

A COMMENTARY ON

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TO THE

THESSALONIANS

By

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A PREFACE

If the apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, attempts, by the Holy Spirit, to raise the soul of the believer above the sufferings, whatever their source or kind are, to set forth with it toward the heavenlies, in anticipation of the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, to enjoy the everlasting glory, and to open his heart up by love for all mankind, while in the furnace of tribulation; In the present epistle, he provides us with a bitter portrait of the growing war of Satan, that would reach its climax by the appearance of the “man of sin”; namely, the “antichrist”, directly before the ultimate coming of the Lord. As the nearer the eternal glory becomes, and the more prepared the church becomes, as a bride for the day of her wedding, the more stirred up Satan would become, to draw her children away from their Christ. It is actually not a material human war, but is rather one between Satan himself and God.

Anticipating the coming of the “antichrist”, or “the man of sin”, the believer sees every tribulation he faces, whether sickness, troubles from his family or acquaintances, from inside or outside, as of no significance whatsoever.

In this epistle, the apostle, by the Holy Spirit, writes to enflame our heart toward the ultimate coming of the Lord, without disregarding our daily work, or getting slothful in our normal life activities.

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AN INTRODUCTION

This epistle, despite its small size, drew the attention and interest of many of the fathers of the early church, like St. Justin the martyr, St. Erinaos, St. Clement of Alexandria, and the scholar Tertullian; on account of the obvious prophecy by St. Paul the apostle about the great apostasy or (falling away) through the appearance of the “man of sin” or the “son of perdition”, who represents an embodiment of Satan, opposing the spiritual kingdom of the Lord Christ at the end of ages. This epistle preoccupied many of the scholars and critics of the Holy Book; Some of them dismissed its authenticity; Others its reference to the apostle Paul; And still others, although accepting its authenticity, and its reference to the apostle Paul, yet they believe that it precedes the other one; namely, it is his first and not his second epistle to the Thessalonians. Many scholars came forward to rebut those critics, and to confirm the soundness of the traditional thought of the church confirming its authenticity, its reference to the apostle Paul, and that it is his second and not his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Its authenticity:

The early church has for long been consistent on looking at this epistle as an integral part of the word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that its holiness is undisputable. Many of the fathers of the church in the second century A.D. quoted it in their works, like St. Augustine, St. Barnabas, St. Justin the martyr, and St. Polycarpus; The ‘Dedakia’ some texts of which go back to the first century A.D., quoted from it; Was mentioned by name in the writings of St. Erinaos, St. Clement of Alexandria, and the

scholar Tertullian, of the second century A.D.; Was mentioned in the law of Mercion; Was referred to among the epistles of the apostle Paul in the 'Mortarian List'; And was found included in the old Latin and Syrian versions.

Its author:

No doubt was raised during the early centuries concerning the authorship of this epistle. It carried in itself strong evidences that the apostle Paul is its author: On one aspect, it referred to the author in more than one location (1: 1; 3: 17). On another aspect, It bore the stamp of the apostle, as far as its overall form is concerned: The apostle Paul used to begin most of his epistles by mentioning his name, those to whom it is addressed, the apostolic blessing, thanksgiving to God for every success or growth he sees in them, to support and encourage them; Then he enters into the main topic, which deals with faith, doctrine, and behavior aspects; And finally he ends it with practical commandments, and a conclusive word. ... Beside the fact that this overall form is utterly and strongly obvious in this epistle. It also demonstrates the features of the personality of this great apostle: his delicacy, his flaming zeal toward the salvation of mankind, his care to pray for the sake of others, and to seek their prayers for his own sake.... All that obviously proclaim that this epistle is the product of the unique flaming mind of the apostle Paul.

Beside these evidences, there are other outer testimonies, proclaimed by the fathers of the early church who, from the beginning. quoted it as an authentic book; and considered it as the living word of God. The scholar Origen and Josabius testified that it has been widely known all over the world in their days.

The main objections against it:

The scholars, defending the authenticity of this epistle, and its reference to the apostle Paul, noticed that the objections of its critics are so weak and not strong enough, to stand before the traditional thought of the church. ... We can summarize those main objections in the following points:

(1) The main and essential objection on which the critics depend, is the eschatological differences between the two epistles. In the first epistle to the

Thessalonians (4: 12; 5: 11), in an attempt to prepare the minds of believers to spiritual watching and strife, in anticipation to when we, who are alive will be caught up together with those who are asleep, to encounter the Lord coming on the clouds, to be forever with him; The apostle hints that the day of the Lord is at hand, that it will come unexpectedly as a thief in the night, and as labor pains upon a pregnant woman,... Whereas in the second epistle to the same congregation, he confirms that that day will not come unless preceded by an obvious sign, when the apostasy (the rebellion) occurs, and “the man of sin, the son of perdition”, is revealed, who opposes and exalts himself above God in His church, and shows himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2: 1-4).

Looking deeply in these two epistles, we shall find no difference in thought, but only difference in the circumstance that prevailed around each of them, that led the apostle to include a certain aspect of the eschatological thought and not the other. What came in the two epistles are actually not two opposing thoughts, but rather two integral aspects of the same faith thought.

To explain this, we may say that, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, intending to encourage them to lead a life of watching and strife without murmur, but with a perpetual thanksgiving amid the tribulation, the apostle concentrated on the element of suddenness of the coming of the ultimate day of the Lord, in order to enflame the longing of those who spiritually strive, to work with joy and sure hope; ... And at the same time to warn those slothful and confused, lest they might fall and be deprived of the blessing and joy of the everlasting encounter with the Groom of their souls, coming to them.

Whereas in the second epistle, addressed to the same congregation, the apostle writes with a new and an additional goal; namely, the necessity of walking with

wisdom and prudence in this world; ... As, whether, out of misunderstanding the first epistle, or because they probable have got another epistle wrongly referred to the apostle, those believers, assuming that the ultimate coming of the Lord is at hand, some of them sold their possessions, and others stopped their daily activities, in anticipation of the day of the Lord, that will come any day; something that caused a great state of confusion and chaos in the whole church. ... That is why the apostle hastened to write to them this second epistle, to warn against those actions against faith; and to confirm that the day of the Lord will not come before certain obvious and public signs precede them; namely, the appearance of “the man of sin, the son of perdition”.

Therefore the elements in both epistles are not two contradictory thoughts, but represent one integral thought, which appears very obviously in a long talk by the Lord Christ Himself about the signs that will precede His ultimate coming, including the appearance of the antichrist; referring at the same time to the element of suddenness, and to our anticipation of the times and seasons (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 7; Acts i).

(2) Some scholars attempted to refer what came in the second epistle about the ultimate coming of the Lord, and the appearance of the man of sin, to a later era than that of the apostle Paul; claiming that the second epistle to the Thessalonians is not written by him; and that its real author has quoted that thought from the book of revelation written by St. John the evangelist.... The man of sin, according to some of them, referred to the re-appearance of the tyrant emperor Nero, about whom it was claimed that he did not die, but hid somewhere in the East, where he prepares himself to appear anew to resume his opposition against the church and her faith in the Lord Christ. ... Others claimed that the man of sin was Vasepsian, ... And still others claimed that he represents the era of Trajan.

Such objection could not be well received; as what is similar to this thought of the man of sin, goes even as far back as the prophet Daniel (Daniel 11), and was

obviously known in the Jewish documents preceding Christianity; and as clearly proclaimed by the Lord Christ Himself, in the gospel according to St. Mark (Chapter 13).

On another aspect, the apostle Paul, in his preaching the gospel, faced a continuous opposition, and even in his days many apostates from faith appeared; That, by his fiery heart, and his spiritual insight, was inspired by the Holy Spirit, that a movement of apostasy, much more violent and bitter than that through which the church was passing in his days, will directly precede the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ; in which Satan will be embodied in the person of the son of perdition, opposing the Person of Christ, until the measure of evil is consummated.

(3) Some critics see differences between the two epistles, when both of them were written within short time, and the sender and the addressees are the same. 'Davidson', made such a big deal of those differences, that 'Salmon' described his allegations; as 'childish criticism!'; as though a child wants to hear a story again in the same way and the same words.

Beside those two objections, Some critics claim that, while the first epistle is characterized by abundant and warm feelings of the apostle toward the Thessalonians, the second epistle, on the other hand is almost formal and firm. In the first epistle he says: "*We give thanks to God always for you all*" (1 Thessalonians 1: 2); while in the second one he says: "*We are bound to give thanks to God always for you*" (2 Thessalonians 1: 3; 2: 13); ... "*We command you*"... and "*Those who are such, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ...*" (2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 13). But we can refer this change in the way of speech to a change in its goal. ... The apostle wrote the first epistle, like a father writing to encourage his children in a time of tribulation, demonstrating his compassionate fatherhood and revealing his partaking of their sufferings. Whereas in the second one, although he is writing to the same congregation, yet he commands and exhorts them because of their erroneous behavior and their slothful abstaining from their

daily work. ... We, actually cannot ask the apostle to write all his epistles with the same tune, which he changes according to the difference in issues and the circumstances prevailing at the time.

The second difference on which the critics concentrated, was, according to a suggestion by A Harnack, that the first epistle was addressed more to the believers of Gentile origin; Whereas the second one was addressed more to those who have great knowledge of the Old Testament. Such a theory of a divided church in the same province, into a church of the Gentiles and one of the converted Jews, is totally unacceptable, especially that the apostle Paul, a great believer in the unity of the church, demands in his first epistle "*I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren*" (1 Thessalonians 5: 27); with no discernment between those of Jewish origin and those of Gentile origin. Quoting the Old Testament, does not imply that it is addressed to those of Jewish origin; as the gospels, written to those of Gentile origin, like that according to St. Mark, include several quotations from the Old Testament.

