

***THE FIRST EPISTLE
OF ST. PAUL TO THE
THESSALONIANS***

2000

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica was the capital of one of the colonies of Macedonia in Greece. Its former name was “*Therma*,” meaning “hot springs.” Cassander the First, the son of Antipater, rebuilt it in the year 315 B.C., and made it the center for his throne. He named the city after his wife, Thessalonica, the sister of Alexander the Great and daughter of Philip II of Macedonia. In the Roman Empire, it was the capital of the new state, and its population was approximately 200,000.

Thessalonica had great significance because of its geographical location on the Greek route, which is a great military road connecting Rome with the East. It was a big harbor equipped as a naval base for the Roman ships, and five or six rulers of the city governed it (Acts 17:6).

Being a great commercial center, it attracted many rich Romans and some of the Jewish merchants (Acts 17:4), who held their council there. It was known for its corruption and wickedness, which compelled St. Paul to talk about the life of purity (1 Thess. 4:1-8).

ACCEPTING THE FAITH

St. Paul visited Thessalonica for the first time during his second missionary journey around the year 52 A.D. Silvanus¹ and Timothy accompanied him (Acts 17:1-10). After being expelled from Philippi, St. Paul directed his attention to the Jews and talked with them for three Sabbaths in their synagogue. He attracted some of the Jews to the faith, and many of the proselytes, and some of the prominent women. These became the foundation of the first church in Thessalonica.

St. Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, “For even in

¹ *Silvanus, the Latin form of the Greek word “Silas.” The origin of this word is Aram “Sheila” or “Saul.”*

Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities” (Phil. 4:16). This reveals he was not relying on the people of Thessalonica financially, and that he stayed there for more than three weeks (1 Thess. 2:7-11). He exerted much effort in his ministry and caring for them night and day. Some said that he stayed there more than six months¹, while others think that he did not stay there more than a month.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

Probably toward the end of 52 A.D., or the beginning of 53 A.D., that is, after a very short period of his ministry in Thessalonica while being in Corinth.

ITS PURPOSE

SS. Paul and Silas succeeded in their ministry in Thessalonica, although they stayed for a very short time. “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘Those who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus’” (Acts 17:5-7). The accusation against Paul and Silas was that they cause uproar and they are against the decrees of Caesar. (Acts 17:7) This worried the multitudes and the rulers of the city, so they left Thessalonica and went to Berea, but they were attacked also in Berea, so they went to Athens (Acts 17:15), then to Corinth. (Acts 18:1)

The ministry succeeded in Thessalonica between the Jews and the Gentiles. As the Jews stirred their brothers who believed, so the Gentiles stirred their brothers who believed. The church suffered a lot from the Jews and from the Gentiles, and the believers expected St. Paul to go back and help them. But he sent Timothy to strengthen their faith, which made some to doubt his fatherhood. So he had to write

¹ *W. M. Ramsay: St. Paul, the Traveler and Roman Citizen. London 1895, p.228.*

telling them his desire to see them, declaring his true fatherhood.

On the other hand, he wanted to draw their attention from the worry of the grief events to the inner spiritual joy.

He talked to them about the resurrection and the advent of the Lord Jesus, to support them amidst their bitter afflictions. He encouraged them for the spiritual strife, and for a holy life filled with love, hoping for the eternal crown and the heavenly wedding, so that they may enjoy the Fatherly bosom,

DIVISIONS OF THE EPISTLE:

<i>1. Introduction</i>	<i>ch. 1:1</i>
<i>2. The success of the church in Thessalonica</i>	<i>ch. 1:2-10</i>
<i>3. St. Paul's fatherhood</i>	<i>ch. 2:1-12</i>
<i>4. The suffering of the church</i>	<i>ch. 2:13-16</i>
<i>5. The eagerness of St. Paul to see them</i>	<i>ch. 2:17-20</i>
<i>6. Sending Timothy to them</i>	<i>ch. 3:1-5</i>
<i>7. Timothy's report about them</i>	<i>ch. 3:6-13</i>
<i>8. Their abiding in holiness</i>	<i>ch. 4:1-8</i>
<i>9. Their abiding in love</i>	<i>ch. 4:9-12</i>
<i>10. Their viewpoint toward the dead</i>	<i>ch. 4:13-18</i>
<i>11. Waiting for the Lord</i>	<i>ch. 5:1-11</i>
<i>12. Concluding commandments</i>	<i>ch. 5:12-28</i>

Chapter One

THE SUCCESS OF THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA

St. Paul used to start his epistles by encouraging the people and praising their good traits. Before he speaks about the problems or weaknesses he encourages them, thus opening the door of hope to everyone. While writing to a church groaning from tribulation, he declares her success in the life of faith and her witness to the Lord Christ before other churches.

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|-------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. The introduction | v. 1 |
| 2. The success of the Church | |
| <i>A. His gratitude for their success</i> | v. 2 |
| <i>B. Their faith, hope and love</i> | v. 3-6 |
| <i>C. Their example before everyone</i> | v. 7-10 |

1. THE INTRODUCTION

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.1)

St. Paul does not have a standard introduction for all his epistles, but he writes a different one that suits each church. While writing to a church groaning from tribulation, we notice the following:

A. St. Paul writes his name, without mentioning his apostolic title, because usually when one is in trouble, he does not want to be formal but with the spirit of the brotherly friendship he speaks with them. That is why he adds the names Silvanus and Timothy, as his partners in writing, although he was the only writer. In humility, he emphasized that he was not the only one with the feelings of love and compassion but the others who participated in the service too.

What a loving and humble shepherd, who goes with them as a

lamb among lambs, sharing with them their afflictions, not to attach them to his person, but to declare to them how much a shepherd loves his people, so that they may touch the love of Christ to them in him as in other shepherds.

B. The writer directs his epistle to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The church has members from the Jews as well as the Gentiles, but they are all one church, by being in the Lord Jesus Christ, as His one holy Body. For where the Son is, His Church is with Him in the Fatherly bosom. As the Lord Jesus said, “That where I am, there you may be also... No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John. 14:3,6).

C. St. Paul calls God our Father, for the believers need to enjoy the compassionate love of God and His concern for their salvation. On the other hand, he wanted to emphasize, in the introduction, the Fatherhood of God, which is the source of every spiritual and physical fatherhood.

D. St. Paul is asking grace and peace for them, for the true peace is not fulfilled by removing all the difficulties that befall us, but by enjoying the hidden grace of God. Sometimes during afflictions bad thoughts may destroy our inner peace, but God’s grace can raise our thoughts above the difficulties, and fill us with the divine surpassing peace. Hence, our heart will sing saying, “In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul” (Ps 94:19)

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE CHURCH

Since the church was surrounded by tribulations from the Jews and the Gentiles, St. Paul wanted to uplift her thoughts to the success that she has achieved by the Holy Spirit:

- A. His gratitude for their success and their prayers for them. (v.2)
- B. Stressing the good points in their lives. (v.3-6)
- C. Their example to everyone.

A. His gratitude for their success and his prayers for them:

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” (v.2) St. Paul with Timothy and Silvanus are offering continuous thanks to God for the success of the church of the Thessalonians, as well as praying for their growth. Truly, he is a wise shepherd who wants spiritual benefit for those who are suffering. Although he is groaning with them and sharing their difficulties, yet in the mean time, he is thanking God for His spiritual blessings during their tribulations. He wants to raise them above the sufferings, which is the purpose of this epistle, and on the other hand, he wants to emphasize that the secret for every spiritual blessing and the success in their lives is due to God Himself. At the end, he reminds them that he is praying for them, and declaring his true love for them.

B. Their faith, hope, and love:

St. Paul wants to distract them from thinking of their immediate afflictions to reflect on the work of God’s grace inside them through faith, hope and love. He says, *“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”* (v.3). He wants them to continuously meditate on faith, love, and hope, not through mere theoretical principles, but through practical life.

What does he mean by work of faith? **St. John Chrysostom** said, [The believer endures a lot, for the faith delivered to him appears through his works. Thus, we can say that faith is not mere theory but is declared through your works, steadfastness and zeal¹.]

St. John Chrysostom talks about the labor of love by saying: [What is the labor of love? When many adversaries pull us away from love and we stand against all of them, isn’t this considered labor?²]

Probably what St. Paul meant about *“labor of love”* is what was mentioned about Jason and his household in the book of Acts 17: 5,6.

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 1.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 1.

And how they endured much for their love to Paul and Silas and for the Gospel, when their adversaries attacked them and brought them before the rulers.

Since the tribulation remained in the church even after Paul and Silas left the city, yet the new church patiently hoped in the kingdom and the true Bridegroom our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why St. Paul wrote, “***And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.***”

These are the three matters which St. Paul is thanking the Lord for, and which he is concentrating his attention and prayers: *their work of faith, their labor of love, their patience of hope*. These three represent one unity that can not be divided or separated. Since believing in the word of truth drives the believer to work for the eternal kingdom, then he opens his heart with love for everyone, desiring not only to work but also to labor, hurrying to the cross instead of temporary rest. He sees heavens opened before him, so he hopes to enjoy its glory. He does not groan from the hardships but carries the patience of Christ, “*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...*” (Heb. 12:2). When eternity comes, we do not need faith any more, for we see God face to face, and we do not need hope for we enjoy what we were hoping for. However, love remains, love which never falls (1 Cor. 13:8). Eternal love, which is built on faith and hope, honors faith and crowns hope.

The secret of the success of the church of Thessalonians and their enjoyment of the true faith, love and hope was God’s choosing them as His children. “***Knowing beloved children, your election by God***” (v.4). St. Paul is emphasizing that the secret of their power amidst afflictions was God being with them. He is the One working in them and the One who chose them. St. Paul is afraid lest they become depressed from all the difficulties which they had encountered. That is why he is talking with pride about their spiritual success and is very cautious lest they fall in haughtiness because of their endurance in temptations. That is why he was directing their attention to God who loved them first, for He chose them and still works in them until they enter into His glories. The church is in dire need for a wise shepherd

who encourages God's people with joyful words which instill in them hope and confidence, and in the mean time, without flattering, he directs them to God who is the secret of their success and growth.

The words "***Knowing beloved brethren, your election by God***" (v.4) reveal the mystery of St. Paul's love to them and his struggle for them. As if he is telling them, "Since God loves you that much and has chosen you to be His children, do I cease working for you, day and night, to achieve God's purpose in you?" This is the view of the wise shepherd toward the ministry; he does not work for the expense of the people, but he serves all humanity, God's favorite creation, and whom God desires its salvation and its entry to the eternal glories. He works for God, and through Him and with His capabilities!

