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**A COMMENTARY ON**  
**THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE**  
**PHILIPPIANS**

**By**

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**OUR CHRIST IS OUR LIFE OF PERPETUAL EXULTATION**

This epistle is considered the sweetest of the epistles written by the apostle Paul. It is as though an essay sent by him to the church in all eras, and to every believer in all times, exhorting them to live perpetually exulting, despite any situation prevailing around them; through practicing the new life that knows no idleness, but is on an un-ceasing motion in Christ Jesus.

The apostle wrote this epistle to a congregation with which he had a special relationship of love, that made them provide him with gifts to spend on the message of the gospel; whether concerning his necessary needs, or those of the ministers accompanying him; even after his departure from among them to Corinth or to Thessalonica.

While in his first imprisonment in Rome, although the apostle was put under house arrest, guarded by Roman soldiers, for the duration of two years, he was banned from traveling to other countries, or cities, or even from going to other houses in the same city to preach the gospel. Yet, as he testified, his chains have led more to the progress of his ministry; were no cause to keep him from testifying to the gospel; nor to make him lose the exulting life in Christ Jesus:

(1) The apostle Paul found in his prison a chance to talk to the Roman guards and officials about our Lord Jesus, a unique chance to preach, which he could not let go. Realizing that he was imprisoned for the sake of the Lord Christ and His gospel, the guards got interested to know more about both; which led some of them to believe.

The word of God is so strong and capable to transform the hosts of evil of this world of darkness, to confess the greatness of God, and to reveal His exalted work; as it happened when God used the Pharaoh of Egypt, during the Exodus of the children of Israel; Herod, at the time of birth of the Lord Christ; those who mocked and scoffed the Lord during His crucifixion; and the guards on His tomb;

(2) The imprisonment provided the apostle Paul with the chance to write to the people beloved by him, about the perpetual life exulted in the Lord.

(3) Contrary to those who preached out of envy and ulterior motives, there were others, as well, who preached with faithfulness, love, and holy will. The apostle's friends, disciples, and a multitude of believers, became stronger in faith, and more daring in preaching without fear, to partake of the apostle's honor as a captive of the Lord Christ.

(4) His enemies worked hard to draw many heathens to faith, with the purpose of stirring up the emperor and the rulers against Paul, and to keep them from setting him free. Some others used the imprisonment of the apostle Paul to appear as though more diligent in preaching the gospel; with the assumption that by so doing, they would belittle his status. Anyway, even those who preached out of envy, in order to add more sorrow to the apostle, made him, on the contrary more exulted for the sake of the growth of the ministry of Lord Christ and the gospel (1: 16-18).

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE

### THE CITY OF PHILIPPI:

The name 'Philippi' means (a lover of horses or of war). It was considered the most important city in the whole region, on account of that it is the first city reached by a sea traveler to Macedonia.

(1) **Geographically:** Originally known as 'Krenides', meaning (wells or springs), it was given the name 'Philippi' after king Philip, the second of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great. But after the Romans took it over, it became a part of Macedonia.

It is located North-east of Macedonia, north of Greece, nine miles away from the Aegean Sea, on a prominent little hill, surrounded by a fertile valley, that made it an agricultural province, beside having mines of gold and silver nearby.

(2) **Historically:** In the year 357 B. C. king Philip the second of Macedonia took over the province of 'Krenides' up to the River 'Nestos', annexed it to his kingdom; made the city larger by adding more lands to it, and stronger to face any attack by enemies. Yet, it eventually fell under the authority of the Romans, to become a Roman colony instead. And when Octavius became emperor of the Roman empire, and changed his name to 'August Caesar', he gave special care to the city of 'Philippi', renewed it, made it even larger, and granted it the 'colonial status', namely, a free Roman colony, whose inhabitants had the same rights and privileges enjoyed by the inhabitants of Rome, the capital. It started to have a Roman culture more than a Greek one, and adopted the Latin language as its official language. The prevailing religion was idol worship.