(4) If some critics have gone too far in their allegations that there are differences between the two epistles, as an evidence of their objection to the second epistle; On another aspect, some were of the opinion that the great similarity, particularly in the opening preface, which is almost the same in both of them, is rather an evidence that raises doubt in the authenticity of the second epistle; saying that there is no need for the apostle to write another epistle to the same congregation, within such a short interval of time, and with such a closely similar issues.

This objection is very weak; as the two epistles carry both what are similar and what are different ; The similarity is when the apostle intends to confirm a certain issue; while the difference is when he writes about something new that happened after writing the first epistle.

Going through those objections, we are more convinced of the authenticity of this epistle, of its true reference to the apostle Paul; ... And that there is no point in the attempts by certain scholars to suggest its reference to an unknown author, or to that it is written by St. Timothy and St. Silas, and only signed by the apostle Paul (see 2 Thessalonians 3: 17); ... Or that it is an epistle specially addressed to the church of Jewish origin. As these solutions stir up many problems, the majority of scholars were committed to the true thought of the church.

The Order of writing of the two epistles:

Some scholars, contrary to the true church tradition, claim that the epistle in our hands precedes the other one; introducing the following evidences, which were rejected by the majority of scholars on account of their weakness and lack of conviction:

(1) Some claim that the order in which these two epistle came in the book, was not according to their date of sending, but according to their respective size. This view is however unacceptable, especially that they came in this same order in the law of Mercion, which does not care for the size of the holy books.

(2) Some believe that the first epistle contains nothing difficult to understand, that would warrant sending another epistle to interpret. Yet this view is also unacceptable, on account of the fact that, because the talk of the apostle in the first epistle (1 Thessalonians 4: 13; 5: 11), concerning the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, has been misunderstood; he hastened to write to them about the signs that precede His coming (2 Thessalonians 2: 1-11), to consummate what came in the first epistle, and to correct the misunderstanding thereof.

(3) Some scholars believe that the first epistle talked about the conquest of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1: 6-8); as though the crisis has already

come to an end; While the second one talks about the anguish which still prevails and even expected in the future. Yet this evidence is unacceptable as well; As the talk of the apostle about a conquest and victory, does not imply the end of anguish, but is rather to encourage and support them to consummate their strife, and to exhort them to receive the suffering with more thanksgiving. Gaining conquest does not mean the end of the spiritual war nor imply the cessation of anguish; as the conquest will always be followed by another, and another, all the time.

(4) Some scholars believe that the apostle in the first epistle seems to be quite aware of the inner circumstances of the church of the Thessalonians;

saying: *“Concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, ... and indeed you do so”* (1 Thessalonians 4: 9-10); While, in the second epistle he writes, as though he needs to know how they are doing; saying: *“We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you”* (2 Thessalonians 3: 4-5). ... How could he write that he knows the works of their love; then he writes that he has confidence in the Lord, that they do and will do the things he commands them?!

In response of this objection we say that, because the apostle wrote his first epistle to encourage and support them amid their anguish, he demonstrated their good side, confirming that their spiritual tendency, which he knows for sure, would make them grow more and more; Whereas in the second one, he wrote to enquire and to make sure that they are walking along the sound path, after such misunderstanding of the issue of the ultimate coming of the Lord.

(5) Some object that in the first epistle He wrote to them, saying: *“Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write*

to you” (1 Thessalonians 5:1); Then, in the second one, he revealed the appearance of the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2: 3). According to them, it would be more logic to write in the first one about the man of sin; and when they come to ask about the

time and season of his appearance, in order to fix the time of the ultimate coming of the Lord, he would then tell them that they have no need to know the times and season.

In response to this objection, we say that the apostle Paul while preaching to them, talked about the anticipated coming of the Lord. Then after leaving them, a serious debate stirred up about the time of the Lord's coming, and the appearance of His everlasting kingdom -- a natural debate that has even come in the minds of the disciples of the Lord (Matthew 24: 3); and still comes in the minds of Christians, east and west, up to this very day; caused by man's anticipation of the future events, and his inner longing for knowledge. ... And as the Lord Christ did with His disciples, the apostle Paul also did with the Thessalonians; He first exhorted them, that instead of being preoccupied by the need to know the times and seasons, they should watch and get prepared for the coming of the Lord; ... Then, having misunderstood his talk, he wrote to them about the appearance of the man of sin, not in an attempt to fix the time and season, but rather to correct their misunderstanding.

(6) Some scholars noticed that the apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, started some topics by the word "*But*" (4: 9; 5: 1); which implies that he continues on something about which he wrote before; and that this is not the first epistle, but has to be preceded by another one. ... But other scholars say that this does not mean a commitment by the apostle to send an epistle preceding that one; but refers to that he might have already dealt with those topics before, even orally, while preaching to them; Or to that he is presenting his own view in the Lord, after some other minister might have already done.

(7) His conclusive remark: "*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; It is the way I write*" (2 Thessalonians 3:

17); should be written in his first epistle; Therefore, this epistle is not the second one, but the first.

That could be rebutted by saying that this remark was written by the apostle following the confusion between the authentic and the false epistle wrongly referred to him.

(8) As it came in the first epistle that he sent Timothy to them (1 Thessalonians 3: 2); some believe that this refers to that this epistle was written after sending Timothy who carried the second epistle with him; that proves that this second epistle is in fact the first one.

This could be rebutted by saying that the apostle did not send Timothy as a courier of messages, but as a "*fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish (you) and encourage (you) concerning (your) faith*". And on another aspect, if it was Timothy who carried the epistle in our hands, he would have been referred to as such in the epistle.

The scholars did not stop at responding to the objections of those claiming that it is the first and not the second epistle of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians; but they referred to the following positive aspects to confirm the authentic thought of the church concerning the order of the two epistle:

1- That the problems that came in the first epistle, came in the second one, more deeper, or as consummation to them.

2- That in the second epistle, the apostle obviously refers to the fact that he has sent them a previous one (2: 2; 3: 17); most probably the first epistle.

While, in the first epistle, he did not refer to one before it.

3- If the epistle in our hands is the first one, How would he exhort and warn in it, then to send another one carrying personal warm feelings?! The way usually followed by the apostle Paul is to start by giving love and warm emotions, to prepare the listener or reader to accept the exhortation and warning

that would follow!

The goal of sending the second epistle:

1- As we already said, the main goal of sending this epistle was to correct the wrong concepts into which some believers have fallen, concerning the ultimate coming of the Lord. Assuming that His coming is at hand, they hastened to get slothful in their daily life, and to walk without order. That is why he wrote to confirm to them that the coming of the Lord has to be preceded by the appearance of the son of perdition, that will cause a great apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2: 3).

2- It so seems that, because a certain message wrongly referred to him, carried to them some wrong concepts concerning the ultimate coming of the Lord, he hastened to send to them this epistle, signed by him (3: 17), to correct the misunderstanding

3- As the church was still under tribulation, he wrote to them in a fatherly way, to encourage them to endure the sufferings, and to demonstrate to them how to walk as is befitting of the children of God.

The date of its writing:

It so seems that it was written and sent from Corinth, few months after the first one, in about the year 72 A.D., when St. Timothy and St. Silas were still with him (1: 1).

Divisions of the second epistle:

We can divide this epistle into three main divisions: In the first chapter he talks in an 'Eucharistic way' (thanksgiving to God); In the second chapter, he talks in a 'Revelation way'; and in the third chapter in a practical way.

1- Boasting of them	Chapter 3
2- The man of sin	Chapter 2
3- Practical commandments	Chapter 3

CHAPTER 1

BOASTING OF THEM

It was not possible for the apostle Paul, with his spacious heart, while writing this epistle, to correct the wrong concepts concerning the ultimate coming of the Lord; to exhort, and to rebuke those who became slothful in their daily life, but to begin his epistle, as it was his custom, by giving thanks to God, for what he saw in them of growth in the Spirit; by revealing before them the good sides in their spiritual life, and by proclaiming how he boasts of them, to encourage and support them. In a true spiritual fatherhood, he knows how to encourage before he rebukes; and to help the weak even while rebuking them.

1- The inauguration of the epistle	1 - 2
2- Giving thanks to God, and boasting of them	3 - 4
3- God's righteous judgment	5 - 10
4- Praying for their sake	11 - 12

1- THE INAUGURATION OF THE EPISTLE:

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1, 2).

It is the same inauguration piece he used in his first epistle, as the tribulations surrounding the church was still the same. He sees her as a church abiding in Jesus Christ, rich, holy, and glorified amid her tribulations, and has her place in the bosom of her heavenly Father, through her union with her Head; the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, again, the apostle calls God as "*Our Father*"; as though, with the intention to talk in the text of the epistle about "*the great rebellion, because of the appearance of the man of sin at the end of time*", he confirms to the church her position in the sight of God, whose role, as our heavenly Father, is to care for us and to keep us, whatever great the attacks of the devil against us are. The more strong and bitter the attacks of the devil, the opponent of the truth, against the church, the more the fatherhood of God is proclaimed.

2- GIVING THANKS TO GOD, AND BOASTING OF THEM:

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of everyone of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure" (3, 4).

The apostle Paul begins his epistle by revealing his commitment to pay back his debt to God, by offering Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving, for the sake of His work, not in his personal life, but in that of the brethren, as is fitting of the father who rejoices in the growth of his spiritual children in the Lord; his own life is to be overshadowed by the thanksgiving to God, being the Source of every good gift, and the Grantor of the virtuous life.

The secret of failure of many zealous ministers is probably looking with pessimism to the failings in their own spiritual life, and in those to whom they minister, instead of giving thanks to God for His gifts in their own life, and in that of others. As to the apostle Paul, he "*always*" gave thanks to God; as though the failings and weaknesses, have not taken away the life of thanks from his heart, not even for a moment; His life turned into a

"Eucharistic life"; namely a life of incessant thanksgiving.... In other words, we can say that thanksgiving in the apostle's life, was not mere words he utters by his lips, or praises he sings, every now and then; but it represented a nature that touches his inner man, who incessantly praises God, by the language of the Spirit; ... The praise comes out with each of the breaths of his life; ... His life became like a new guitar, on which the Holy Spirit of God plays to offer a symphony of thanksgiving to the Father in His beloved Son, which He smells as a fragrance of pleasure, well received by Him.