St. Paul, realizing God's love for them and Him choosing them, made his ministry for them not mere words or philosophy, but power able to renew their lives, so he was certain that God is working through them. He said, "***For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake***" (v.5). St. Paul is emphasizing here God's love to them and His choosing them, which gave him three capabilities to work among them: *power, Holy Spirit and much assurance*. These were the secret of his success.

He carries "***power,***" that is, the power of the Gospel for salvation. God, who chose them, offered them salvation through the cross or the Gospel. St. Paul came hidden in the cross, through the Gospel. He did not present them mere words but the secret of the strong new life through the cross. He did not go to them in weakness, but he was equipped with the power of the Gospel, who is able to captivate one in the divine love and make him enter into the kingdom of God and to live as a child of God by the power of the Spirit.

God's love to the believers and His choosing them has armed him by the power of the Gospel of salvation, and gave him the Holy Spirit to work in him for the ministry. He went to them by the Holy Spirit who is able to declare God's love incarnated in offering His Son, the ransom for many. Truly the Gospel is the power of the minister to

achieve his mission, but he cannot work without the Holy Spirit who attracts the souls to the cross, and to reconcile them with God in His Son, and to make them enter to the new life on the heavenly level.

Finally, St. Paul realizing that God chose them, made them enter with great assurance, trusting that God desires the salvation of men. He is confident that God achieves His purpose through his ministry and that the secret of his power lies in his outlook full of hope, even amidst tribulations, whether from outside or inside. Even if there are divisions among the Jews and the Gentiles, he is confident that God can work to renew his creation. He is not pessimistic nor in despair, no matter what the circumstances are!

St. Paul said, “*As you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake*” (v.5). He is telling them that his strife amidst sufferings, day and night, and his concern for them testify how he was equipped with the Holy Spirit and much assurance. However, he is giving them the credit, for they are the subjects of God’s love and His election. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [St. Paul is praising their good deeds secretly, and that is why he is enduring everything for them. Him saying, “What kind of men we were among you,” is an indication that he is willing to sacrifice his life for them. He said in a different time, “I endure all things for the sake of the elect...” (2 Tim. 2:10). What things the believer does not endure for the sake of God’s elect?¹”]

What gladdened St. Paul’s heart was that they were following his example and even God’s example in enduring the sufferings joyfully. He said, “*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit*” (v.6).

St. John Chrysostom said: [How amazing! Suddenly the disciples became teachers! They did not only hear the word but they were elevated to St. Paul’s level. He praises them saying, “*Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit*” (v.6). They received the word not only in affliction, but also in much affliction. This is what the book of Acts relates to us how persecution

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 1.

was against them (Acts 17:5-8), for the wicked people have stirred the rulers against them. Not only they endured and suffered, but also they rejoiced. This is exactly what the apostles did, “*So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (Acts 5:41). How amazing! Enduring hardships is not easy, however, these have exceeded the human limits, and as if they have no bodies which are affected by sufferings! How did they follow God’s example? God endured joyfully many hardships, by His own will. For our sake, He emptied Himself, and He rejoiced as the time approached for Him to be spat upon, whipped, and crucified. He said, “*Glorify Me...*”(Jn. 17:1-5) How can one talk about tribulation and joy at the same time? How can the two meet? He adds, “***Joy of the Holy Spirit.***” Tribulation is in the carnal matters, while joy is in the spiritual matters. How? All what happened to them was demeaning, but the Spirit did not leave them. Therefore, anyone who suffers can be joyful, if he is suffering for God. However, if he is suffering for his sins, then he will remain in his sufferings. This is the joy of the Holy Spirit. Whatever is saddening becomes joyful! St. Paul said that the wicked will persecute them, but the Spirit will not forget them. As the three youths enjoyed the dew amidst the fire, you will also enjoy the afflictions. Truly it is not the nature of the fire to rain dew, likewise it is not the nature of the tribulation to produce joy, but the Spirit makes suffering easy if it is for Christ; for amidst the fire, the believers are at rest¹.]

The Lord promised us with sufferings, but not without joy. He said, “*Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you...In the world, you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer (rejoice), I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:22,33)

C. Their example to everyone:

“*So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe*” (v.7).

The people at Macedonia believed in the Lord Jesus before the

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 1.

people in Thessalonica, but the latter became an example to the former. The church in Thessalonica became a teacher not to unbelievers but to believers who preceded them in the faith. In a very short time, the people in Thessalonica accepted the faith and became an example not only to Macedonia in the north, and which Thessalonica is one of its important cities, but also to Achaia, which is in the south. Thus, its influence extended to the north and to the south.

St. John Chrysostom said: [Let no one despair if he had wasted so much time without doing anything good. In a short time, one can do a lot of achievements that had not been done in the past. Since those who were not believers were so enlightened, how about those who were believers from the beginning?¹]

St. Paul continues his talk about the effect of their new life and their faith, which spread everywhere.

“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (v. 8-10).

St. John Chrysostom commented on these words by saying: [As the smell of the sweet scented perfume spreads to far places freshening the air with its nice aroma, likewise famous and great people do not hide their virtues, but through their good example, they win many to Christ and change them to a better life. This was exactly what had happened as if he is telling them that you had filled the world with your amazing teachings!²]

The words *“has sounded forth”* express the spiritual power of their faith and their vitality. The entire world had heard about their faith, and it was sounded forth, so there was no need for St. Paul even to say anything. *“We do not need to say anything.”* Their practical

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 1.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 2.

faith carried an inner testimony, as if it is a loud trumpet sounding not only in the surrounding cities but also to far distances. The voice of the Lord has sounded in every place. They were a living testimony of the work of God's grace in man. They accomplished the message, which St. Paul desired to finish.

What does he mean by saying: “*For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you*”? He wanted to declare to them that their glorious spiritual life amidst tribulations did not only announce their spiritual glories but also St. Paul's blessedness. Everyone started talking about St. Paul going to them, accompanied by Silas, and how they served and changed those men to the living God who is able to raise from the dead. **St. John Chrysostom** states that they endured all dangers like St. Paul. The secret of enduring suffering joyfully is their faith in the One who rose from the dead.

St. Paul is directing their attention, during tribulations, to the Heavenly Father, whom the Son obeyed to the point of death. The Son rose by His own power and authority as He said, “*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).

Chapter Two

THE FATHERHOOD OF ST. PAUL TO THE SUFFERERS

The Thessalonians were in dire need to feel St. Paul's compassionate fatherhood. He wrote to assure them that he shares their sufferings, that he longs to see them and be close to them during this difficult time.

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|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. The fatherhood of St. Paul | v. 1-12 |
| 2. The suffering of the church | v. 13-16 |
| 3. The longing of St. Paul to see them | v. 17-20 |

1. THE FATHERHOOD OF ST. PAUL

St. Paul wanted to reveal his true fatherhood to them. He said, *“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict”* (v. 1, 2). He is reminding them with his service in Philippi before coming to them (Acts 16), when he endured tearing his clothes, beating and throwing him in the inner prison and fastening his feet in the stocks (Acts 16:24). He could have defended himself because he was a Roman citizen, but he preferred to endure for the sake of the Gospel. He preached to the keeper of the prison and all his family. When he was called to go to them, he did not go to escape the trouble that befell him in Philippi, but to preach the Gospel *“in much conflict.”*

Since they were suffering because of the Gospel, he also suffered because of the ministry, considering that enduring sufferings and insults is a living sign for preaching the Good News in an effective way. He emphasized that his going to them was not in vain, for he had previously endured suffering in Philippi and did not stop his continuous struggle for the ministry.

Enduring sufferings and injustice was a true sign of his true mission and the effectiveness of the Divine Gospel. **Fr. Gregory the Great** said: [St. Paul considered his ministry effective because he was spitefully treated, and we reject enduring sufferings¹.]

In his practical fatherhood through the Gospel, he endured sufferings to declare the word of God for the sake of God and not to please men. He said: ***“For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts”*** (v.3, 4). St. Paul believed in the message of the Gospel as a divine act, which he presented to them amidst many tribulations. They should accept it too amidst tribulations. He was entrusted for the Gospel in truth, without any deceit, uncleanness, or guile. His disciples should have the same spirit.

The many sufferings from outside and the inner strife are a true indication of the effectiveness of the message of the Gospel. He declares the truth without any deceit, in a holy life without any uncleanness, in a loving heart without any guile. Exhortation should carry these three conditions: *truth, holiness, and love!* However, if any deceit (heresies) or uncleanness or guile penetrated the ministry, the Gospel of God is distorted. These three matters are inside the heart, which God, who tests our hearts, knows.

St. Paul emphasizes that he does not preach to please them or to please others, but to please God who tests our hearts. He does not suffer for them but for the sake of God who called him to the ministry, presenting the truth with his holy life and through his wide heart and his spiritual fatherhood!

His fatherhood obliges him to struggle amidst tribulations for the sake of the Gospel, without any deceit or guile. He declares it through his life, which is without blemish, and through his heart, which is without guile, so he does not expect any material reward from them. ***“For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness, God is witness. Nor did we seek glory***

¹ Epistle 30.

from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (v. 5, 6). He could have made demands as an apostle of Christ and asked the believers to honor him and use his authority. However, ministry, which is in his heart, is fatherhood first of all and does not seek its own but what is good for others! Truly, two things defile a servant’s life, self-righteousness and covetousness. The two are centered on the ego, so that a servant seeks his own interests and not others. He takes more than he gives, and serves himself with the Gospel, instead of serving the Gospel with his life.

St. Paul compares himself with a nursing mother who nurses her infant, for she is very compassionate toward him and cares for him, neither for any temporal glory nor for money, but for the sake of love. *“For we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (v.7, 8).* He is a compassionate father and lives among them. **St. John Chrysostom** commented about *“among you”* by saying: [I am one of you, I do not brag¹.] How essential for the shepherds to grow to the full stature of Christ without any pride! The subject of the struggle of the wise shepherd is not just to train himself to give good speeches, but to be among his spiritual children as one of them. He trains himself to wash their feet and to be their servant. He carries a spirit of spiritual parenthood and sacrifices himself for them. God has revealed His love to his children through the ministry of the cross; likewise a servant should sacrifice his life for the ministry.

St. Paul presents himself as a nursing mother full of compassion for her infants, with a wide heart for everyone. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [There is nothing wider than St. Paul’s heart who was wide enough to love everyone with great zeal. His love was not partial or weak, but he presented it with his full capacity. It is amazing that his love to the unbelievers is the same as his love to the believers, so his heart embraced the entire world².]