## PREACHING IN PHILIPPI:

In the year 50 or 51 A.D. “a vision appeared to the apostle Paul in the night; a man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying: ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’. Now after he had seen the vision, he immediately sought to go Macedonia , concluding that the lord had called him to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16: 9, 10). Accompanied by Silas, Luke the Evangelist, and Timothy, they went to Philippi, the foremost city in the province of Macedonia, in which Paul took notice of the following points:

- Paul was a Jew, while the Philippians were Gentiles.
- Paul was proud of his Jewish origin, while the Philippians were proud of being Romans; although Paul himself had the Roman citizenship.
- Paul was Asian, while the Philippians were Europeans.
- Paul’s mother tongue was Hebrew, and he mastered the Greek language, while the Philippians spoke both Latin and Greek.
- Paul’s heart radiated the faith in Christ, while the Philippians lived in heathen abominations.

The apostle Paul visited ‘Philippi’ (Acts 16: 11-40) during his second preaching trip, and there, he established the first Christian church in Europe. Once he arrived there, accompanied by Silas, Luke, and Timothy, they went to the suburbs of the city on the riverside of the River ‘Gengets’, where the Jews used to pray every Sabbath day, and spoke to the women about salvation. Now a certain woman named ‘Lydia’, a rich seller of purple heard the testimony of the apostles, the Lord opened her heart to faith, and she, together with her household, were baptized, and begged and (constrained) the apostle and his company to come and stay in her house. She became the first Christian in all Europe; and Philippi became the first city in Europe to believe in the Christian faith (See Acts 16: 12, 15, 40).

St. Luke the Evangelist, in the book of acts (16: 16-40), wrote about how an evil spirit of divination was driven out of certain slave girl, who brought her masters much profit by

fortune-telling. That girl followed Paul and his company, crying out, saying: “*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation*”. Doing that for many days, Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the evil spirit: “*I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her*”, which he instantly did (Acts 16: 16-18). Yet, our teacher Paul did not accept that testimony from the devil, the enemy of the Truth; because if he did, all the people present would have accepted all her words. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, dragged, and brought them to the magistrates, and said: “*These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city, and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or to observe*”. The magistrates tore all their clothes, and commanded them to be beaten with rods. In this incident, we can notice the following:

- The charge against them is not new; the devil used it on the tongues of the Jews against the Lord Christ Himself.
- God, who allows evil and anguish to dwell upon His children, turns evil to good, and anguish into comfort; by which His believers could see His wonders, and experience His love and work in them.
- Having their clothes torn, Paul and Silas rejoiced because they had before their eyes Jesus Christ bared on the cross to cover our nakedness.
- That sacrifice done by the two apostles represents the cross of preaching, the cost of the distribution of the gospel, and the salvation of souls from the hold of the devil.
- It was an opportunity for ‘Saul of Tarsus’ to remember what he has previously done to the innocent Christians of persecution, beating, murder, and imprisonment; ... “*I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake*” (Acts 9: 16).

Despite their suffering of imprisonment, injustice, and persecution, Paul and Silas, at midnight, were praying and singing hymns to God; and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were

loosed. But Paul and Silas did not escape. Such an earthquake and other later wonders, like the movement of the Mokattam mountain, near Cairo, reveal the limitless strength of the Christian faith that surpasses time, and would never get old.

The keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, assuming that the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying: 'Do yourself no harm for we are all here'. At that the prison keeper fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to his household, who all received the Christian faith. The next day, when the magistrates heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were embarrassed because they have beaten and imprisoned them without trial.

In short, the apostle Paul afterwards visited Philippi twice during his third preaching trip in about the years 57 and 58 A.D. (Acts 20: 1, 6). Later, when the Philippians heard about his imprisonment in Rome in the years 61-62 A.D, they sent 'Epaphroditus' to him with a gift (4: 10), and to stay to serve him. The Philippians were immensely distressed to hear that Epaphroditus' fell sick almost unto death; and when he got well, Paul sent him back to the Philippians to rejoice, having been longing to see him.

### **SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI:**

- 1- Because of the small number of Jews in Philippi, bigotry was less felt than in other cities.
- 2- This church had a special place in Paul's heart, because he went there according to a heavenly vision.
- 3- Feeling a great love for the apostle Paul, the Philippians sent to him material support more than once.
- 4- It was a suffering church, scoffed by adversaries, on account of that they worshipped someone condemned to death.
- 5- This church represented home where Paul found comfort.