Through such a joyful spiritual binocular, the apostle recognized in the progress achieved by the Thessalonians. as far as the basic principles of the Christian life – faith, love, and hope, are concerned; He felt in them an incessant growth of practical faith; of love for everyone; and of hope, the grantor of patience amid the tribulations. This achievement, he has already proclaimed more than once in his first epistle to them; saying: "*remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thessalonians 1: 3).

(1) Concerning faith, he says: "*Because your faith grows exceedingly*" (3). It was not something strange for the apostle to acknowledge the

exceeding growth of their faith amid the tribulations; As, according to St. John Chrysostom, faith always does through the storms and waves of violent temptations; during which the soul of the believer, would not find a refuge for himself, except to hide in Christ; ... to enter together with Him into the garden of Gethsemane; ... to prostrate himself before the Father, crying out and moaning; ... to enter into a new vision, to be revealed in his works; something that would not be possible to enjoy out of the sufferings, even if he spend long years in continuous worship! ... Tribulation – for the sake of Christ – causes the believer's soul to open up, and to enjoy new depths in the cross of the Lord, His burial, and His resurrection; and causes his faith to grow exceedingly. ... Suffering for the sake of the Lord, commits the heart of the believer to cry out from its depths, to say together with the disciples of Christ: "*Increase our faith, O Lord*" (Luke 17: 5).. ..Then he would find the gates of heaven wide open before him.

If it is befitting of the Christian to live by faith during the time of comfort; The fire of tribulation would reveal the soundness of his 'faith', and its furnace would give it a true shine; to become amid the darkness, like a glittering star.

(2) Concerning 'love', he says: "*And the love of everyone of you all abounds toward each other*" (3). If 'faith' is the foundation of, and the entrance into the

Christian life; 'Love' is its glory, being the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22), which never fails (1 Corinthians 13: 8). If the tribulation has given the Thessalonians growth of faith; it also enflamed their heart with love;... In the furnace of tribulation, the believer encounters the Crucified, not just to behold Him, but to enjoy His attitude, by bearing within himself a flaming spiritual longing to deliver his own life for the sake of everyone, as His Lord has done; and to appreciate the importance of the commandment of the apostle: "*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 2: 4, 5).

St. John Chrysostom believes that the apostle's saying: "*of you all*", in his talk about the abounding 'love' (3), reveals the nature of love in us; ... As, loving one, two, or more persons, is not true love; which is rather to have the heart open to everyone; ... Loving one's own is a human kind of love, whereas loving "all", even the enemies, is a divine love! ... It is as though the believer, in his encounter with the Crucified through the suffering, would not have his heart closed toward his adversaries, and would never seek revenge for himself; But, on the contrary, would have his heart open toward them; with the understanding that his true enemy is not his human adversary, but it is the devil who stirs men up against one another.

(3) Concerning the "patience of hope", the apostle says: "*So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure*" (4). In the first epistle the apostle proclaimed to them that, because of their patience in tribulation, they have become

an example to all in Macedonia and Achaia; That the word of God has sounded forth through their life, in every place; And that their faith toward God has gone out, so that he does not need to say anything more (1 Thessalonians 1: 7, 8). But now, as persecutions and tribulations on them have lasted that long, and got even stronger, he grew more aware of the increasing glory attributed to them, that he is boasting of them among the churches of God. The glory of the priest or the minister lies indeed in the faith of his spiritual children in the Lord; practically proclaimed through the patience of hope amid the tribulations.

Here, the apostle connects patience to faith; ... As many who, by nature, have great endurance; yet this feature would soon fail, once they fall under oppression. Whereas faith would open the eyes of a believer by hope in the righteous judgment of God, to receive from the crucified his patience, and to partake of His feature; And would make him rejoice in affliction as his glory, and his depths enflamed with longing toward the last day.

The subject of boasting of the apostle is the “patience” practiced by his spiritual children, being a practical and a true partaking of the passions and crucifixion of Christ.... This is the treasure, boasted by the church in the early era of martyrdom. ... And once the persecution came to an end, the believers headed to the wilderness, to receive, through the monastic life, the suffering with patience, not to be deprived of the fellowship of the cross in new depths. ... I truly say that the treasure of the believer, is to receive the patience of Christ in himself by the Holy Spirit, as a fellowship in the passion of the Lord; whatever is the kind or the source of the suffering! ... To be keen on acquiring the true patience in his sickness, in troubles within his household, in his job, or In the bad treatment by others. ... According to St. John Chrysostom: [It is befitting of us to walk along the same road of our Lord, to partake of His glory and honor ... How glorious are the sufferings, through which we liken His death!

3- THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD:

The eternal kingdom of God is the secret why the believers endure sufferings with patience; About this the apostle says: "... *which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer*" (5). Commenting on this apostolic statement, St. John Chrysostom says: [In the heart of a natural man, amid the tribulation and oppression, a desire for revenge against the oppressors would stir up; But not in the heart of the Christian, who anticipates the righteous judgment of God, that will bring to him the eternal kingdom, and make him enjoy the heavenly glories.

When the true believer falls under oppression, he would not seek the divine revenge against his oppressors; but would rejoice in carrying the cross; and his feeling of joy would exalt above any bitterness, to lift him up to glories. ... He hates the oppression and not the oppressors; ... He feels the weakness of the human nature, which is used by the devil -- the enemy of all mankind -- as a tool to provoke man to oppress his fellow man; ... And he longs to see the oppressors, liberated from the bondage of oppression and cruelty, to enjoy the eternal kingdom of love. By such a faith view, a believer accepts the suffering, not with the spirit of submission, but with that of strength and love, looking forward to the greater glory, longed for by all mankind.

But the apostle goes on to state an actual fact, not sought after by the believer; saying: "... *since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you*" (6). Not saying "since God is righteous", but "*since it is a righteous thing with God*"; it is as though the apostle states an undisputable fact; which is that God will repay with tribulation those who use tribulation, in case they persist on their position without repentance. ... The apostle himself has been once an opponent who persecuted the church; Yet as he did that in ignorance; and as he received the truth once it shined on him, the forgiving mercy of God flowed over him; not only to make him forsake giving trouble to believers, but to receive with joy that of the wicked for the sake of faith. And as the Lord said to Ananias: "*For he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before*

Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel; For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9: 15, 16).

In order to cheer them up amid their anguish, he opened their eyes on the anticipated revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, saying: "*And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with the mighty angels*" (7). ... The Lord was hanged on the cross, by the wicked religious authorities – the high priests, the priests, the Pharisees, and the scribes, etc. But, behold, the ultimate day is coming when the Lord Christ will be proclaimed as an eternal King; while the wicked who did not repent will perish.... It is as though he says to them: You, who partake here of the passions of the Lord, will partake as well of His great glory. ... The scene of the eternal glory and the heavenly comfort were never out of sight of the apostle. In his saying "*rest with us*", he intends to say: For us, namely, the apostles, His ultimate coming is the secret of our comfort, and for you as well; You will all be with us, to enjoy together the same kingdom; on the day when the Lord comes together with His mighty angels; You, together with us, will partake of the glorified life, with the heavenly hosts, as a proclamation of the might of the Lord.

The angels who come together with the Lord, are called by the apostle, "*the mighty angels*". It is as though he intends to say to the Thessalonians: Although you may seem now as though in weakness amid the tribulations; yet you are here invited to join the angelic life, and being spiritual people, and the children of God, will come together with the mighty angels. The weakness in which you now live amid the furnace of tribulation, is like the seeds sowed in weakness on the soil, to produce abundantly and strongly. If the Lord Christ, in the weakness of the cross, has revealed what is greater than strength, presenting to humanity a new nature, according to the image of the Creator, raising it from its lowly and corrupt nature, up to the heavenly heights; ... We, by our union with Him, will set forth from the weakness of the cross to the might and glories of resurrection.

What is amazing, is that the apostle Paul, who wrote this epistle to correct their wrong concept and assumption that the day of the Lord is at hand, and got slothful in their daily life; talks to them about his longing for the coming of that particular day, putting it before their eyes as a motive for their strife amid the tribulations, yet without getting slothful in their present daily life. The apostle does not accept extremism, whether to the right or to the left; Man should not get preoccupied with temporal things, that would dampen his longing for eternity; But at the same time, he should not get his heart absorbed by the eternities, at the expense of sanctifying the temporal work.

The apostle goes on to say: “... *In flaming fire Taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (8).

The apostle, by his prophetic spiritual eyes, beholds our Lord Jesus Christ coming in His eternal kingdom, in flaming fire burning His enemies; And as the Psalmist says: “*Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him; And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him*” (Psalm 50: 3); and, “*A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about*” (Psalm 97: 3). It is the fire of the divine justice, that does not stand evil, but would abolish it; taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey His holy gospel.