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 2.

² In 2 Cor. Hom. 1.

In Greek, the word “*cherishes*” (v.7) means nurses, and some fathers translated it as thus in their writings: “*We were among you as nursing you...*” He presents himself as a compassionate mother for her infants, who wishes to sacrifice her life for them. He declares his simplicity with them. Truly the believers need to see the spirit of simplicity and meekness in their shepherds, away from the spirit of authority!

St. Paul carries the marks of the Lord Jesus, who became as a fetus in the womb of St. Mary to share with the fetuses their lives, and became as a sucking baby to share with the infants so they may spiritually praise Him. He became as a child to raise childhood and to attract the children to Him. Seeing that those whom he serves are like infants who need a nursing mother, St. Paul embraces them and he became like an infant among them, so they may find rest in him.

The word “*cherish*” means gives warmth. In the Old Testament, it was used to express the embracing of the birds to their little ones (Deut. 22:6) where the young ones feel the warmth of the mother. In the New Testament, it was used to express the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Church: “*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church*” (Eph. 5:29). Likewise, St. Paul is compassionate toward God’s people as his own children, like the birds embracing their little ones.

Through his fatherly love, St. Paul is offering them the gospel of God to experience God’s practical love in the cross, so they may accept to be God’s children before becoming St. Paul’s children. However, he did not present this ministry through mere exhortations, but he offered all what he has, even himself. As if he is telling them, “*Since I present the gospel of God to declare God offering His Son a ransom for you, likewise, I carry the same traits so I offer my life for your sake. Our gospel to you is not mere philosophy and exhortation but practical divine love, which you can see it in my life.*”

St. John Chrysostom said: [We want to sacrifice our life for you. Truly we preach the gospel, for God has commanded us, but we

love you and want to offer our lives for you¹.] [A true lover is ready to offer his life for those whom he loves. Nothing is sweeter than love².]

St. Paul talks about his practical fatherhood by saying, ***“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you as a father does his own children, that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory”*** (v. 9 – 12)

St. Paul, who preached in many countries and carried the burdens of the starting churches, was working with his own hands so he may not burden any one! He labored in the ministry as a father who works to make his children comfortable. As he wrote to the Corinthians, *“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void”* (1 Cor. 9:13-15)

No doubt, St. Paul, sometimes, accepted some gifts from churches in which he had preached (Phil. 4:16), and in love he accepted their hospitality to him, but he refused to take anything while preaching the gospel, especially when the ministry is new, so no one is stumbled in him or he may become a burden on anyone. He considered preaching the gospel and the salvation of every soul as number one in his priorities and much more important than anything else!

St. Paul sacrifices his life for them and does not ask for his rights. His main concern is their ministry so they may enter the kingdom of God and His glory. This fatherly love is based on his holy

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 2.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 2.

life, for he testifies how he lived among them in righteousness and purity, without blame. By purity, he meant his holy life in his relationship with God; by righteousness, he meant his righteous life with others; and without blame, he meant his inner spiritual life and his faithfulness with himself. His sacrificial fatherhood is based on his life with the Lord, whether his relationship with Him or with others. However, we cannot divide the spiritual life into life with God, life with others, and life with oneself. But it is one homogeneous life from all aspects. St. Paul meant that his sacrificial love is an aspect of his new life with God, which is characterized by purity, righteousness and no blame. His work as fatherly pastor is complete with his spiritual life in the Lord!

After declaring his fatherly love without any selfishness and his struggle for them to enjoy the gospel, then he talks about his exhortation, not only for them as a group, but individually for each member. ***“As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged everyone of you, as a father does his own children, that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory”*** (v.12). His relationship with the believers is based on fatherly love. (1 Cor. 4:14; 2 Cor. 6:13; Gal. 4:19, Phil. 1) Through this fatherhood, he finds comfort, joy, and his crown, that all his children may enjoy the kingdom and the eternal glories. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [The true comfort and rest for the wise teacher is in the growth of his disciples. Nothing shows his ability to plan and teach like the fatherly love toward the children. Love is a necessity for a physical father, how about a spiritual father, who bears children through grace!¹]

How beautiful are these words, ***“we exhorted everyone of you, as a father does his own children.”*** St. Paul was very zealous for the salvation of the whole world; however, amidst all the tumults and problems of the churches, he was concerned for each individual person. He follows the Lord’s teaching in His fatherly love when He carves each one of us on the palm of His hand, as if he is the only individual who exists! We saw in the life of **St. John Chrysostom** how he was

¹ In 2 Cor. Hom. 15:3, 4.

not occupied by the multitudes that listen to his sermons, but was concerned for each individual personally. This is the true fatherhood, which stems from the depth!

2. THE SUFFERING OF THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA

The life of suffering is an integral part of the gospel or the “*Good News*,” which a Christian experiences through his enjoyment of the inner joy of the kingdom. In spite of the inner joy, there are sufferings from outside; and with every spiritual growth, there are attacks from the devil. Thus, sufferings are a true sign of one accepting the “*Good News*” and his unity with the Crucified Christ and his interaction with the gospel. ***“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men”*** (v. 13-15). The proof that the word that they had accepted was not human but the word of God was that they endured the same sufferings, which the church had suffered in Jerusalem and Judea. The believers in Thessalonica accepted sufferings from their countrymen, for the Jews attacked the Jews who accepted the faith, and the pagans attacked those who believed. What the church of Thessalonica suffers from is a fellowship of love with her Crucified Christ as well as the other suffering churches too.

God allows suffering to share the holy fellowship with the Crucified Christ, but this does not justify those who cause the suffering. Therefore, St. Paul adds, ***“And they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost”*** (v. 15, 16).

Truly God the Almighty uses even the wickedness of the evil people to purify the righteous people, so that He might bring out of the eater something to eat (Judges 14:14) and out of the strong something sweet. However, this does not justify their stand nor make them acceptable in the eyes of God, for they do not please God. Their evil became a part of God's plan for the salvation of the elect and their purification. But He did not force to do that, He could have used other means, for God did not force Judah to betray, but due to His foreknowledge, He used that evil in betraying the Lord Jesus as part of God's plan for salvation.

The evil people are not only the enemies God's but also men's. Some may befriend them and others may encourage them to do evil, but their wickedness has to be revealed, so they lose all their friends.

The goal of the evil people was to attack the word of truth and the living faith. But they filled up the measure of their sins. They wanted to attack the word of God, but God's word is not restricted, and the believers are purified during these attacks and in the mean time, they filled up the measure of their sins to drink the eternal punishment. How amazing is God's care, who uses even the evil of the wicked people to fulfill His will in the elect and declare His justice in the unrepentant sinners!

3. THE LONGING OF ST. PAUL TO SEE THEM

St. Paul directed the believers' attention from the outside sufferings to the inner joy with the word of God working in them and the fellowship of the Suffering Christ and with the other suffering churches. But amidst all that, he revealed to them his feelings of his true eagerness to see them. He is the spiritual person who longs to go to heaven, but he does not ignore the human aspect and feelings. He said, *“But we brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore, we wanted to come to you, even I, Paul, time and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown or rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy”* (v. 17-

20).

As a spiritual father, St. Paul feels their presence in his heart. Though he did not see them for a long time, yet they are in his heart in Christ Jesus. He loves them and longs for them expressing his holy feelings without any embarrassment. For he said, “*endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.*” These are human feelings sanctified in Christ Jesus, that is why he highly regards them in all his writings. In spite of all his high spirituality and longing to heavenly matters, yet he deals with them in a practical way, sanctifying all human relationships. We see this clearly also in the last part of his epistle to the Romans, when he said, “*Greet my beloved Epaphroditus... greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord, greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine*” (Rom. 16: 5-13). He does not conceal his feelings, which are sanctified in the Lord, but he reveals them, by the power of the Spirit.

St. Paul calls his children his hope, joy and crown of glory! In the Day of the Lord, he will present them as holy children, the fruit of his labor. He regards them as his glory and pride! Every suffering he endures for them multiplies his eternal glory.

Through this view and his inflamed holy eagerness for them and his realization that they are his glory and crown, he exerted every effort to go to them amidst his tribulation, but Satan hindered him. He attempted several times but the devil’s war was fierce, which deprived him of enjoying going to them to support them during their afflictions, so he sent them Timothy.

St. John Chrysostom said: [What do you say? Can the devil prevent him from going? Yes, for this time the devil prevented him. However, in his epistle to the Romans, he said that the Lord hindered him (Rom. 15:22). And in another place, Luke said that the Spirit did not permit them (Acts 16:7). In the epistle to the Corinthians, he said that the Spirit also hindered them, but here he says that Satan hindered them.]

Chapter Three

SENDING TIMOTHY

St. Paul sent his disciple Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians to support them during their sufferings, because he himself could not go to them, then Timothy went back with good report about them.

- 1. Sending Timothy** **v. 1-5**
- 2. Timothy's report** **v. 6-13**

1. SENDING TIMOTHY

“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith” (v. 1,2)

St. Paul did not write to the Thessalonians that we chose Timothy for you, but in great wisdom, he clarified that for his love for them, he preferred to be deprived of Timothy's help, in order to send him to them. He declares that out of his great love he is sending Timothy to them. He preferred to stay alone in Athens that they may enjoy his company.

Truly, this verse reveals St. Paul's wisdom, love, and humility. On one side, he was extremely wise, for he did not mention what was heard among the Thessalonians that St. Paul had ignored them and sent them Timothy instead of himself going to them. But he defended himself in an indirect way so he does not hurt St. Timothy's feelings whenever this epistle is read, and in the mean time to put away all the gossiping to ruin his love for them. He also revealed his love for them, for he emphasized that sending Timothy is a sacrifice on his part. He also revealed his humility by saying that he desperately needed Timothy!

If some had stirred some gossips about sending Timothy, yet he wanted to clarify that he is sending them the dearest person he has. He

described him by three characteristics, his brother, minister of God and fellow laborer. He did not mean just to praise Timothy but to show that he offered them the best brother. He tried to calm them down by telling them that there is no one greater than Timothy to send to them. If they had expected him to visit them, yet he is sending them the best; he is God's minister. Accept him as if you are accepting God Himself; he is a fellow laborer with St. Paul and they have common experiences in the ministry!

Sending Timothy to them shows his fatherhood, for he could not hear about their sufferings without sending Timothy to comfort and confirm them!

The purpose of sending Timothy to them is ***“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this”*** (v. 3).