## **THE DATE OF WRITING THIS EPISTLE:**

This epistle, together with those to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon, were known as the 'captivity epistles', written while Paul was in his first captivity, or in prison in Rome (61-63). This epistle was the last of them, and Paul sent it with 'Epaphroditus'.

## **THE GOAL OF SENDING THIS EPISTLE:**

The goal of writing this epistle as proclaimed by the divine inspiration, was to support the children of God before the afflictions of this world. It demonstrates to us a portrait of the believer as a saint, who, despite suffering bitter situations, yet he is always rejoicing in the Lord; and that the world cannot deprive us of the comfort in Jesus Christ, or of experiencing the spiritual victory over all the disturbing circumstances. This epistle, indeed, shows us how our behavior in this world, our relationship with one another, and with the others should be:

- 1-The Philippians worried about their beloved prisoner in Rome.
- 2- They worried about the preaching of the gospel by the apostle to the Gentiles.
- 3- This epistle was a call to rejoice in all circumstances; a call to fellowship in preaching the gospel (1: 5); in the grace of Christ (1: 7); in the Spirit of Christ (2: 1); in the passions of Christ (3: 10); in the afflictions for Christ's sake (4: 14); and in giving (4: 15).
- 4- He wrote to thank them for their generosity in giving.
- 5- He wrote to counsel them and to warn them against the false teachers.
- 6- There were no problems or dissensions worth mentioning; except some non-conformity between two women ministers in the church:  
'Eudia' and 'Cyntyche', that caused some concern by the apostle.

## **FEATURES OF THIS EPISTLE:**

1- There are no doctrine debates in this epistle; for the apostle's mind was wholly absorbed in the heavenly joy. What is

proclaimed in this epistle, is the active (dynamic) heavenly life, exulted in our Lord Jesus Christ; as shown in the fellowship in the Lord (4:

1). Joy is the main feature in the relationship of the apostle with the church congregation; it supports the believers to endure the suffering, and to confront the possibility of martyrdom.

- \* We practice this joyful life here on this earth, as long as Christ is our life; and for us, to die is gain and a profit (1: 21); as we shall behold Christ face to face at our departure from this world.
- \* *"Our desire is to depart and be with Christ, which is far better"* (1: 23).
- \* We strive toward *"the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (3: 14).
- \* Although *"Our citizenship is in heaven"* (3: 20), yet St. Paul was not preoccupied with receiving the prize after death, but with preaching the gospel; and with turning his whole life into a glorification of the Lord Christ. If by his death he could glorify Christ, it would be "gain"; as long as the goal of his whole life is to glorify Christ.
- \* We anticipate Jesus Christ who will change our weak bodies to the likeness of His glorified body. We honor our bodies, because they will partake of the glories of our souls.
- \* The apostle Paul counts the joy and crown of his people as his own (4: 1). The good minister practices the life of fellowship with those he ministers. He rejoices together with them, and suffers when they confront troubles. And according to his words of the apostle Paul, he counts himself *"labor in birth for them until Christ is*



*formed in them*" (Galatians 4: 19); and in the world to come, he will find them his crown.

- \* He counts his ministry as a call for joy: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice*" 4: 1).
- \* "*He counts all things as rubbish, that he may gain Christ*" (3: 8); being our sufficiency and our treasure.
- \* The apostle repeats the expression: "*the day of Jesus Christ*" (1: 6, 10); as a joyful day.

2- The apostle Paul refers to the meaning of the incarnation and salvation (2: 6-11).

3- The apostle proclaims his trust in the work of God: "*I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly*" (2: 24). He has confidence that the Lord will set him free of prison, and bring him back to them.

4- The apostle trusted that God will work in the rulers of that country who were extremely evil and corrupted.

5- Through sanctifying our emotions, the apostle Paul does not only lift us up to see our bodies glorified, and be in the likeness of the body of Jesus Christ risen from the dead; but he indirectly exhorts us not to destroy our emotions, but to enjoy sanctifying them; saying:

*"I have you in my heart"* (1: 7).

*"How greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ"* (1: 8).