Why does the apostle write about the divine vengeance? Would this give any comfort to those in tribulation, and under oppression? ... I do not think that the apostle Paul, with his heart spacious with love for all men; who longs for the salvation of every soul on earth, means that! ... But he intends to proclaim an actual fact, that would happen, whether the oppressor likes it or not; Namely, that those who do oppression and persist on doing it, will crop its natural fruit as a divine vengeance; On those who choose corruption, corruption will dwell for their perdition; And those who give trouble and oppression to others, will be given like trouble and oppression; according to the words of the apostle himself: “*To repay with tribulation those who trouble you*” (6). ... What is going to happen to the wicked as a divine vengeance, is not the desire of believers; nor the believers are the cause behind their punishment, but the cause is their ignorance

and disobedience ... The Gentiles who did not know God, would fall under punishment because of the darkness of their ignorance; While those who came to have the knowledge of the gospel, and came to receive it in their minds, and not in their life, will fall under vengeance because of their disobedience. God judges the wicked, whether they are ignorant Gentiles or rebellious believers. By saying: "*who do not obey the gospel of our Lord*", the apostle probably means the congregation of the Jews who rejected the gospel, despite the prophecies they have within their hands; putting them among the rebellious and disobedient to the gospel embedded in the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The apostle's talk about the eternal vengeance, is not giving the believers an inner comfort, because of their falling under the oppression of the wicked; as much as giving them an inner warning, lest they would, as well, fall under vengeance. ... If they are now weak under oppression ; their weakness will eventually turn into strength. But in case they divert toward practicing oppression, they will be counted as unknowledgeable of God, and as disobedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to fall, themselves, under the eternal punishment. ... That probably remind us of the story told about one of the saintly monks, who used to weep bitterly every time he sees someone oppressing his brother. In response to a question, why he weeps, he said that whenever he sees others do that, and having in mind his own weak nature, he fears lest he would himself fall in the same transgression, oppresses another and loses his eternal salvation. ... The punishment on the wicked, should instigates in us compassion on them, to work on taking them away from the eternal perdition; beside giving us a warning lest we may also fall and eternally perish.

Describing the perdition under which the wicked fall, the apostle says: "*These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*" (9). On one aspect, it is an everlasting, irreversible and incessant perdition, realized by the appearance of the Lord Himself, and the proclamation of His eternal glory; As though, in the proclamation of the face of the Lord, and the manifestation of the glory of His power, there is perdition of the wicked; like the light that

scatters the darkness. His coming, which is the cause of our joy, glory, and our kingdom, is itself the cause of the everlasting perdition of the wicked.

In the present world, the wicked seek their own glory; They appear, while the face of the Lord would be hidden from them; They practice their violent power, if not apparently in their behavior, it would be in their heart and inner will. Whereas in the world to come, when the face of the Lord which they once opposed will appear, they would not be able to encounter or behold Him; The Holy Book says: The glory of God is manifested in His angels and His saints, to expose the vanity of the wicked and their utter weakness. Hence the proclamation of His coming is considered as a punishment for those of perdition, and glory for the saints. According to this concept the apostle goes on to say: *“When He comes in that day, to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all those who believe, because our testimony to you was believed”* (10).

Who will be glorified: God, or His saints? ... So asks St. John Chrysostom, to which the apostle responds: Yes, God is glorified in all His saints! ... How? When the haughty wicked see how those they have scourged, despised, and ridiculed, have become so close to Him. ... It is a glory to God, as well as glory to them; ... It is His glory as well as their own!... It is glory To Him, having not forsaken them; and glory to them, having been found worthy of such great honor.

It is the will of God to be glorified in His suffering bride; to let her carry His features here and there; when His patience appear in her through her spiritual strife; as well as His glory and beauty through her enjoyment of the everlasting inheritance. ... In His farewell prayer to the Father, the words of the Lord were: *“I am glorified in them”* (John 17: 10); *“And the glory which You gave Me, I have given them, that they may be one, just as We are One”* (John 17: 22); And as it came in the book of Isaiah: *“You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of Your God”* (Isaiah 62: 3); And in the book of Ezekiel: *“Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you’, says the Lord God”* (Ezekiel 16: 14).... If God flows His glory on His bride; proclaims His

splendor in her; and holds her in His hand a crown of glory, and a royal diadem; when she is still living on earth, amid the tribulation and suffering, How much more would it be when she comes out of this world of suffering to live together with Him in His glories, partake of His everlasting inheritance, and be forever in His presence, encountering Him face to face?! ... That glorious day would be indeed a testimony of glory to God, who works in His church, and to the apostolic work, through which we came to enjoy the preaching of the gospel, to enter into the everlasting inheritance.

4- PRAYING FOR THEIR SAKE:

“Therefore we also pray for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (11, 12).

In this conclusive talk of the first division of this epistle, concerning supporting them, and boasting of them for their endurance of the sufferings and tribulation with thanksgiving, the apostle referred to the following aspects:

(1) The apostle referred to his perpetual work for their sake, even while being away from them in flesh, through praying for their sake all the time. which a

true shepherd should do for his flock; as the prophet Samuel says: *“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 Samuel 12: 23, 24); counting his ceasing to pray for them, even for a short time, a sin he commits against God, and a serious slothfulness in teaching his people the good and right way. Praying and teaching are integral, and go hand in hand in the life of the minister, without which he would be sinning against God Himself. ... Talking about the importance of the prayers in the life of a priest, St. John Chrysostom says: [The priest, being entrusted to be a father to people in the whole world, approaches God, supplicates in his personal

and public prayers, to put an end to wars and riots everywhere, and beseeches for peace and comfort for everyone, and for the healing of all the sick.

(2) He perpetually prays to God to count the people worthy of the divine calling. ... If it is God who called them to the

everlasting glory, being His elect children; They are in need – through the prayers of their spiritual minister – to abide by this calling, that the good pleasure of God would be consummated toward them; and faith would be strongly proclaimed in them through work. ... God has the favor of calling them to the everlasting glory; And the apostle is committed to pray that the divine Caller, with His grace, would work to make them worthy of His free call; Yet without disregarding the positive and practical aspect of the faith of the people themselves.

In such few and simple words, and in an indirect way, the apostle Paul refers to the role of God Himself, to that of the minister, as well as to that of the people, in the enjoyment of the everlasting inheritance. God has the full favor of extending the free call; The apostle's role, being aware of the true source of these good gifts to the people of God; is to keep on raising incessant prayers and supplications to the Lord,, to draw His compassion and mercy; While the people's role is to proclaim the faith through the work, by the power of the Spirit.

While writing, proclaiming his practical love through his incessant prayers for their sake, without disregarding his responsibilities toward the other churches, demonstrating the rich grace of God; he keeps exhorting them to work fervently to proclaim their living faith, and to prove their worthiness of the divine calling for them. It is as though God's will in calling them to glory, would not be realized, even by the incessant prayers of the apostle, without their living faith working by the power of the Spirit. As according to St. John Chrysostom: [Grace is always standing by; It seeks and welcomes those who accept it; Our Lord Jesus, seeing a watching soul, fervent with love, He would flow on it an abundance of His riches, even surpassing

its own request; He just seeks from us a little contribution to take over the whole task.

(3) If the goal of the prayers of the apostle is for the will of God to be realized by giving them the everlasting glory; That glory is actually a mutual glory: for the Groom as well as for the bride; he says: *“That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ”* (12). The glory that they enjoy, particularly on the day of the Lord’s ultimate coming, is the glory of His holy name. When the Lord bestows His glory on His church, this glory would reflect on His holy name; And every glory to His holy name, is proclaimed in them to their account.

Because the goal of our life is for His holy name to be glorified; We pray every day, saying: *“Hallowed be Thy name”*; And according to the apostle: *“That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2: 10, 11). This glorification is realized to our account, as we are glorified in Him, *“For both He who sanctifies, and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren”* (Hebrew 2: 11); And together with Him we would reign in glory, according to the words of the apostle: *“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him”* (2 Timothy 2: 12); *“And If children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* Romans 8: 17).

Talking about the mutual glory between the Lord and His church, St. John Chrysostom says: [When the Lord is glorified, so will be His servants; Those who glorify their Lord, will, themselves, also be glorified by the same glory He has, beside a glory of their own ... The grace He grants us, is to be glorified in us, and we in Him].

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CHAPTER 2

THE MAN OF SIN

Although the topic of “*the man of sin*” is considered as one of the main prophecies in the New Testament, yet, the apostle Paul, by writing about him, did not mean to reveal future events, as much as intending to realize practical goals; Hence he ended this chapter by calling on them to “*stand fast in the Lord*”; to enter after that into the third division of the epistle concerning the practical commandments.

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|---|---------|
| 1- The Falling away (the rebellion) will come first | 1 - 12 |
| 2- The abidance in the Lord | 13 – 17 |

1- THE FALLING AWAY (THE REBELLION) WILL COME FIRST:

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our being gathered together to Him, we beg you not to be quickly shaken in mind, or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here” (1, 2)

The apostle Paul requests from the Thessalonians not to let their mind be like a boat in a violent storm, concerning the ultimate coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our being gathered together in and with Him on that great day. He requests from them not to be alarmed by false prophecies, nor vain proclamations; by misinterpreting his words when he was preaching among them; nor by a letter as though coming from him.

He exhorts the believers not to follow the violent allegations that claim that the day of the Lord has already come; saying:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition; who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called god or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (3, 4).

The topic of “*the man of sin*” has long preoccupied the writings of the fathers of the early church, in the middle ages, and even of some of the recent Theologians , who compared him to what came in the book of Daniel about the king who exalts himself above every god (Chapter 11); to what came in the book of Revelation about the false prophet, and about the land and sea beasts (Chapter 13); and to what St. John the beloved said in his epistles about the antichrist.

St. Justin the martyr, in the second century, spoke about the “*man of sin*”, as being the man of apostasy who utters blasphemies against the Most High; and who dares to persecute the Christians.

And St. Erinaos says: [Although being a thief and a rebel, he would care to be worshipped as god; and although being a slave, he would set himself as a king; And bearing the power of the devil, he would come, not like a righteous king submitting to God, but as an opponent, in whom everything satanic would concentrate, claiming to be god].

In the first centuries A.D., it was believed that the antichrist would appear once the Roman empire collapses; Hence the scholar Tertullian says: [We, Christians are committed to pray for the sake of the emperors and for the complete stability of the Roman empire; which, we believe is the only obstacle against his appearance; Let us then fervently pray to God to postpone the existence of such a fearful power!].

St. Hypoletus and St. Erinaos suggest that the antichrist will be a Jew, and of the tribe of Dan in particular.