St. Paul did not ask God to remove this affliction, but asked that they should not to be shaken by these afflictions. Thus, the purpose of sending Timothy was to confirm them during the tribulation. **St. John Chrysostom** commented on St. Paul's saying, ***“That we are appointed to this,”*** that afflictions became part of the believer's life, that he is appointed to accept affliction for the sake of Christ. It seems that the Thessalonians were not affected by the sufferings that had to go through, but they were affected by the sufferings that St. Paul had to go through in every city.

St. John Chrysostom said: [The disciples worry because of the sufferings that befall their teachers. St. Paul encountered many difficulties, for he said, *“Satan hindered us”* (1 Thess. 2:8). He also said that he wanted to go to them once and twice but he could not; which shows how many afflictions he had to go through. Thus, they worried about him more than about the tribulations that befell him. This is like a soldier who does not get worried when he is wounded as much as when he sees his leader get wounded¹.]

To comfort them, he reminded them of his talks about the cross, temptations, and sufferings as essential matters in the life of faith. He

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 3.

said, *“For in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain”* (v. 4, 5). As a spiritual father, he is revealing to them the difficulty of the spiritual road, but in the mean time, he is hurrying to help them and support them.

St. John Chrysostom said: [(St. Paul) is telling them not to worry, for these tribulations are expected to happen. This is exactly like what the Lord Jesus told His disciples, *“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe”* (John 14:29). This is very comforting when the Teacher tells His disciples what will happen, like the doctor when he tells his patient what will happen to him; the sick person becomes less worried. We rejoice amidst tribulations since the Lord Jesus had foretold us about them¹.] St. Paul with the spirit of prophecy is confirming that we are appointed for that, so every suffering we encounter is by God’s permission.

St. Paul is confirming that all what had happened to them was because of temptation, where the devil is trying to spoil the apostolic work in them, and destroy all what he had built through preaching the Gospel. That is why Timothy is going to them to make sure that the devil has not destroyed what he has built. St. Paul feels that every weakness befalling on his people, touches his labor and crown, and makes him lose his joy. He is telling them, in an indirect way, that sending Timothy is not demeaning to them, but it touches the essence of his ministry, and their success is his success, and their weakness is destruction to his labor!

2. TIMOTHY’S REPORT ABOUT THEM

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you” (v. 6).

Timothy did not only give a report about their spiritual and

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 4.

psychological conditions, but was also a gospel, for he said that Timothy brought them good news of their faith and love. St. Paul preached to the Thessalonians and they responded by their faith and love, which comforted his heart. Their faith was not shaken by the many tribulations they had to go through, for Timothy brought good news of their faith and love, and they were eager to see St. Paul. They love St. Paul, although he was absent in the flesh, and they do not cease to remember him, not only while performing miracles but also while enduring afflictions!

St. Paul could not hide his feelings, for he said that he also desires to see them. This is the mutual love between a father and his children or a shepherd and his sheep, while being in the fiery furnace.

St. Paul continues: “*Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith*” (v. 7)

The word “*comforted*” does not mean enjoying some rest, but enjoying some power too. The faith of the church of the Thessalonians was a great support to St. Paul who encountered many tribulations from beatings and imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:23) and yelling at him in Thessalonica (Acts 16:5), and these were repeated in Berea, Athens, and Corinth. During these afflictions, he heard about their faith and that they were not shaken during his tribulations.

St. John Chrysostom comments on the words “*our affliction and distress*” by saying: [He did not ask them to thank him because he is suffering for them. But he thanks them for they were steadfast in his sufferings, as if he is telling them that the harm will befall them more than him, although he is the one suffering¹.] He considered that his wounds do not harm him as much as it harms his disciples if they are not steadfast in the faith. Seeing them steadfast, he rejoiced amidst his sufferings and considered this as a source of comfort to him. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [A good teacher’s main concern is what affects his disciples, thus he says, “*We are comforted when you are steadfast in the faith.*”] It is amazing that St. Paul is the one suffering for the Gospel, but seeing his disciples steadfast amidst tribulations, he was

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 4.

comforted and he praised them.

He confirms what he said by saying, ***“For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God”*** (v. 8, 9)

St. Paul is declaring that he lives when he hears about their steadfastness in all the tribulations they encountered. The success of his children is the joy of his life, and their stumbling is his death! It is amazing that he does not say that we rejoice if you stand fast in the Lord, but that ***“we live.”*** Hence, a shepherd considers his people as his life!

St. Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be attached to his person, but to God Himself, for he said, ***“if you stand fast in the Lord.”*** **St. Augustine** said that St. Paul he did not want them to be steadfast in him but in the Lord, for ***“Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”*** (1 Cor. 3:7)¹. What rejoices a wise shepherd is the steadfastness of his people and not their attachment to his person.

This report which Timothy gave to St. Paul, stirred in him the desire to offer God a sacrifice of thanksgiving to give back some of the debt. He said, ***“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God”*** (v. 9). He was very eager to see their faces and perfect their faith, for he said, ***“Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you”*** (v. 10, 11).

St. John Chrysostom sees that his desire to see them, praying day and night to see their faces, is an indication of his joy for their spiritual fruits, like a farmer who hears that his land became fruitful, so he was eager to see it.

What does he mean by saying ***“Perfect what is lacking in your***

¹ *Sermons on N.T. 54:4.*

faith”? Timothy has shown a joyful report about their steadfastness in the faith. Saying to perfect what is lacking in their faith, St. Paul means that he is eager for their continuous spiritual growth toward perfection. No matter how great our faith is, we have to ask God to perfect what is lacking in our faith and in the faith of our brothers. The more we walk in the road of virtues, the more we entreat Him to perfect what is lacking in our faith until we reach the full stature of Christ.

He asks God to remove all obstacles, which the devil has put to hinder him from visiting them, for he said, “**May our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you**” (v.11)

Finally, he prays that God may make them continuously grow in love, not only toward him, but also toward each other, whether believers or unbelievers. Perfect love for every one is an indispensable matter in sanctifying the heart by the Holy Spirit. He continues, “**And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints**” (v. 12,13). **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Love makes them blameless¹.] The purpose of our faith is a holy life in the Lord, for without sanctification we cannot see God (Heb. 12:14). The basis of a holy life is “love;” since the holy life is enjoying the fellowship with God and He lives in us. God Himself is “love” (1 John 4:8). And in His second coming, He cherishes the love that is in His children, for He calls them to His kingdom prepared since the foundation of the world, and He punishes the evil from entering to His kingdom because they did not have love (Matt. 25:41-46).

The Lord Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, grants us love and makes it grow in us (v.12). **St. Ambrose** said: [What does he mean by the Lord make you increase in love, and establish your hearts blameless in holiness? He means that holiness is a gift of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13)².] And **St. Basil**¹ confirms that St. Paul, saying the Lord, refers to

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 4.

² Of the Holy Spirit 3:14.

the Holy Spirit.

¹ *On the Holy Spirit, 21.*

Chapter Four

CONFIRMING THE BELIEVERS

Since the tribulations which the Thessalonians had to go through had purified them before God and men and became a testimony of faith. St. Paul was glorified because of all these difficulties, yet he directs their attention to their spiritual growth so that they may meet the Lord Jesus, their spiritual Bridegroom. Hence, he talks about the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. The meaning of a virtuous life | v. 1-3 |
| 2. Forsaking adultery | v. 4-8 |
| 3. Growing in love | v. 9-12 |
| 4. The Second Coming | v. 13-18 |

1. THE MEANING OF A VIRTUOUS LIFE

“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (v. 1-3)

St. Paul points out the meaning of a virtuous life or the holy Christian behavior, which can be summarized as follows:

First: A virtuous life is not mere social conduct and moral values which one can personally struggle to attain, but rather it is an interaction with the divine commandment in the Lord Jesus, *“we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus...”*

Since St. Paul is commanding them, he is commanding them in the Lord Jesus. These are not human commandments, but God’s commandments in the Lord Jesus, which is the word of God. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb. 4:12). St. Paul clarified his role by saying: *“Therefore, we are*

ambassadors of Christ as though God were pleading through us; we implore on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20) We do not accept the commandment, even if it were from an apostle, but as a divine commandment, which Christ declares through us, so that it implies authority to change our lives and giving us new depths.

His saying, "*in the Lord Jesus*" means that he talks to us while hidden in the Lord Jesus, in whom he finds peace and rest and in whom he tastes the divine love. He wants us to share in the joyful destination. In the Lord Jesus, the shepherd and the flock are hidden, and the priest commands his children, and the spiritual children accept the commandment. In Him all struggle and in Him all are crowned. Briefly, we say that the foundation of the virtuous life is the continuous fellowship in the Lord Jesus to enjoy new depths through His free grace working in the hearts of the strugglers.

Second: Since the virtuous life is accepting the divine commandment in the Lord Jesus, hence we accept it through the "*Paradosis*" or tradition. He said, "*Just as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God.*" Christian behavior is a part of the apostolic receiving from God. It is associated with the Christian faith or the Gospel of Christ, whom we accept from the Lord Himself through His disciples as a tradition, which is delivered to successive generations. Thus, we accept the living Gospel, not as mere dogma, but as practical living faith in the heart, and declared through communal and family worship. It is a life that touches every human being and interacts with his thoughts, feelings and deeds.

Third: The purpose of the virtuous life is to please God. We could not please God after we have marred His image; "*They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no not one*" (Ps. 14:3). When the Word of God incarnated, the heavens opened to hear the voice of the Father from heaven. He said: "*This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17), in the Jordan River and also on the mount of transfiguration. Likewise, as we accept to be members in His Holy Body, in the new Jordan, we accept the Father's good will, where He sees us united in His Son, the subject of His pleasure. When the Holy Spirit lifts us on the mountains

of the holy Bible, as on the mount of transfiguration and declares His kingdom inside us, then, we hear that joyful voice of the Father, who rejoices with the fruit of His Holy Spirit within us.

Since the virtuous life is fellowship with the Lord Jesus, then we find the pleasure of the Father. For outside Him, we cannot please Him, as St. Paul said, “*But without faith, it is impossible to please Him...*” (Heb. 11:6). In other words, the virtuous life is not mere social conduct but rather it is unity with God, in the Lord Jesus Christ. So He may dwell in us as members in His body, giving us a place in His Fatherly bosom.

Fourth: St. Paul said, “*that you should abound more and more...*” The virtuous life is limitless, for a believer will not rest until he reaches the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), carrying His traits, where the Lord Christ is apparent in his life.

