it was which at the time astounded the keeper of the prison, that being so forcibly confined, he, through prayer alone, prevailed to shake the foundations, throw open the doors of the prison, and to unbind all the prisoners. Nor is this the only occasion. But with Peter too, and Paul himself, as well as the other disciples, one may see this occurring constantly. In the midst of persecution, the grace of God ever flourishing, and appearing by the side of the tribulations, and thus proclaiming His power. Wherefore Christ said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is perfected in weakness’”.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, I, 16.