A group of fathers believe that the appearance of some opponents of the truth, would be a symbol of the antichrist who is to appear at the end of time. As an example, St. Cyprian considers Antichus Epiphanius; ... While St. John Chrysostom considers Nero, who counted himself as a god, as one; whom father Victorianus also believes, to be himself the beast that comes out of the sea. ... St. Jerome, on the other hand, believing that many will be considered as symbols of antichrist, says:[As Solomon and other saints were symbols of the Savior, we believe that many will appear as symbols of the antichrist, like Antichus, the most evil of kings, the persecutor of the saints, and the defiler of the temple].

In the middle ages, several of the western Theologians were interested in the topic of the antichrist. Those opponents among them of the authority of the church in Rome, considered the Papal chair in Rome as a symbol of the antichrist; Father Bernard says: [The ministers of Christ turned into ministers of the antichrist; and the beast of the Revelation resided on the chair of St. Peter]. Yet, several of the Protestant Theologians rejected that view, confirming that the antichrist is not to be symbolized by a certain system, but by a certain man who is to appear at the end of time before the ultimate coming of Christ.

The same way, Extremists among the Catholics accused the Protestant movement of being a symbol of the antichrist, a view rejected as well by other Catholic Theologians.

In the present time, in the West, there are four interpretations of the man of sin, which are:

- a- That what came in this chapter, is not meant to be a prophecy concerning the future.
- b- That what came in this chapter is a prophecy that has already been realized and done with.
- c- That it is a continuous event with time, has been realized in the past, still is at present, and will continue to be in the future.
- d- That it is a prophecy concerning the future, to be realized just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ.

Between the Lord Christ and the antichrist:

(1) The apostle says: "*The man of sin is revealed*" (3). As the Lord Christ came, being the incarnate Word of God, in whom the perfection of the divine righteousness is embodied, he who acquire Him will acquire in himself the righteousness of God; ... The man of sin, in whom sin will be embodied, will also come, will instigate the spirit of evil in his followers, and will oppose every true righteousness.

(2) He is called "*the son of perdition*" (3). If Satan perished through forsaking God, the secret of the whole creation, and his perdition will be consummated on the great day of the Lord; His main task is to corrupt and destroy the creation of God, and to enforce his feature on his followers, who seek, in their turn, the perdition of others; will bear his image, and will be according to his example; ... The same way, the believers in the true God bear His image, and walk according to His example.

The traitor Judas, on whom Satan reigned, carried this title, "*the son of perdition*" (John 17: 21); And we, having God reign in and on us, saving us from perdition, carry the title, "the children of God".

(3) "*The man of sin*" will be a real man, clothed by the devil, and in whom he works with his whole energies; "*so as to deceive, if possible even the elect*" (John 24: 24)... The Lord Christ, on the other hand, the Son of God, who became a real man by His incarnation, carried our nature to redeem it, and to bring back those who are lost, counting them as His little brothers, through the sacrifice of the cross, he offered on our behalf; He became one of us, in order to offer the ransom in our name, and to our account.

(4) He is called the one “*who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called god, or that is worshipped*” (4). Setting himself as a god,

he opposes God, and provokes mankind against His kingdom. ... As much as the man of sin appears proud, and refers to himself what is not his; The Lord Christ, although He is One with the Father, He submits in complete obedience to the Father, even to death on the cross. Emptying Himself, and taking the form of a servant, he realized all obedience; to count us in Him the children of obedience, and to let us have back what we have lost through our pride and disobedience.

St. Erinaos confirms that the antichrist, in his pride, is not able to exalt himself above the true God, but “*above all that is called god*”, although he is not truly as such.

It is amazing how the Jews reject the Lord Christ who came talking about, and seeking the glory of the Father, although He is One with Him; And receive the antichrist, who will come to talk about himself, seek what is his, and not what is God's. ... And as said by St. Augustine: [Proclaiming Him who seeks his own glory, and not that of God (John 7: 18), the Lord Christ says to the Jews: “*I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; If another comes in his own name, him you will receive*” (John 5: 43). He proclaimed to the Jews before hand, that they are going to receive the antichrist who will haughtily seek his own glory, when he is truly “*the son of perdition*”. ... The Lord Christ, on the other hand, showed Himself to us as a great role model of humility; For, although He is equal to the Father, yet He sought the glory of the Father, and not His own glory. ... The secret behind the recognition of the Jews of the antichrist is their materialistic way of thinking, and their literal interpretation of the prophecies. And as St. Augustine says: [They assume that the prophecy saying: “*Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles*” (Psalm 106: 47). will be realized in the antichrist, and under his leadership, against their seen enemies, whom he is to captivate in a seen way, and to gain for himself the seen glory].

(5) The apostle Paul designates “*the temple of the Lord*” as the center of activity of the opponent, “*where he sits as God, showing himself that he is God*” (4).

What does he mean by “the temple”? St. Erinaos and St. Cyril the Great, believe that the antichrist will renew the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, as the Center of his activity. Whereas St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and Father Theodoret, believe that he will have his throne in the temple of the Christian church; And St. John Chrysostom adds that he will not only sit in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, but in every church.

Anyway, if the Lord Christ has come to this world to consecrate in every heart a temple for the Holy Trinity, and through this consecration, to restore to the divine temple its sanctification; ... The antichrist, on the other hand, will come to destroy the hearts and to corrupt the temple set in them, to take them by force to his account, and to corrupt and persecute the churches of the Lord.

(6) About the man of sin, the apostle says: "*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs,*

and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (8, 10). It is as though Satan declares his kingdom by enforcing his energies for deception and diversion from the truth, in order to bring humanity over to the kingdom of the vain darkness. ... Whereas the Lord Christ, on the other hand, came to work with the power of His deity, to bring them over to Him, to enjoy the light of the truth. He came to present to them His Holy Spirit who leads to the whole truth, and sets forth with the believers to the heavenly secrets.

The "*man of sin*" or "*the lawless one*" will attempt to liken the Lord Christ, by "*working with all power, signs, and wonders*" (9); But they are all "*lying*", being the work of the deceptive Satan, who is called "the liar" and "the father of liars". ... The Lord Christ, on the other hand performed them with the spirit of truth through His love for mankind and His compassion toward them; ... The former, in pride, shows off his illusionary and temporary power, while the Lord Christ worked with the spirit of humility, to carry us over to His kingdom of light.

The use by the man of sin of powers and wonders, as well as their practice by the wicked, does not make them a goal sought by the believer, nor a measure of man's goodness and virtuous behavior, as the Christian faith is not set on signs and wonders. The Lord Christ has performed limitless and unprecedented wonders and powers as mere sign of love and compassion toward men; And presented Himself as a sign, and as the secret of life and the power of resurrection. ... When He was asked to perform a sign, He proclaimed that He presents His death, burial, and resurrection -- which were all symbolically proclaimed in the prophet Jonah -- as a sign to mankind. His salvation work is the sign which should preoccupy every mind, and absorb all feelings and emotions!

In the second century, the scholar Origen talked about the satanic powers. Although not denying their existence, yet he says that they are deceptive, and unable to change our corrupt nature into a holy one; nor to grant growth for the virtuous life; And even those who practice them do not walk in purity. ... The book, 'The garden of Monks' contains many warnings by the saintly fathers against performing signs through the deceptions of Satan, that would lead our minds astray, away from caring for our eternity, and from their preoccupation with the Lord Christ. St. John Chrysostom often

talks about caring for the virtuous life in the Lord, and not for performing signs; on account of the fact that God will not judge us on doing or not doing signs, but on our faithfulness or slothfulness in our spiritual life.

Between the man of sin and the persecuting King:

To demonstrate the portrait of the man of sin, as presented by the apostle Paul, we compare it here with what came in the book of Daniel about the persecuting king:

(1) The work of the man of sin is to stir up the movement of falling away from faith; provoking men, not only to forsake faith, but to oppose

the truth, and to stand against God Himself. ... And the persecuting king, as presented by the prophet Daniel, is a breaker of the holy

covenant; *"He will lose heart, then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those*

who forsake the holy covenant" (Daniel 11:30).

(2) The man of sin sits in the temple of God as a god; ... And the persecuting king will send his armed forces to desecrate the temple

fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice" (Daniel 11: 31).

(3) The man of sin will oppose anything that is called god (4); ... And the persecuting king shall stand against God, or as said by the

prophet Daniel: *"He shall do according to his own will; he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies*

against the God of gods" (Daniel 11: 36).

Therefore, what came in the book of Daniel (Chapter 11) about the persecuting king, applies to the man of sin about whom the apostle Paul talks in a more clear way.

The man of sin as proclaimed by the apostle:

The portrait of the man of sin is probably now clearer; in that he is a real man who will appear just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, to set himself as a god, and to oppose the Christian church, as a desperate final stroke by Satan before he breathes his last, through the proclamation of the everlasting kingdom of God. Now, let us explain the phrases said by the apostle, other than those we have already dealt with.

The apostle demanded from them not to be deceived by any means, for that day will not come unless the *“falling away”*, *“the man of sin”*; *“the son of perdition”* (3, 4), *“the opponent, who exalts himself ...”* and *“the lawless one”* (8), will come first.

St. John Chrysostom says: [It is called the *“falling away”*, as he will cause many to fall away, and *“will deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Matthew 24: 24). He is called *“the man of sin”*, as he will do wickedness of no limits, and will provoke others to do them as well. He is called *“the son of perdition”*, as he, himself is destined to perish. And he is called *“the opponent”*, as he will stand against God; and *“exalts himself”*, as he makes himself a god; and he is called *“the lawless one”*, as in him, the lawlessness that Satan provokes along the ages, will be publicly revealed.