In Christ Jesus, we please the Father; thus we have to struggle without ceasing, so we may grow in Him and abound to please Him. St. Paul realized that without faith, we couldn’t please Him, not through laziness, but through continuous strife as spiritual soldiers. He said, “*No one entangled in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4). He struggles that he may not go back to the carnal life, for “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). In his unceasing struggle, he does not ask for the praise of men but to please God. He said, “*For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (Gal. 1:10). To please God, he gives up not only the lusts of the flesh and the praise of men, but also his rights, until he satisfies God. He lives a virgin life, not because marriage is defilement, but to devote more time for the spiritual strife, for he said, “*He who is unmarried cares for the things that belongs to the Lord, how he may please the Lord*” (1 Cor. 7:32).

Fifth: St. Paul summarized the virtuous life in one sentence: “*For this is the will of God your sanctification.*” **St. John Chrysostom** commented saying: [See how St. Paul is very enthusiastic

about this matter, for he wrote, “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Also in his epistle to St. Timothy, he wrote, “*Keep yourself pure*” (1 Tim. 5:22). In his epistle to the Corinthians, he wrote, “...*in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings, by purity...*” (2 Cor. 6:5,6)¹.]

What does St. Paul mean by holiness that God desires in us? It is isolating what is strange to our nature and accepting what is God's. In other words, holiness carries two simultaneous meanings: emptying and filling. Emptying all the evil that penetrated our nature and filling with the Holy God Himself, as the mystery of our life. If God is the Holy One, then our virtuous life is that His holiness will be fulfilled in us, so we may carry His holiness inside us and become holy in Him.

The Holy Spirit takes what is Christ's and declares it (John 16:14), not only in words but also practically, so he may change our mind to the mind of Christ, our will becomes His will, our members become His members, and our sufferings His sufferings. Holiness is the apparition of the Holy Christ in our inner lives and our apparent behavior!

2. FORSAKING ADULTERY

Mentioning the virtuous life, St. Paul wrote about the negative and positive aspects. One does not enjoy holiness unless he empties himself from all defilement and evil. Virtuous life is a continuous dynamic life where one empties himself from evil then enjoys the pleasure of living with God. One accepts the divine thoughts and rejects all satanic thoughts.

St. John Chrysostom said: [Virtue is divided into two matters: forsaking evil and doing good. Forsaking evil is not enough to attain virtue, but it is only the beginning. We have a long way to struggle².]

St. Paul mentioned the negative aspect of the virtuous life, which is forsaking evil, especially adultery, whether by thought, sight or deed. He presented a new concept of forsaking it by the following

¹ *In 1 Thess. Hom. 5.*

² *In 1 Thess. Hom. 5.*

points:

First: Talking about adultery as one of the worst sins, St. Paul is talking about the positive side, which is attaining holiness. In other words, forsaking sin cannot be done separate from attaining holiness. *“That each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God” (v. 4, 5).* The Gentile cannot forsake the passion of lust for he does not know God, that is, he does not know how to obtain God and be united with Him. If he ever knew God, he knew Him through theoretical thoughts and mental philosophy, therefore, he stays in his vacuum, and he cannot forsake lust of the flesh, hoping it will satisfy his life. However, the true believer can forsake adultery, moreover, he cannot tolerate it, and he does not feel deprivation or emptiness, but rather he possesses his vessel in sanctification and honor and feels divine overflowing springing from inside him that satisfies him. A true believer does not feel that he is thirsty to any temporal desires, because through his unity with God, he feels that what he receives from God is much better than what he has forsaken!

Through our new life in Christ Jesus, a believer struggles, abstaining from adultery, because it does not fit the new nature that he has enjoyed in baptism, looking at his body as a holy vessel and an instrument for righteousness.

We can look at the vessel meaning the husband or the wife, for Christian looks at his partner as his vessel who abides in love, through the unity of the Holy Spirit. Each partner settles in the other’s heart, and cannot go to another place like Noah’s dove which could not rest except in his hands, and not like the crow who settles on corpses.

St. Augustine¹ said that here he refers to the marital relations, for everyone looks at the other partner with a holy look, as a holy vessel. Thus, the relations between them is not based on the lust but on love, so they reproduce children as a fruit of their love and unity, and not as a fruit of the lust of the flesh.

¹ *City of God*, 14:18.

St. Ambrose¹ has a symbolic interpretation to the holy vessel, for he sees that a priest or minister who does not practice what he preaches is defiling the hearts of others instead of bringing them as holy vessels to the Lord. So they become vessels of destruction instead of vessels of honor.

Second: St. Paul considers adultery as transgressing the brothers, for he said, “*That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified*” (v.6). Whoever looks at the other with lust is defrauding his body for his own lust. Love is sacrifice and giving, while lust is taking and selfishness. Love is giving without discrimination toward sex or appearance. One respects the other partner and appreciates his thoughts, talents, and life. A beloved wife is the one, who sacrifices for her husband, and he appreciates her thoughts and talents. Thus marital relations become a fruit of their true mutual love.

St. John Chrysostom presents us a living example of love and lust. According to our human thought, we may think that Potiphar’s wife loved Joseph, but in fact, she did not love him but she wanted to satisfy her lust. To prove that, she unjustly accused him and put him in prison. However, Joseph truly loved her, for he reminded her of her husband to embarrass her, and did not say, “*your husband,*” but said “*my master*” to waken her conscience and realize that she is his master. Gently, he rebuked her as if telling her, “It is shameful that you desire evil with a servant.. See whose wife you are?” In spite of him being so gentle with her, yet she put him in prison, yet while he became second man in Egypt, he did not revenge for himself².

Thus, adultery is not love but greediness for others and selfishness to fulfill one’s desires.

St. John Chrysostom explained St. Paul’s words, “*Do not defraud one another,*” by saying, [God has appointed one wife for the

¹ *Duties of Clergy* 3:32.

² المؤلف: الحب الأخوي 1964، ص38-40.

man, thus putting natural limits. So when one looks at another (lustily), it is like stealing, but even more than stealing, for stealing a wife is more catastrophic than stealing money¹!]

Third: The calling for sanctification and abstaining from adultery is a holy calling and not mere social issue, for he says, “*For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness*” (v. 7). Thus, leading a holy life is fulfilling God’s will in us, and adultery is transgression against God Himself. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [He Himself has called you and you insult the One who called you².]

The adulterous cannot justify his act by saying that this pleases the other partner and that he does not hurt anyone. This crime is addressed to the Holy God Himself, for He grants His Holy Spirit to sanctify man. Whoever commits adultery insults the Spirit dwelling inside him. He said, “*Therefore, he who rejects this, does not reject man, but God who has given us His Holy Spirit*” (v. 8). **St. John Chrysostom** said: [If you defile a woman, whether an empress or a slave, you still committed crime. Why? because God revenges not to those who were hurt, but to Himself³.]

God is so generous toward us that He granted us His Holy Spirit, in the sacrament of confirmation, to sanctify us with the holy Chrismation “Myroon,” He creates in us a holy place fit for the heavenly kingdom, so we may become kings through our unity with Christ, the King of kings. (Rev. 7:14). And we become saints through our adoption in the Holy of holies. Therefore, every sin we commit is an insult to the One who raised us to become saints and kings. The king who wears a crown on his head and holds a scepter, if he commits a sin, he insults the position he is holding.

3. GROWING IN LOVE

A. St. Paul said, “*But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*” (v. 9). **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Due to his

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 5.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 5.

³ In 1 Thess. Hom. 5.

great wisdom, St. Paul wrote that he had no need to write to them. Thus, he emphasized that the matter is very essential, for such important matters are very apparent before everyone. Second, saying thus, he embarrassed them more than if he had offered them advice. He loves them because they are abiding in truth, and saying thus, he leads them to more righteousness¹.]

B. He wanted to show that they are truly abiding in love, so he does not have to write to them about it. And if he writes, he asks for their growth. He encourages them so they may not have low self-esteem, but he urges them to grow in love without limits. This is St. Paul's method in writing to encourage others and to instill hope in them, so that even when he rebukes them, he supports them with encouraging words! On the other hand, every Christian who is a member in the body of Christ, that is the church, is granted the free gift of love, and he has to kindle it through spiritual strife, by the Holy Spirit living inside him. That is why St. Paul wrote "***For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another***" (v. 9). We are taught not only through the divine commandments but also through His work in us, for He works in us with His love.

C. St. Paul presented a practical example for the brotherly love, which is strife in labor to help others instead of asking them to help us. "***That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing***" (v. 11, 12).

St. John Chrysostom said: [The Apostle emphasizes that unemployment causes many evils, and that labor is very beneficial, for labor is a sign of our love to our brothers by helping them, for He said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)².]

The early fathers heeded to talk about "*the work of the hands,*" not only as an expression of brotherly love where one helps others and does not burden anyone financially, but also as an integral part of the

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 6.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 6.

spiritual life. God has sanctified the human work and associates it with worship, which God smells an acceptable aroma and a sign of God's love by being faithful and honest in his work as well as his worship. On the other hand, work supports the soul and the mind in our life with God. For example, **St. John Cassian**, when talking to the monks about boredom, commented on St. Paul's words, "*That you also aspire to lead a quiet life*" by saying" [Stay in your cells and do not engage yourselves in gossiping which stems from lazy people and causes worries to others¹.] As unemployment causes emptiness in the soul and mind, so one may get occupied with trifle matters and loses his inner soul and cause others to lose their peace, likewise work is beneficial to our inner quietness and the quietness of others.

St. John Cassian explained the words "*to mind your own business*," by saying: [You should not meddle in others' business or be inquisitive of their lives, thus you may spend all your energy, not in your spiritual growth and attaining virtues, but in demeaning others. An unemployed person fills his empty heart not in building himself that is in his own matters, but he occupies his mind with other's behaviors to condemn them and demean them².]

St. Paul emphasizes, "*to work with your own hands as we commanded you*;" this means that he had previously commanded them to work so they may not feel empty and start to worry or be inquisitive about others' matters and condemn them. This phrase reveals an important element in St. Paul's ministry, which is while he is talking about the Gospel as an integral part of their Christian faith, yet he is directing their attention to work with their hands as part of their spiritual life. He preaches the Gospel as a part of the daily life, for faith touches our spiritual life, as well as our psychological and social life, which constitute one undivided life. Our enjoyment of the new life in Christ Jesus sanctifies our spirits and bodies and our entire behavior in our daily life, even our eating, drinking, sleeping and recreation.