*"Since he (Epaphroditus) was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick*

*almost unto death” (2: 26, 27).*

*“Therefore, if there is any ... comfort of love, ... if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love being of one accord, of one mind” (2: 1, 2).*

6- The cooperation between the divine grace and the will of man; as it is God's pleasure to work in us; by strengthening and sanctifying our will, and supporting us to work, in case we submit to Him. He wishes for us to be positive toward our salvation: *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (2: 12-13).* The apostle Paul also wishes for us not to cease striving: *“for the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3: 14).*

7- The apostle Paul did not only diligently practice the joyful life in the Lord, but he also became the source of joy for those suffering; being

*“poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of their faith” (2: 17-18).*

In the book of Exodus 29: 40, the drink offering

refers to the joy through the suffering. Wine, as a symbol of the spiritual joy, is poured on the sacrifice (the suffering), to turn it into an inner joy

8- The apostle Paul refers to the importance of ‘delivery’ (4: 6); which we sometime call ‘tradition’,

9- The positive role of the congregation (the laic), whom he called ‘saints’, to whom he referred even before the bishops and deacons (1:

1). As the main topic of this epistle is life in Christ, reactive (dynamic) and exulting, namely, the heavenly holy life; that is why it is directed to the church as a whole, and particularly to the congregation, called to be saints. It is the commitment of the bishops and the deacons to do their best to minister to the children of God to become truly saints.

10- The apostle Paul lived his life interceding for others. Even while in prison he used to pray for his friends, saying: *“I thank God for every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy”* (1: 3-4).

### **THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE EPISTLE:**

It is established that this epistle is written by the apostle Paul, as confirmed by all the early testimonials, like those of Saints Polycarp, Erinaos, Cyprian, and the scholar Origen, and others; beside the fact that its style, teachings, and principles, all conform to the same in the other epistles written by the apostle Paul.

### **DIVISIONS OF THE EPISTLE:**

1- Joy amid the sufferings	Chapter 1
2- Joy in the ministry	Chapter 2
3- Joy in the Lord	Chapter 3
4- Joy in everything	Chapter 4

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## **AN INSPRATION FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

### **YOU ARE MY JOY**

- + Heaven so glittered before the eyes of Paul the prisoner, that,  
He did not see the iron chains around his hands;  
But saw the splendor of Your glory reflecting on him.  
He did not even desire to hasten to go out to work to the account of Your gospel;

Because the chains have opened up new doors for preaching.

- + The magistrate building turned in his eyes into a podium for the Word.  
And in his cell, he found a magnificent opportunity to write epistles to his beloved.
  
- + His soul exulted in him, to offer a praise of thanksgiving.  
By his prison, the hearts of his beloved were encouraged to preach with more zeal.  
And even his adversaries found in it an opportunity to minister to spite him;  
With the assumption that they would by that, add affliction to his chains.  
And by that, they would steal his glory.  
But the heart of Paul, the gospel lover, was exulted.  
When he realized that all things led to the glory of God.
  
- + His prison became a practical preaching by the life of joy in You.  
O Source of joy!  
O my joy and the exultation of my heart.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **JOY AMID THE SUFFERINGS**

#### **SIGNS OF THE JOYFUL LIFE IN CHRIST:**

From his prison, the apostle Paul wrote to the church beloved by him, which had a special place in his heart. The topic of this epistle is 'Christ our joy'; the Source of joy in all circumstances, that transfigures more amid the sufferings, by which we partake of His passions.

In this chapter, the apostle Paul presents to us certain signs of this new exulting life in Christ Jesus:

1- **A holy look at the others:** The apostle calls the believers “*All the saints in Christ Jesus*” (1); both congregation and priests.

2- **Holy emotions** (7-8). When St. Augustine repented, his old emotions changed their course. Instead of the carnal desires, which were

destroying his energies, he enjoyed new divine desires, and his emotions were enflamed by love for God and for men.

3- **Growth in love** (9); in **knowledge**, in **discernment** (9); in **good works** (10); and in **righteousness** (11). Joy is behind this perpetual

growth and continuous progress in Christ Jesus; It is a daily renewal, aiming to be like the Lord, who is Love, Wisdom, and

Righteousness.

4- **Directing all the energies to the salvation of man with joy** (12-26). St. Paul was not brooding on his imprisonment or sufferings, but he

rather found in his prison a great opportunity to testify to Christ in a new atmosphere: among the prison guards and the state officials. He exulted in his imprisonment, for it gave a serious and daring push to the preaching of the gospel, both by himself, his disciples and friends, and even by his adversaries who envied and opposed him.