The apostle says: *“Do you remember when I was still with you, I told you these things”* (5); which reveals that he already talked to them about the man of sin when he preached to them, although his visit was only for a short time, probably few weeks, or few months. ... It also shows that talking about the coming of the man of sin is an integral part of the word of preaching. For, at the same time the preacher proclaims the blessings of salvation, in the worthiness of the holy blood; he enflames the longing of his listeners to the coming of the Savior, and the enjoyment of the fellowship of uniting, to and in Him. Yet this gift is not without labor and sufferings, as there will always be the deceptive devil along the ages, who will concentrate his energies during the last days, to corrupt the souls of believers. ... Therefore the talk about the man of sin is closely connected to the preaching of the holy gospel; and is spoken about even by the Lord Christ Himself, saying: *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look here is Christ’, or ‘there’, do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand”* (Matthew 23-25). We also saw St. John the Evangelist talk in his epistles about the antichrist; And in the book of Revelation we read about the two beasts, the terrestrial and the marine (Chapter 13); and about the false prophet (Revelation 16: 19, 20).

The apostle goes on to say: *“And now you know what is restraining him, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; but only until what is restraining it is removed, then the lawless one will be revealed”* (6, 7). He is as though telling them, as he did when he preached them in person: that revealing him is now restrained; namely, is deferred until the proper time. ... Now the lawlessness works in a mysterious way, But when the time comes for the man of sin to appear, the restraining will be removed, and Satan will show up publicly with all his energies to oppose the truth.... With the appearance of the man of sin, and the stirring up of the war against the truth, all previous opposition, however ferocious it has been, will be considered as *“hidden’* or mysterious! The horror of what Satan is going to do publicly against Christ, will turn what he has already done into naught!

The ferocity of the attack by the man of sin, leads some to consider that he is no one but Satan himself; to which St. John Chrysostom says: [Is he the devil? ... No; ... But he is a man in whom the devil inserts all his evil].

Those words said by the apostle (verses 6 and 7) would probably make us ask the following questions:

What is this restrainer that holds back the man of sin from being revealed?

Why is the apostle writing in such a vague way?

How could this restrainer be removed?

St. John Chrysostom responds to these questions by saying that in the apostle's era, two views prevailed:

(1) The first view is that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, who holds back the man of sin from being revealed until the proper time; a view rejected by St. John Chrysostom.

(2) The second view is that the restrainer is the Roman State that represents the greatest obstacle holding him back from being revealed.

This view is accepted by St. John Chrysostom, who, in the light of the prophecy of the prophet Daniel, interprets it in the following

way: The Babylonian State was set on the ruins of the Medes; ... The Persian on the ruins of the Babylonian State; ... The Macedonian (the Greek State) on its ruins; ... The Roman State on the ruins of the Greek State; ... And finally, the antichrist will come to reign on the world in the place of the Roman State. ... That will be just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to reign forever over His church forever in heaven. According to St. John Chrysostom, the apostle concealed the identity of this Restrainer to avoid stirring up the Roman Emperor against the church, prophesying the end of the Roman State on the hand of the antichrist.

If we adopt the spiritual interpretation and not the literal one, we can say that the man of sin is restrained now by a divine decree; as the devil is chained, while the Lord Christ reigns over the hearts of His believers. He will stay restrained until the church of the Lord Christ grows stronger. Then, just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, the devil will be released of his chains, to pour all the live coals of his wrath on the believers, through the appearance of the man of sin, the false prophet, or the antichrist; who will use the forces of certain nations to his account, set himself god in Jerusalem, and publicly fight the church, whose members will flee because of the ferocity of the tribulation, even the elect among them (Matthew 24: 24). ... At the end of this war, which will last for a duration of three and a half years, God will send His two prophets Enoch and Elijah to be martyred,

then be raised up from the dead to oppose the man of sin, destroy his kingdom, and cause many to be saved... Then the Lord Christ will ultimately come on the clouds, and His church will be raised up to everlasting glories. It will be the final battle, for a predestined time, allowed by God for the devil against His church, to deprive him of any chance to protest; and in which He support His church by Enoch and Elijah; ... And Through the defeat of the man of sin, the kingdom of the devil is utterly destroyed.

The temporary restrainer is therefore the divine decree, that predestinate the times; which we may liken to what happens in nature, when a lion catches a live deer and brings it over to his little cubs. If the lion let the deer, it may kill the cubs; but it stands on guard to restrain it from harming the little ones; But once they grow up and learn how to fend for themselves, it may let them deal with deer on their own. ... So God cares for His church and keeps her; yet He lets the lawlessness work in a hidden way; But in the proper time, when God is sure of the spiritual growth of His believers, the restrainer is removed, and the man of sin appears clearly on the ring

To apply that practically to the life of the regular believer, we may say: The Christian at the beginning of his repentance – according to St. John Chrysostom – is like a little infant being trained to walk his first steps. He would need the support of the hands of his mother; but after a little while, she will have to withdraw her hands from him and let him walk on his own, even for a few seconds; while keeping her eyes and heart on him, and her hands would be ready to give him support in case he needs it. ... Such is the way God deals with us at the beginning of our spiritual strife, giving us many comforts, and protecting us against temptations; But once our spiritual arm gets stronger, He would allow for tribulations and spiritual wars to come our way, as though He lifts up the restrainer, to let us grow stronger, and become justified by the work of His hidden grace in us.

We can also interpret the man of sin here, as the heretic thoughts and the philosophies opposing the truth; which are allowed by God to prevail on the world, to enter into a war against the evangelic truth, to occupy the heart of the believer -- "the temple of God", and to sit in it in place of faith. This is the feature of the present modern era, in which these kinds of thoughts haughtily sit like a god in the hearts of men.

Few years ago, while I was ministering in Australia, a highly educated Egyptian lady came to tell me about an Indian young man who claimed divinity. She used to attend his meetings as a matter of curiosity, and to ridicule their idea of worshipping of him. But, according to her, after several meetings, and listening to his talk about the inner power shining in the heart and working in it, she came to be among those worshipping him. Feeling that a ray of light has filled her heart, she found herself kneeling before his portrait, and proclaiming: [You are my Lord!];. ... After some discussions

with her, I asked her to kneel before the true God, and to beseech Him to proclaim the truth to her, which she did. And after long and fervent prayers, she was inspired to open the gospel, and to read chapter 2 of the epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.... She came back to tell me in true remorse: [I know now, that it is the man of sin who came to sit in my heart “the temple of God”, and to set himself a god in my depths]. ... In true repentance, she returned to her Christ, to let Him reign anew in His temple.

Therefore, we can say that the ‘man of sin’ appears in more than one form to take the holy temple of God; hence the confirmation by the Lord Christ that many false christs will appear (Matthew 24).

Finally we find it befitting to present one of the theological views that considers the “restrainer” who holds back the ‘man of sin’, to be the **church of the Gentiles**. According to those who embrace it, the removal of this ‘restrainer’ will be realized when the church of the Gentiles will be (caught up) by her Groom, before “*the falling away*”, and the proclamation of the man of sin. Then the Jews will receive faith in the end of days, according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*The hardening in part has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved*” (Romans 11: 25, 26). Their belief that the church of the Gentiles will be (caught up) before “*the falling away*”, is based on the words said by the Lord Christ Himself: “*Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and the other left*” (Matthew 24: 41).

Yet this view is rejected by several theologians for the following reasons:

a- Saying that the church of the Gentiles will be (caught up) before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, and even before the appearance of the “man of sin”, would imply that the coming of the Lord will happen three times: the first when He incarnate to consummate the salvation on the cross; The second, before the appearance of the “man of sin” to (catch up) the church of the Gentiles; and the third time for the final judgment.

Some have so cared for this view, to call themselves ‘The Adventists’, namely (those of the coming). It is ridiculous to set such a major doctrine upon some personal interpretation of one or two texts of the Holy Book; While the Holy Book, keeps on speaking of the second coming of the Lord Christ, as the ultimate coming, and the final general judgment.

b- Saying that the Jews will receive faith in the Lord Christ once the fullness of the gentiles has come in; This does not mean their

separation as an independent church or congregation; But they will be integrated as members in the one body of the church. We cannot,

as well, call the present day church as the church of the Gentiles; As, although many of the Jews have rejected the faith, Yet there are

many who have received it, and even preached it. Christians, whether of Jewish or of Gentile origin, have all melded together, according

to the words of the apostle: *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into*

Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female; for you are

all one in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3: 26-28).

c- If the church of the Gentiles will be caught up before the appearance of the "man of sin"; Who will then oppose him? Will it be the Jews?

... How will they receive faith while the church have been already (caught up)? The book of revelation tells us about the bitter war

through which the church will go in the days of the antichrist; which was also told by the prophet Ezekiel (Chapter 38).

d- If the church of the Gentiles will be (caught up) before the day of judgment; Will she come back again on that day to be judged? The

Holy Book tells us, that on the day of judgment, there will be only two categories of men: those who have departed in the Lord, who will

be raised up; and the congregation of the living, who will be caught up together with them at that time (see 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18). ...

Then, to which of these two categories does the church of the Gentiles belong? ... They are, no doubt, not departed, having been

(caught up) alive; And they are as well not living, as the only survivors would be the Jews who receive faith after the church of the

Gentiles is (caught up)?!... Therefore, if their interpretation is correct, there would be three categories: Those departed in the Lord;

Those (caught up), namely the church of the Gentiles; and those alive of the church of the Jews; Which does not conform to the evangelic

thought.

e- If those embracing this view based it on the saying of the Lord that “*one will be taken, and the other is left*” (Matthew 24: 40, 41). That

talk was only symbolic, to reveal the enjoyment of the spiritual man of setting forth to the Lord Christ in His glory, to be together with Him

in inheritance; while the other one, will remain where he is, namely, would be deprived of the enjoyment of the everlasting glory.

That is the way the Lord will encounter humanity; when He would say to the wicked: “*I never knew you, depart from Me, you who*

practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7: 22); and confirming this in more than one location (see Luke 12: 25, 27; Matthew 25: 12). ... Does

this imply that those wicked people will disappear from the knowledge of God: ... No way! But He will not know them as His children, His

beloved, and the heirs of His glory! ...