This complete outlook toward man removes all astonishment

¹ *Institution 10:7 f.*

² *Ibid.*

regarding Solomon the wise when he repeatedly wrote about avoiding laziness and emptiness. He said, “*For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.*” (Prov. 23:21) **St. John Cassian** said: [Definitely the drowse man does not deserve to be clothed with the imperishable garment, “Put on the Lord Jesus” (Rom. 13:14) “Putting on the breastplate of faith and love” (1 Thess. 5:8). Isaiah addresses Jerusalem saying, “*Awake, awake! Put on your strength O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city!*” (Is. 52:1). Whoever is lazy or bored, let him work hard and avoid laziness¹.] For the road of laziness is full of thorns and his heart produces only thorns and briars. For Solomon said, “*I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles, its stone wall was broken down*” (Is. 24:30,31). However, a working soul does not have thorns, but is filled with the joyful fruits of the Holy Spirit, and it is not clothed with rags but with the splendor of the Lord Himself. Solomon the wise said, “*Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms*” (Prov. 31:10-17). This is the soul that does not cease to work day and night, so she may satisfy the heart of her Bridegroom the Lord Christ with the fruit of her spirit and offers the food of love to her brothers. She lives by the spirit of power and with a steadfast arm.

Thus, labor is a holy obligation for every Christian, even if he is not in need. **St. Basil the Great** said: [A Christian should be disciplined; whoever is able to work should not eat the food of laziness, and whoever is occupied with work should do his best for the glory of

¹ *Ibid.*

Christ¹.]

4. THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD

After talking with them about the virtuous life in the Lord, St. Paul is directing their attention to the resurrection of the dead and the second coming of the Lord. He is instilling in them the spirit of hope in their spiritual strife and to be steadfast, during tribulations, to the end.

First: Death in our faith is considered sleep. He said, “*but I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*” **Fr. Aphrahat** says: [A sinner, though he is living, is dead in the eyes of God. However, a righteous, even when he dies, is living to God; and this death is considered sleep. David the Psalmist said, “*I lay down and slept; I awoke for the Lord sustained me*” (Ps. 3:5). “*Awake and sing you who dwell in dust...*” (Is. 26:19) The Lord Jesus said about the ruler’s daughter, “*She is sleeping.*” (Matt. 9:24). He also said about Lazarus, “*Lazarus is sleeping but I go and wake him up*” ((John 11:11)².]

He calls the dead as sleeping, because their souls have enjoyed the resurrection from the dead when they were buried with Christ in baptism. Death has no authority over them. They are in temporary sleep until the Day of the Lord when their bodies will arise to enjoy the glory, thus the souls share their crown and live in the glories of eternal life. Since death is rest and sleep, then the resurrection is life. **St. Ambrose** said: [Rest is good but life is much better. St. Paul said, “*Awake you who sleep, and rise from the dead and Christ will give you light*” (Eph. 5:14)³.]

Second: As long as death is considered sleep, then we should not be mourn without hope, as unbelievers. The Lord Jesus wept when Mary bowed at His feet saying, “*Lord, if you were here, my brother would not have died*” (John 11:32). The Jews said, “*See how much He loved him.*” The Lord Jesus has sanctified our human feelings by His

¹ Epistle 22:2 *On Perfection of the Life of Solitaries.*

² *Selected Demonstrations 8: Of the Resurrection of the Dead, 18.*

³ *On Belief in Resurrection, 2:39.*

weeping. Thus, we share with those who suffer their sufferings and we have longing feelings toward the departed, but in a living hope that we will meet with them.

St. Ambrose said: [Not every weeping results from unbelief, for natural sadness is something and sadness in despair is something else. There is a great difference between longing to what we have lost and weeping in despair. There are tears for sorrow as well as tears for joy¹.] **St. Basil the Great** wrote to the church of Barnosios, north of Cappadocia, assuring them that St. Paul is not ridding us from our feelings but he is warning us not to surrender to sorrow. He said: [I do not mean that we should not have any feelings toward the departed but we should not surrender to sorrow².]

The reason of not surrendering to sorrow is our hope, which is beyond this temporary life to see the eternal life declared inside us. **St. Basil the Great** said: [If our hope is in this life only, we will be very bitter, however, if the love of God is in us and we liberated from the bonds of the body, then this is the beginning of the true life. Why are you sad as if you have no hope? May you rest and be above all the tribulations of life³.]

Third: St. Paul said, “*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (v. 14). St. Paul called the dead those who sleep because they carry Christ inside them. Death has no authority over them, but the resurrection is inside them (John 11:25). Even if they die physically, yet they rise through Christ living inside them. Resurrection is not strange to them nor far from them but it is inside them working in their bodies and souls.

St. Cyprian said: [Unbelievers are sad when their friends depart because they live with no hope. However, we live in hope and believe and trust that we abide in Christ who suffered and rose for us. We shall rise in Him, so why do we not want to depart from this world

¹ *On the decease of Statryus, 1:10*

² *Epistle 62.*

³ *Epistle 101.*

but we are sad for those who departed as if we lost them forever, while the Lord Himself encourages us by saying, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he dies, yet he lives”* (John 11:25). If we believe in Christ, let us believe in His words and promises that we will not die forever. Let us proceed with trust and joy that we will conquer and reign forever¹.]

Fourth: St. Paul declares that the departed will rise and live in glory. He said, *“God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”* (v. 14). This is the secret of their glory and honor. John the Beloved heard a voice from heaven describing the eternal life saying, *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (Rev. 21:3). **St. John Chrysostom** wrote to one who lost his son: [When you ask for your son, ask for him where the King is and the host of angels. Do not ask for him in the tomb, lest you be still crawling on earth while he is up elevated in heaven².]

Fifth: St. Paul is talking about the meeting of the living and the dead. He said, *“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 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 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. Therefore, comfort one another with these words”* (v. 15-18).

St. Paul is proving that the resurrection is not hard for God, for He who gathers the living to meet Him in the clouds can also raise the dead to have the same inheritance.

St. John Chrysostom states that by saying *“we who are alive and remain”* the apostle does not mean himself and his generation, but

¹ *Treatise 7 On Mortality, 21.*

² *In 2 Corinth. Hom 1:7.*

he means the believers who remain until His Second Coming¹. Saying “*we*” is an indication of the unity of the church.

St. John Chrysostom is questioning: [If the Lord descends to take us, why are we caught up in the clouds? For the honor! When a king enters a city, the dignitaries will go and meet him, but those who are condemned wait for the judge. When a compassionate father goes into a place, his true children go out to meet him and embrace him, but the sinners stay inside. The Lord Jesus was taken up in the clouds (Acts 1:9), and we too will be caught up in the clouds. What great honor! He descends to us and we arise to meet Him! What joy that we will be with Him!²]

St. Gregory of Nyssa, said: [When the believers are caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus, this is a sign of the transformation in their bodies from the corruption which pulled them to the earth to the incorruption to lift them up to the clouds to meet the Lord. When the trumpet of the resurrection sounds to raise the dead and to change the living to incorruption, then the bodies become weightless and they are caught up in the clouds³.] He also says that the human nature of the Lord was buried in the earth, yet He ascended to the heavens; this makes us believe that we will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air⁴. **St. Augustine** had a similar saying: [Since the bodies will be incorruptible, then they will not be a burden on the souls. The souls will not cleave to the bodies, but the bodies will cleave to the souls and the souls will cleave to God⁵.]

¹ *In 1 Thess. Hom. 7.*

² *In 1 Thess. Hom. 8.*

³ *On Making of Man, 22.*

⁴ *Adv. Eunomius 12:1.*

⁵ *On Psalms 109:56.*

Chapter Five

CONCLUDING COMMANDMENTS

St. Paul concludes his epistle by practical commandments like:

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|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. The life of watchfulness | v. 1-11. |
| 2. Love of the shepherds | v. 12-13. |
| 3. Other commandments | v. 14-22. |
| 4. Conclusion | v. 23-28. |

1. THE LIFE OF WATCHFULNESS

Since St. Paul is writing to the suffering church that is patiently waiting the Lord's Second Coming, he is directing their attention to be always watchful. He mentioned the following points:

First: The Lord's Day does not come by, for no one knows when that Day is (Matt. 24:26). "***But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you***" (v.1). St. Paul is repeating what the Lord Jesus said before His ascension, "*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority*" (Acts 1:7). The Lord does not want to hide from us His secrets, but in His great love He wants us to be inflamed and eager for His Second Coming. We should ask for His fast coming and be ready to enter His eternity¹.

As His Second Coming is a private secret of God which will be fulfilled when the elect are completed and we do not know when, likewise we should struggle in our spiritual life to practice a righteous life in the Lord and to grow spiritually without waiting for His spiritual gifts. In true hope, one struggles leaning on the bosom of the Lord, who liberally grants us without reproach, and we leave Him the time of giving. He grants us for the glory of His name and for the edification of the church and our salvation. The Lord determines the right time and gives according to what He sees well! As we long for the Second

¹ *Some Early Fathers see that we must not be involved in searching for knowing the times (St. Augustine: On Ps. 6:1).*

Coming of the Lord without knowing the time, likewise we open our hearts for His rich grace without determining the time. God is generous in His giving but He may delay His giving to teach us perseverance or to purify our faith so that we may not take His gifts lightly. Hence, delaying His giving is one aspect of God's great care for us, which surpasses our understanding.

Second: This Day comes to the unbelievers as a thief in the night, or as labor pains for a pregnant woman. He said, "*For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!'*" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (v. 2, 3). It is a dark day for those who are not ready, as if one sleeps in peace but then all of the sudden that Day comes as a thief or as labor pains which come unexpectedly. Amos the prophet said, "*Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light*" (Amos 5:18).

St. Augustine said that the Lord's Day coming suddenly is to condemn those who are not ready. He said: [Let us be watchful at night so you may not be surprised by the thief, for the sleep of death is coming, whether you want or not¹.]

Third: Since the Lord's Day is darkness for those who are not ready, it is a lighted joyful day for the believers. St. Paul said, "*But you brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night*" (v. 4-7).

Formerly, we were all sons of darkness like the robbers and adulterers who wait for the night to perform their evil deeds. **St. Augustine** said: [Who are the sons of night? and sons of darkness? those who practice evil deeds. They are sons of night for they are afraid lest their deeds are manifested at the daylight. No one works in the

¹ *Sermons on the N.T., Hom. 43:8.*

daylight except the one who works in Christ¹.]

We were all abiding in darkness, as if in a state of sleep, where the Lord's Day comes as a thief or as unexpected labor pains. But now when we accepted the Sun of Righteousness inside us, we became children of the light, joyfully waiting for the Lord's Day.