Moreover, by saying that one will be taken, while the other will be left, the Lord intends to confirm the element of surprise in judgment,

when one will enjoy inheritance, while the other will be denied, without any other chance to regain what he has already lost! ... In the

same way, the Lord introduced the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins; in which there is no real door to be closed, nor lamps or

material oil; but they all are symbols to instigate in us the life of preparedness for His encounter; That is why, after talking about taking

one and leaving the other, He added: “*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming*” (Matthew 24: 42). It is

obvious that the whole talk of the Lord in this concern, is about the ultimate day and judgment, and not about (catching up) somebody,

preceding the coming of the antichrist; For his talk about the antichrist came preceding that about taking one and leaving the other (See

Matthew 24: 23; 24: 40).

The apostle’s conclusive talk about the man of sin:

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all powers, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason,

God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (8-12).

In these conclusive words said by the apostle about the man of sin, it is to be noticed:

(1) Saying: “*And then the lawless one will be revealed*”. Implies that the man of sin, called here “the lawless one”, being the provoker of

men to practice lawlessness, and to provoke others as well to practice it; will be **revealed**; Namely, he was already there in the mind of

Satan, who did every effort to have him revealed; Yet he is not until God allows, once the restrainer is taken away.

We can say that Satan got to know what was hidden from him: that the incarnation of the Word, the baptism, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord; all represent an integral divine work, that have been in the (mind) of God from eternity for the salvation of mankind; ... And that God has prepared mankind to receive that salvation work through the fathers, and the prophets; through the law, the rites, the events, and the symbols. So that men would be capable of receiving the salvation by Christ Jesus at the fullness of time.. ...

Coming to know all that, Satan prepared in his turn, a counter plan, whose leading character will be the antichrist; whom he has prepared since the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, through the heresies, the atheist philosophies, the material thoughts, and all kinds of doubts, setting the stage ready for the appearance of the antichrist; which God did not, and will not allow, before the proper time; as a final chance for the devil. ... He remains protecting the church against his appearance, until just before His ultimate coming; when Satan would consummate his cup; and the church, tasting all the bitterness from him, get to be crowned

(2) Although the appearance of the antichrist represents for the church a great horror, and a serious danger, even, if possible, on the elect;

that we clearly saw in our interpretation of the book of Revelation; yet the apostle says: “... *whom the Lord consumes with the breath*

of His mouth, and destroys by the brightness of His coming”; And St. Ambrose says that the Lord Christ consumes the antichrist by His

Holy Spirit.

What does he mean by the “*the breath of God’s mouth*” that will consume the antichrist? On which the prophet Isaiah also says: “*The*

Lord shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth; and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11: 4)?

There is no doubt that, by the breath of the Lord’s mouth, the apostle means the “Holy Spirit”; who is not granted to Him as grace or gift; for together with Him, they are One in essence, an indivisible unity; As it is impossible to find Christ without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without Christ.... This divine Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, and the breath of His mouth, capable of scattering the darkness, and all the works of Satan, and of destroying the power of the man of sin, ... the Lord Christ breathed on His disciples, and said to them, ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sin of any, they are retained*’ (John 20: 22, 23). The Holy Spirit, the Forgiver and the Destroyer of sin, is then granted to the church through her ministers, that the believer can say with all his strength: “*O death, where is your sting?; O Hades, where is your victory... The sting of death is sin*” (1 Corinthians 15: 55, 56). If our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome the death and destroyed the sin, He has granted us His Holy Spirit who brings us over into the circle of the cross, and establishes us in Christ Jesus the Savior, granting us the forgiveness of sin, that Satan, the enemy, with all his energies cannot stand before us.

The main task of the Holy Spirit in our life is to bring us over into the fellowship of the Father in His Son; hiding and establishing us in His only-begotten Son as members in the Holy Body; to be found conquerors and to conquer by Christ who “went out conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6: 2).

(3) The apostle says: “...*destroy him by the brightness of His coming*” (8). The scholar Origen believes that “the man of sin”, carrying the works of Satan with all its ferocity and deceptions, represents the lying that would have no existence with the proclamation of the coming of Christ; namely, with the appearance of the Truth. The appearance of Christ Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, at the end of time, will utterly destroy the darkness of the devil, and will cast it into the everlasting torment; As the proclamation of the truth destroys the lying.

We can say that what will happen at the end of times, is an extension of what is daily realized in the life of the church. As, the more the heavenly Groom is transfigured and His splendor proclaimed in her life, the more difficult it would be for the devil or the sin to find a place in her. It is as though the work of the church as a congregation and members, is to hide in the Christ, the Truth; And once He is transfigured in her, the darkness would be scattered, and the ignorance would come to an end. That is the secret of our conquest and victory; hence the apostle says: “*I can do all things through*

Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4: 13).; And the Lord Himself says: “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15: 5).

(4) To introduce a cause for the appearance of the man of sin before the ultimate coming of the Lord, the apostle says: “... *and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (10-12).*

The Truth has come incarnate, and man had no more excuse for his ignorance; Yet, some people did not believe, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Those people have so delivered themselves to ignorance and darkness, that God would send them the delusion, to expose their wicked works, and to consummate their cup of evil. And as the apostle Paul says: “*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind” (Romans 1: 28).* The coming of the man of sin will not destroy the coming of the truth, but will increase its justification and splendor. He will destroy those who have destroyed themselves by themselves by rejecting the truth and their pleasure in unrighteousness; to realize the saying of the Lord: “*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25: 29).*

2- THEIR ABIDANCE IN THE LORD:

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (13).

For fear that his listeners might get terrified when they hear about the man of sin, and what he carries of Satanic works and deceptions, the apostle intended to provide them with the spirit of hope, proclaiming his commitment to offer an incessant sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for the sake of His eternal plan toward us; having loved, chosen, and sanctified us by His Holy Spirit, and the belief in the truth.

That is the role of the good shepherd, to provide his flock with the spirit of hope, to keep them from being terrified by the wars of Satan, the attacks of sin, and the cruel tribulations; and to let them have their sight truly on God who loved them and chose them to be given salvation, to be sanctified by His Holy Spirit, and to believe the truth in them.

It is as though the apostle has drawn their inner insight away from the bitterness of the spiritual war, to the knowledge of the plan of the Holy Trinity toward the believers; confirming the following:

That they are beloved by the Lord Jesus Christ who provided them with salvation.

That they are chosen by the Father from the beginning for this salvation.

That their spirits are sanctified by the Holy Spirit to receive the truth in them.

I do not intend to enter into theological details; but wish to confirm that any work by one Person of the Holy Trinity, is not separated nor isolated from that of the other two Persons. And to clarify this point I say:

(1) If the Lord Jesus Christ loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2: 20); The Father as well "*loved us and sent His Son to be*

propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4: 10). ... The exalted love of God the Father made Him deliver His Son for our sake; and with the

same love the Son delivered Himself in obedience to the Father (Hebrew 5: 5), and to realize His will, which is one with His own will.

(2) The Father chose us, having found us children to Him through our union with Him in His only-begotten Son; and having seen us sanctified

by being hidden in Him, and blameless before Him. And as said by the apostle: "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,*

that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1: 4). ... If the Father by His love has chosen us in His Son,

The Son as well, by the same divine love, has chosen us children for His Father; according to the words of the Lord Himself: "*You did*

not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15: 16). Here He talks about the choice of His disciples and apostles for the preaching work; but

this also applies to the choice of the believers for the sonhood to God, and the enjoyment of His free salvation.

(3) In the previous epistle we spoke about the sanctification of the spirit, being something concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit; yet

without separation from the other two Persons of the Holy trinity. And as said by St. Ambrose: [The father sanctifies (1 Thessalonians

5: 23; John 17: 17); The Son also sanctifies (1 Corinthians 1: 20); And the Holy Spirit sanctifies as well; But it is one sanctification, as

the grace of the secret of baptism is one.

The apostle consummates his talk about the work of the holy Trinity in the life of the believers, being chosen for salvation, and to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, saying: "... *to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (14). He provided us with the way as well as the goal; As there is no other **way** to realize this divine goal in us as the holy elect of the Lord, except by the gospel; namely, the preaching of salvation through the cross. The apostle calls it "*our gospel*"; although he did not write any of the four gospels; He considers the word of preaching which he utters and lives in his life, as his living gospel which he enjoys. As to the **goal**, it is the acquirement of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the down payment of which we enjoy through our spiritual strife, to enter into His perfection on His ultimate coming.

As God has kept nothing from us: having loved us, chosen us, granted us the sanctification of the spirit, provided us with the "Truth" – Himself -- dwelling in us, and gave us the gospel of salvation, as a way to enjoy of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; All that would surely make us strive to hold fast to the living traditions provided to us through the apostles; according to the words of the apostle Paul: "*Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle*" (15). Commenting on this text, St. John Chrysostom says: [I wish we see the tradition of the church as something worthy of appreciation; and think of nothing else. I wish we hold fast to the oral and written traditions delivered to the apostle, which he, in turn, delivered to you, to live the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a practical life of faith, translated through worship and preaching.

The tradition delivered to us is not something of the past, but is a 'talent' or a 'treasure' of the living faith, proclaimed through the union with God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. This faith is practically translated through the church laws, the rites of spiritual worship, in the inner behavior of the believer, the depths of his soul, the thoughts of his mind, and his dealing with others.

The apostle ends his commandment to them to hold fast in the Lord and in the church's tradition, by a short prayer, which he raises for their sake to support them, saying: "*May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace; comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work*" (16, 17). He lifts up our hearts to our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who works in the heart, in the mouth, and in the behavior, in order to live as is befitting of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we enjoy through the tradition, sanctified in the thought, the feelings, as well as in the words and work.