St. John Chrysostom said: [How can children of light exist? Sons of perdition commit evil deeds befitting Hades. The Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees, "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is own, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*" (Matt. 23:15). St. Paul said, "*God's wrath come upon those who practice such evil.*" The children of God do deeds which please God, and the children of the light do deeds of light².]

Fourth: Children of day and children of light are watchful at night, not because they do not want to sleep but because of inner watchfulness. St. Paul commands us, "*Let us watch and be sober.*" Let our lives be full of light. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Regarding the body, there is day and night which is involuntary; thus the body needs to sleep sometimes and wake up sometimes. However, we have authority over the soul to either have daylight or night. When we close our inner eyes, we lose our spiritual insight and the soul sleeps, but the soul may be awake, "*I sleep but my heart is awake*" (Song of Songs 5:2) Even if the body sleeps, but the heart is awake and does not know darkness nor laziness!

We do not deny the importance of being watchful for the edification of the spirit, whether in prayer, or praising or Bible study or visiting the sick, etc... **St. John Climacus** said: [A watchful eye makes the mind pure, but lots of sleep ties the spirit. Lots of sleep creates forgetfulness and being watchful purifies the memory³.]

Fifth: St. Paul said, "*For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night*" (v. 7). The soul does not

¹ *On Ps. 63:13.*

² *In 1 Thess. Hom. 9.*

³ *Ladder of Paradise 29:3, 9.*

sleep unless she accepts to live in darkness then she becomes lazy. The soul does not get drunk unless she accepts to drink the wine of evil that makes her drowsy, then she loses her stability and loses the goal of her life. The soul which desires the riches of this world and seeks the vainglory lives in darkness and as if drinking wine. Then one day, she will wake up to find nothing of which she was seeking. She lived in sleep and drinking while the body was lazy and she was drowsy with the love of the world, so she had no deposit for eternity.

Sixth: St. Paul said, “*But let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation*” (v. 8). Since we accepted not to live in darkness or night, let us live in the daylight, living as spiritual soldiers getting our refuge from the breastplate of faith, love and the helmet of hope. These three elements: faith, love and hope are the equipment for our spiritual war, which the Thessalonians have experienced, as mentioned at the beginning of the epistle: “*Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope...*” (1 Thess.1:3)

As long as we are children of light, Satan, the ruler of darkness, will continue to shoot his darts of evil. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [May faith and love surround you as a shield, so no fiery dart of the devil can attack you¹.]

St. Serenus said: [Faith stops the darts of the evil lust and destroys them by the fear of the judgment to come and faith in the kingdom of heaven. Love surrounds the chest to protect him from evil thoughts and does not allow the evil darts to penetrate the inner man. “*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Cor. 13:7). The helmet is the hope of salvation which protects the head, for Christ is our head, therefore, in our temptation, we have to protect our head with the hope of the good things to come, especially to keep the faith pure. When one loses part of his body, he still can live but with some disabilities, however when one loses the head, he cannot live even for a moment².]

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 9.

² Cassian: Conferences, 7:5.

St. Paul arranged the weapons of the spirit in that order: faith, love then hope. However, in other places, they are arranged in different order: faith, hope then love. Faith is the secret of our meeting with God and enjoying fellowship with His Son, and hope grants us joy through our assurance that we are invited to our eternal inheritance. Since faith enlightens us to realize the mysteries of God's love, then hope drives us to accept those mysteries without any despair. Love is the garment of the eternal wedding and the portion that remains with us in heaven, because "*love never fails.*" Faith will end as soon as we see God and His mysteries, and hope will end by our practical enjoyment of the inheritance, however love will last forever and this will be the secret of our eternity as our language in heaven. Here he talks to the Thessalonians, while in deep distress, that is why he talks about hope after talking about faith and love to assure their need of continuous patience without despair, waiting joyfully for the Second Coming of the Lord and enjoying the eternal glories.

The secret of our power in our spiritual strife is God choosing us and sacrificing His Only-Begotten Son a ransom for our souls. He wrote, "*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him*" (v. 9, 10). **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Do not lose the hope of going to God, for God offered you His Son. Do not weaken in front of the present evils! God offered His Only Begotten Son to save you from Hades, what else He did not offer for your salvation? Thus, it is appropriate for us to live in hope. Do not fear that you are going to meet the Judge for He greatly loved us offering His Son Sacrifice for us. Let us hope for greater matters and live in faith and love¹.]

Since our spiritual weapons are faith, love and hope, then we are granted these weapons through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We believe in Him as our Savior and receive from His cross the mystery of the divine love, and through Him we hope for the glories. The believer is filled with faith, love and hope through this sacrifice!

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 9.

Through this sacrifice, we belong to Him and became His own, whether we are struggling in this world or whether we sleep. St. Paul said, “*whether we wake or sleep*” (v. 10). He also said, “*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Cor. 6:20). Also, St. Peter said, “*Knowing that you were not redeemed with incorruptible thing, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

Through the death of the Lord Jesus, we became His own and the heart became His resting-place and we rest in Him. Thus, our struggle in this world had a purpose, which is to be in the presence of God. This is our true comfort that supports our brothers. He said, “*Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing*” (v. 11)

2. LOVE OF THE SHEPHERDS

“*And we urge you brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (v. 12, 13).

After urging them to be spiritually watchful and to wait for the Second Advent of the Lord, he asked them to honor their spiritual fathers and to esteem them highly. The reason behind that was that some of the rebels tried to mar St. Paul’s image in the eyes of the Thessalonians because he was not able to go to them during their tribulations but sent Timothy, his disciple and partner of in the apostolic ministry. St. Paul had revealed his compassionate fatherhood and sharing their sufferings, and now he does not ask for glory to himself but asks for love to everyone who serves them. When the Lord Jesus healed the leprous, He told him, “*Go, show yourself to the priest*” (Matt. 8:4). St. Paul also said, “*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine*” (1 Tim. 5:17). **St. John Chrysostom** commented on that: [Whoever loves Christ loves the priest too, for through him, one receives the sacraments. Do you love him as your eyes? Do you embrace him? He opens heaven for you; do you honor Him and

embrace Him? If you have a wife, love him more for he offered you your wife. If you love Christ and the kingdom of heaven, know that you receive all that through him¹.]

The honor that we offer to the priest or the love that we show declares our obedience to the word of God and our acceptance to the fellowship with Him. Nothing gladdens the heart of the servant and satisfies his soul except to see his children in the bosom of God. The priest does not need any words of praise or any emotional love, but all what gladdens him is the salvation of his children. Honoring him is achieved when we support him in his message, through our spiritual growth and our work in the vine of the Lord for the kingdom of heaven. This was what we have touched clearly in our study of **St. John Chrysostom**, for he pleads to his people to pray for him as if he was in danger, by repenting and laboring in the vine of the Lord².

St. Paul said, “*to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (v.13). The work of the wise shepherd is centered in his continuous struggle and his watchfulness for every person to make him enjoy the life in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Thus, St. Paul is commanding us to love the shepherds remembering their strife and love, which may sometimes be painful in our sight. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [As physicians prescribe painful medicines for their patients, but they accept for their remedy, and as the fathers chastise their children, so the teachers do the same thing. Patients do not like what their physicians prescribe, yet they accept it, and fathers chastise their children against their will. Likewise, priests do what is good for their people and they have to obey them. This is not achieved easily, for if a priest rebukes someone, this person does not thank him but becomes his enemy. If the priest tells his people to spend their riches on the poor, this becomes as if he is burdening them. If he tells them to control their lust and avoid luxuries, they may consider that as if he is attacking them. If the priest punishes a lazy person, he may consider that as an insult to him³.] Thus, a priest, in his fatherly love, should be

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 10.

² المؤلف: الحب الرعوي 1965، 74-82؛ القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم 1979.

³ In 1 Thess. Hom. 10.

strict, which may bother some people and they do not accept his fatherhood with love but with hatred. That is why St. Paul wrote “*to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (v. 13).

3. OTHER COMMANDMENTS

St. Paul concluded his epistle by some short commandments:

First: “*Warn those who are unruly*”: What does he mean by “*rules*”? In Greek, it means rite or discipline, and does not mean only the outward limits but it contains the curriculum of life. When we say “the rite of the angels,” we mean the angelic life in its purity and praises. When we say “the rite of the monks,” we mean the deep thoughts of the monks. A Christian has his own private rite, which is “*the life in Christ*,” thus he has the will of Christ, the mind of Christ, the behavior of Christ in his personal worship, group worship, family life, everyday life, as well as his inner life.

St. John Chrysostom said: [Who are those who are unruly? They are those who do against God’s will, for a person who insults is unruly, a drunk or anyone who sins is unruly. Those who deviate from God’s path and are unruly will be cast away¹.]

A Christian life is a complete rite carrying all the elements of dogma, worship, and behavior. Whoever deviates from the dogma, worship, or behavior is unruly.

Second: “*Comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all*” (v. 14). St. Paul is telling them to warn those who are unruly, but with compassion, kindness, and patience, so they may not be destroyed and lose hope. When we warn those who are unruly, we have to do that with patience. Servants should warn with love and patience. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [There is no better medicine for teachers than patience!²]

Whom does St. Paul mean by the faint-hearted? Those are the ones who cannot endure insult and become so discouraged that they may lose hope. We have to encourage such people, so we have to be

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 10.

² In 1 Thess. Hom. 10.

very compassionate with them when we rebuke them. Rebuking is not a goal in itself, but rather it is a means for edification. If a teacher destroys one of those faint-hearted, he will be asked for her soul.

A shepherd may find some who are weak in faith, he should not despise them, but on the contrary, he should uphold them and support them so they may be strengthened. He should resemble the Lord Jesus who said, “*A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench.*”

“**Be patient with all**”: Any soul, regardless of her spiritual level, needs some patience!

St. Ambrose said: [Lord, let the weaknesses of every man be before my eyes so I may not rebuke him but I may carry his weaknesses with him, and weep with him. When I weep, I weep for myself too and say; “*She (Tamar) has been more righteous than I*” (Gen. 38:26)¹.] **St. John Climacus** said: [Oh, you active shepherd, look for the lost and carry him on your shoulders, for love is the talent of the true physician².]

During our study of the “Pastoral Love,” we mentioned that the work of the church is not to bind, except in extreme cases. The church should be compassionate with everyone, but without compromise³.

Third: “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone” (v. 15). St. Paul declares that love does not stop at the limits of helping the weak and being compassionate to the sinners, but love endures the evil with an open heart without revenge. **St. John Chrysostom** said: [You may say that an evil person has caused me a lot of harm, do you want to revenge for yourself? No, do not revenge for yourself, but “**See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone**” (v.15) This is the highest level of philosophy that we render good for evil. This benefits you and may benefit the other too⁴.] By rendering good for evil, the person is

¹ المؤلف: الحب الرعوي 1965، 592.