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CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL COMMANDMENTS

The Apostle's talk about the great movement of falling away (rebellion), provoked by the appearance of the man of sin, the son of perdition, before the ultimate coming of Christ, does not destroy his psyche, but, on the contrary, it enflames his heart toward the serious spiritual work to the account of the heavenly kingdom. Yet he seeks the support of the congregation, by prayer, and by walking according to the order befitting to them. That is why this part of the epistle came:

1- Seeking their prayers	1 - 5
2- Exhorting them not to walk disorderly	6 - 16
3- The conclusion of the epistle	17 – 18

1- SEEKING THEIR PRAYERS:

If the talk about the “man of sin” concerns the believers who will live in the era just before the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ, Yet, being actually a proclamation of the war of the devil in its fiercest forms, which has, and still is, setting forth to oppose the work of Christ wherever and whenever it is; The apostle demands from his people: “*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified just as it is with you*” (1).

This apostolic demand reveals the role of the laymen in the church; That they are not mere listeners to the word of the Lord, but they, being living members in the body of Christ, should be aware of the goal of the head, and should work to the account of this goal. If they are incapable of preaching the word by giving sermons, yet they may at least pray for the sake of the word of God to have free course, and be glorified in men. These prayers have their activity in the life of ministers, in the word of preaching, as well as in the listeners, not less than the word of sermon itself.

If the apostle Paul is committed to pray for the sake of the people of God, to enjoy the fellowship of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2: 14); On another aspect, he is aware of his need for their prayers for him, for the sake of his spiritual growth, and of the apostolic work. If the apostle Paul was separated from his mother's womb for this apostolic task (Galatians 1: 15); And according to the command of the Holy Spirit to the church, saying: “*Separate to me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them*” (Acts 13: 2); Yet, that would not mean that the apostle could manage without the prayers of the

people for his sake. It is not out of the spirit of humility, which should be the feature of every Christian, and in particular of every shepherd; But it is also a sign of the active mutual love between the members of the one body of the church, who should pray for one another, so that the Lord would grant success to all, according to the specific ministry and talent of each; And it is as well a sign of the apostle's faith in the work and activity of prayers.

Commenting on this phrase, St. John Chrysostom says: [Yes, he was praying for the sake of their fastness; And now he asks them to pray to God for his own sake, not to protect him from danger, "*for (he) is appointed to this*" (1 Thessalonians 3: 3), namely, to endure sufferings; but "*for the word of God to have free course and be glorified*" 91). That is what preoccupies his mind, for which he strives, and for the sake of which he asks for their prayers; that the word of God, like the sun, would shine all over the world, and make it rejoice; Or, according to the Psalmist, that the Lord would "*send out His command to the earth, His word (would) run very swiftly*" (Psalm 147: 15).

If the apostle encountered opponents in his ministry like Alexander the coppersmith who did him much harm (2 Timothy 4: 15); he asks the congregation to pray to make their opposition to no avail; saying: "*that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith*" (2).

The apostle probably, with the intention to encourage them to strive in spiritual life and ministry, reveals to them that he is opposed by wicked men, the same way they are; and that he suffers the same way they do. Praying for their sake to God to grant them success, and to scatter every evil counsel against them, he reveals to them that he is, as well, in need of their prayers. How beautiful indeed is the life of fellowship and mutual love between the shepherd and his flock ... a fellowship in love, in work, in sufferings, and in prayers.

Then the apostle again confirms that the commitment does not stop at prayers, whether on his part or theirs, but prayers should be melded with work; and the work of God's free grace with life; saying:

"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now, may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (3-5).

If they need in their spiritual life, as well as in their testimony to the Lord, to depend upon the Lord, He is faithful in His care for His church, despite the existence of the wicked men, according to the words of the apostle: "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Timothy 2: 13). He establishes the believers, keeps them against the evil one, guides their hearts – the center of life – toward the divine love, and the endurance of the sufferings with patience. Yet the believers, in turn, are

committed to undergo a positive role; saying: “*that you do, and will do the things we command you*” (4); We are committed to pray to seek the free grace of God, yet, without getting slothful in our strife. Commenting on this apostolic saying, St. John Chrysostom says: [How great indeed is the activity of prayer, if, on our side, we do our part!]. And in another location he says: [God, although He does all the work, intends to make His servant look as though has contributed something, lest he would fall into shame].

Confirming the divine work in our life, the apostle says: “*The Lord will establish you and guard you from the evil one; ... will direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ*” (3, 5); And in another location he says: “*It is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2: 13). He works in us, grants us the conquest over the evil one, establishes us in Him, gives us the good will, the heavenly love, and the feature of patience of the Lord Christ. We owe Him everything; as according to St. John Chrysostom: [We cannot run along the way of God, unless we are carried on the wings of the Spirit].

The apostle proclaims his longing to see God leads his people’s hearts to the divine love, and to see them bear the feature of Christ, namely, patience. In other words, by love, the believer enters into the cross of the Lord, and endures the suffering with joy, as being a fellowship with the crucified, and bearing His feature of endurance.

2- EXHORTING THEM NOT TO WALK DISORDERLY:

“*We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you*” (6, 7).

We can understand the importance of walking in an orderly manner from the commandment within our hands. On one aspect, saying: “*We command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*”, is a confirmation of its seriousness and the importance of being committed to it. And on another aspect, he does not stop at warning us against walking disorderly, but he commits us to withdraw from every brother who so walks. I do not intend to repeat what I have already said, in my commentary on the first epistle, concerning the concept of ‘order’, or of the ‘rite’, being, not mere following certain church systems and arrangements, but it is a matter of life control, which touches our doctrine, worship, feelings, and dealings with others.

As much as God commands us to love everybody, He demands from us through His gospel, to withdraw from the fallen brethren, who have the name of Christ, and not His strength; and who keep the formalities of worship, and not its spirit. He demands from us to withdraw from those who walk disorderly; like the

heretics who corrupt the rite of faith, the adulterers, etc. The apostle says: "*Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump*" (1 Corinthians 5: 7); And, "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has unrighteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness, and what accord has Christ with Belial?*" (2 Corinthians 6: 14, 15). And St. John the beloved says: "*If anyone comes to you, and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him*" (2 John 10, 11)

Concerning this, St. Cyprian says: [There is no fellowship between faith and non-faith; between him who is with Christ, and who opposes Him; between him who is a stranger to unity, and the lover of peace]. And talking about withdrawing from the wicked, he says: [It would be befitting of us to withdraw, and even flee from the fallen, who walk in evil, and persist on sin, lest we, as well, would divert from the truth].

At the same time the apostle Paul commands the believers to withdraw from those who walk disorderly, and not according to the tradition received from him, he asks them to follow his lead, having translated the spiritual rite practically in his own life, and having walked with order and true evangelic rite. As though the order for him, is not mere oral or written instructions he preaches, but a way of life; he says: "*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you*" (7)

Introducing himself as a role model to the people of God, he does not do it with pride of heart; but is committed to utter it through his compassionate fatherhood. ... According to St. John Chrysostom: [How great is the confidence in the teacher, whose good behavior and life, makes him a role model for his disciples, more than the words of his sermons.... What the apostle said was not out of pride, but for the sake of public benefit].

Talking about the good example in the life of a shepherd, St. John Chrysostom says: [The good example produces a tune sweeter than that of songs and all the instruments of music; because people give heed to what you do, more than to what you say!] And according to him: [The Lord put us here to be light; to teach others; to be like leaven; to walk like angels among men; like fathers among their children; as spirituals among men, who would draw benefit from us; to become like seeds which produce fruition]. And St. Augustine says: [The life of a priest should be like a perpetual sermon among his congregation].

The apostle Paul presents himself an example and a role model in following the tradition he gave them, one aspect of which is the commitment to work. He labored day and night in making tents, so as not to be a burden on anyone; and to proclaim that Christianity, together with its heavenly nature, does not despise the daily temporal labor, but sanctifies it as an integral part of the spiritual entity of the believer. The apostle says:

“Nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden on any of you; not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves as example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good” (8-13).

In the first epistle, we talked about the authority of St. Paul, being an apostle, to eat out of the gospel; Yet he intended to waive it, so as not to become a burden on anyone; ... he kept laboring and toiling day and night (a Thessalonian 2: 9); which he committed himself to do, as well, in Corinth (Acts 18: 3; 2 Corinthians 9: 9), and in Ephesus (Acts 20: 34).

He presented himself an example, proclaiming his Christian commitment to labor, as an integral part of his spiritual work; continually putting before his eyes the commandment saying: *“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”* (10), (with the exemption of those physically or mentally incapable of working); which is the natural law set by God, when He created and put man in paradise to work (Genesis 1). And the Lord Himself says: *“The laborer is worthy of his wages”* (Luke 10: 7).

The apostle, not only exhorts them to work diligently, but *“not to grow weary in doing good”* (13); namely to strive doing good, whatever the obstacles may be. By *“doing good”*, he probably means that man’s labor is sanctified, and is considered *“good”*, even if it is a regular daily labor; having in mind that the Lord Christ has partaken of our labor before He begins His preaching ministry.

Finally the apostle warns them, saying:

“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person, and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (14, 15).

The apostle, while commanding us to be firm with those inside, who do not give heed to the commandment, or obey the apostolic word, by withdrawing from them, and not keeping company with them, that they may be ashamed; At the same time, he commits us to mix firmness with love, not to count them as enemies whom we should oppose, but to admonish them as brethren whose salvation and their return to the holy life, we seek.

St. Ambrose, talking about the importance of mixing firmness with love, says: [It is not befitting of a shepherd to be cruel or violent, nor to be too lenient; lest, in the former case, he would look as though, one with a tyrant authority; and in the later, as insulting without due cause, the office he got].

Then the apostle ends his warning with a prayer to God, the King of peace, to grant them the true peace, that springs up in the heart, and reflects on the outer behavior of man; The secret of which being the proclamation of the presence of God Himself in the life of man and with him; saying: "*Now, may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all*" (16).

And ends his epistles to the Thessalonians by saying: "*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write*" (17, 18)

The apostle wrote this conclusion with his own handwriting, to discern between his authentic epistles he sent to them, and the ones wrongly referred to him; Or to give his apostolic blessing to them, praying to the Lord Jesus Christ to grant them His grace to work in them, and to accompany them always, until they consummate their strife with joy.

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