² المؤلف: الحب الرعوي 1965، 594.

³ المؤلف: الحب الرعوي 1965، 570-601.

⁴ *In 1 Thess. Hom. 10.*

purified, while the evil person loses a lot if he does not repent. St. Paul emphasizes that this should be our dealing with everyone even those who annoy us, for the fire is not put off with fire but with water.

Fourth: “Rejoice always” (v. 16). When the heart is wide enough to hold everyone even the wicked, then the soul puts on the heavenly garment and is worthy of the heavenly life, thus, it is granted joy as a heavenly gift. She lives in that joy even amidst tribulation. Sorrow cannot penetrate her life even if it did; it will not remain for long. Continuous joy is a Biblical commandment and also a gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is granted through one’s unity with the Father in His Son Jesus Christ. **St. Gregory the Wonder-Worker** said: [See how God grants us the surpassing continuous joy¹.] **St. Didymus the Blind** said: [The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. He not only comforts those who are worthy and saves them from all sorrow, but in the mean time, grants them continuous joy which dwells in their hearts².]

Fifth: “Pray without ceasing” (v. 17). How can one enjoy all the previous promises of God’s unlimited love and continuous joy? There is a new commandment that is the secret of divine gifts: “**Pray without ceasing.**” We are in desperate need for continuous prayer; it is the work of the angels, especially thanksgiving prayers. Thus, God’s purpose in us becomes evident where the heavenly life is declared inside us.

What does continuous prayer mean?

A. Since prayer is a relationship, then it is a continuous relationship with God and realizing that we are in God’s continuous presence, during our worship as well as our work, during our wake up as well as our sleep. **St. Jerome** said: [The Hebrew was required to appear three times in a year before the Lord (Ex. 23:17). If in the Old Testament, God was asking the people, who were spiritually beginners, to appear before Him, however, in the New Testament, St. Paul is

¹ Hom. 2 On Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary.

² المؤلف: الحب الإلهي 946.

urging the believers to continuously pray to Him¹.]

B. In the eyes of **St. Hilary of Poitiers**, continuous prayer is to go beyond the needs of the body and to concentrate on spiritual matters. He said: [We are required to forget the needs of the body and continue in prayer without any obstacles².] This does not mean we ignore the body, but we have to be liberated from the slavery of the body, to live spiritually, so we may give God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's. While giving the body its needs without being enslaved to it, we care for the spiritual needs without ceasing.

How do we practice continuous prayer?

St. Augustine said: [Does "*prayer without ceasing*" mean that we continuously bow our knees and raise our hands? If this were true, we could not do it. However, there is an inner kind of continuous prayer, which is the desire of the heart to accomplish a good deed. If you are eager for the Sabbath, the eternal rest, then you will not cease praying. If you do not want to stop prayer, then be eager to pray. Continuous eagerness to prayer means continuous prayer³.] Continuous prayer is a continuous inflamed heart, unceasing yearning for eternal life, and dwelling with God forever. This longing toward eternal life is kindled when one takes off the old man and puts on the fiery Holy Spirit, the holy life, which draws the mind, the heart, and all feelings toward divine matters. **Fr. Isaac** said: [We cannot obey this commandment unless we purify our mind from all sin and our mind is lifted up to live a virtuous life where goodness becomes natural, and is nurtured by continuous meditation on the Almighty God⁴.]

The *Agbeya* prayers (canonical hours) support this continuous prayer. **St. Jerome** said: [St. Paul commands us to pray without ceasing. To the saints, even sleeping is considered prayer. Yet, we still have to put some fixed hours for prayer, lest if our work hinders us from prayer, the time itself will remind us of our commitment to pray.

¹ On Ps. 31.

² On Ps. 1:12.

³ On Ps. 38:13.

⁴ Cassian.: *Conferences* 9:3.

We have to pray at the dawn of the day, at the third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour, and at Vespers. Do not start to eat unless you pray and after you eat, thank God for the food. We have to pray several times during the night and recite several verses from the Bible. Prayer is a weapon when we leave the house and after we come back. Do not give the body rest unless your soul is nourished¹.]

Sixth: “Give thanks in everything” (v. 18). Thanksgiving is a characteristic of the heavenly creatures. When they realize God’s great wisdom and love, they continuously thank Him for His goodness. Hence, a believer cannot thank in everything unless he receives the heavenly new nature in baptism, thus his heart meditates day and night with unceasing thanksgiving praises. He feels that he is indebted to God with his whole life, realizing God’s surpassing care and fatherhood. His inner depths cry with thanksgiving praises and the tongue of his inner man sings as the children and the sucklings praised the Lord Jesus in His triumphal entry to Jerusalem.

Seventh: “Do not quench the Spirit” (v. 19). This verse occupied the minds of the fathers of the church. I mentioned some of their opinions in my book, “*The Holy Spirit between the New Birth and Continuous Renewal*².”

God who grants us His Holy Spirit as a free gift to work continuously inside us, warns us of not quenching the Spirit, or stopping His work in us by attacking Him. Truly, the Spirit will never depart from us, but He may be saddened by us, and his work is put off when we do not respond to Him. **St John Chrysostom**³ compares the gift of the Holy Spirit with a lamp in a house. If the lamp is put in front of an air current, it may be put off. If someone insults you, do not insult back, lest the current of hatred puts off the flame of the Spirit kindled inside you. When the wicked opens the evil door in front of you, wisely keep your door shut, so the gift of the Holy Spirit will be inflamed inside you.

¹ Epistle 22:37.

² الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981.

³ In 1 Thess. Hom. 11.

The oil of that lamp is the deed of love, for the fiery Holy Spirit is kindled inside us as long as we respond to Him by loving God and people. However, if we keep our lives shut from loving God and people, then we will lose the oil of love, which is lit inside us.

St. John Chrysostom says that when robbers want to steal a house, they first put off the lamp, so they may achieve their goal. Likewise, the main task of the devil, when attacking a believer, is to put off the work of the Holy Spirit.

Eighth: “Do not despise prophecies” (v. 20). As the Church is concerned to keep the work of the fiery Holy Spirit continuously inflamed inside us, likewise she is concerned to keep the Holy Spirit inflamed through her pulpit, so no one would stand up and say a prophecy without carefulness. We should not despise the work of the Holy Spirit inside us lest He is put off. We should not despise the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of preaching. But these words should be like an inflamed fire, which the priest holds with the tongues, as if he is the cherub who presents those in the hearts of his spiritual children. So they may be inflamed with the holy divine fire and the Spirit is not put off inside them.

Truly, how our Church is in desperate need to have inflamed priests like the cherubim who present the word of God as fire which can work in the hearts of people.

Ninth: “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (v. 21, 22). Since the priest should not despise the pulpit but presents, through his inflamed life, the word of God as kindled fire, likewise, the people should be able to discern (1 Cor. 12:10) those who accept the true word of God and those who reject the spoiled milk. With this spirit, the believer could discern the thoughts too, so he accepts God’s thoughts and rejects the evil thoughts, and even the form of evil thought like idle thoughts which are not evil in themselves, but they waste the time and energy.

4. CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE:

St. Paul concludes the epistle with the apostolic blessing and

praying for them, “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 23).

St. John Chrysostom said: [Notice, the love of the teacher, for he prays after he advises them. He adds the prayer to his epistle, for we need the prayers as well as the advice. That is why we give you advice then we pray for you¹.]

Our petition as priests for God’s people, is that God may sanctify them and keep their spirits, souls, and bodies blameless, so that they may be ready to meet Him and share His glory. We pray for the Holy Trinity, the One God, the King of peace, to grant us sanctification. **St. Ambrose** said: [As the Father sanctifies, likewise, the Son and the Holy Spirit².]

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Trinity, although it is referred specifically to the Holy Spirit, for He is the One who grants the fellowship and unity with God the Father in His Son. He offers us this work as the mystery of the forgiveness of our sins, sanctification of our spiritual and physical life, through the merits of the Only-Begotten Son who offered His blood as the price of our sanctification, so we may settle in the bosom of the Holy Father. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification and the One who grants it. The Son paid the price, and the Father wants to sanctify us, sending His Beloved Son for that purpose. That is why the Holy Bible refers the work of sanctification to the Father, as the Lord Jesus said in His farewell prayer, “*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*” (John 17:17). He refers to the Son, “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Cor. 1:30). He refers to the Holy Spirit, “*God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*” (2 Thess. 2:13).

The purpose of St. Paul’s ministry and prayers is to see God’s people sanctified in the truth, so that the prayer of the Lord Jesus may

¹ In 1 Thess. Hom. 11.

² Of the Holy Spirit 3:4.

be fulfilled, “*Sanctify them by Your truth*” (John. 17:17. “*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they may be sanctified by the truth*” (John. 17:19). The sanctification touches the life of the believer, his spirit, soul and body. St. Paul wrote, “***May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ***” (v. 23) **St. Ireneaus** said: [What was his purpose in prayer? To preserve those three: the soul, the body, and the spirit, until the Second Advent of the Lord. The apostle felt that a person should be complete, which will be achieved in the life to come, when the three will be united to inherit one salvation¹.]

The sanctified life is not the purpose of St. Paul’s prayer, but rather it is the purpose of God’s calling for us. That is why God presents all the divine capabilities to achieve His call for us. He said, “***He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it***” (v. 24). **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Look at St. Paul’s humility! He thinks that sanctification will be achieved not because of his prayers for them, but because of God’s call to them. God has called them for salvation, and He is truthful for He will certainly save them for this is His will².]

After praying for them, St. Paul asked them to pray for him, presenting himself a living example for a faithful servant who know his mission and goal. His main work is to pray for them, as Samuel the prophet said, “*As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way*” (1 Sam. 12:23). In the mean time, he asks them to pray for him, for he realizes how badly he needs their prayers.

“Greet all the Brethren with a holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” (v. 26-28)

Since physically he is absent from them, yet he desires to kiss them holy kisses in the Lord. Since he cannot achieve that, he asks them to accept the brothers who read this epistle instead of him. Thus, he is inflamed with the fire of the spiritual love! His request that this

¹ *Adv. Haer. 5:6:1.*

² *In 1 Thess. Hom. 11.*

epistle be read to all the brothers carries a sign of his love to everyone, desiring to talk with them, even with the epistle.

Finally, he concludes by asking the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to support them in their tribulations, in this virtuous life and to fulfill God's will in them.

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