5- **Joy in the gift of suffering** (27-30). Suffering for the sake of Christ was the apostle’s program which he often proclaimed in his epistles

Suffering carried to others a testimony of the transfiguration of the Lord Christ in us, as did the chains of the apostle Paul (7, 13). It can, as well, incite in us the growth in faith. It is a gift from the Lord Christ. Just like faith, joy in his suffering was a testimony that the apostle’s soul is free, having created an atmosphere of joy even inside the prison. Telling us about his exulting conquest of the suffering because of his trust in Christ, he refers to the name of the Savior 40 times in this short epistle.

To enjoy the perpetual joy, it is befitting of the believer to re-evaluate his life; lest what came in Revelation 3: 1 would apply to him: *“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”*.

1- An apostolic greeting	1 – 2
2- Thankfulness, prayers, and love	3 – 7
3- Longing and prayers	8 – 11
4- Chains and conquest	12 – 14
5- Rejoicing in preaching Christ	15 – 19
6- Life in Christ	20 – 26
7- A challenge and strength	27 – 30

### **1- AN APOSTOLIC GREETING:**

*“Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (1)*

Here, St. Paul adds the name of his disciple Timothy, as being a fellow partaker of his mission; He was planning on dispatching him to Philippi to bring back their news to him, to be comforted and rejoice (2: 19). Because Timothy was well known to them (acts 16: 3, 10-12), and had a special place in their hearts, he accompanied Paul in his two visits to Philippi. Paul wrote his name in the epistle, although he did not take part in writing it.

*“Paul and Timothy, servants ...”* Demonstrating true humility, the apostle Paul, although the teacher and the author of the epistle, adds the name of his epistle to his name, as equals, without discrimination. Timothy, actually, represents the consistent discipleship, strife, and persistence to the last breath.

St. Paul does not call himself as an apostle in this epistle, nor in that to the Thessalonians, or to Timothy, because his apostleship was not in doubt by the

addressees; and the Philippians were not in need to be reminded of his apostolic authority.

The apostle calls himself and his disciple “*servants of Jesus Christ*); as they seek no special place in the church, and are not preoccupied with authority, but boasted the work of the Lord who gave them the blessing to be servants to fulfill His will. The apostle, in this epistle calls himself a servant for the following reasons:

- 1- He opens the epistle by what is fitting for such believers as the Philippians.
- 2- Because he was going to talk about the Son of God who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant
- 3- Paul, feeling that he is a possession of the Lord; having been bought by His precious blood, he became His servant.
- 4- The church in Philippi was the fruit of Paul’s obedience to the Lord.

+ Calling himself a servant and not an apostle! How great indeed is this rank, and how it is the top of all goodness, to be a servant of Christ, and not just someone called for ministry. A servant (a slave) of Christ is actually free, as far as sin is concerned. And being a slave for someone, he could not be enslaved by another; namely, he could not share his service to Christ with some other master.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Who would not love to be chained by such chains like those of Paul; which, although real chains, yet they are rather, chains of love that bring forth liberty; hence boasted by those chained by them, like Paul and Timothy, who call themselves: “*servants of Jesus Christ*”. Being so chained, and enslaved, we would become in a greater glory than to be free with someone else.

(St. Ambrose)

*“To all the saints in Christ Jesus”* (1). The apostle often uses the term *“all”*, and *“you all”* (1: 4, 7, 8, 25; 2: 26), with the intention of exhorting us to keep away from divisions and dissensions.

+ As the Jews, as well, had the tendency to call themselves “saints”, according to the early inspiration (the Old Testament), in which they were called *“a holy nation”* (Exodus 19: 6); *“a holy people to the lord your God”* (Deuteronomy 7: 6, etc.). The apostle Paul added the designation: *“in Christ Jesus”*; as those are alone, and not the others, are the true saints,

(St. John Chrysostom)

We should marvel at his reference to the congregation, and calling them *“all the saints in Christ Jesus”*, before referring to the bishops and the deacons.

The term “bishops” came to mean (Presbyters), embracing the bishops and the priests together; as, according to St. John Chrysostom, Philippi was not large enough to have more than one Presbyter. He also believes that the bishops count the priests and the deacons as their fellow partners in ministry. St. John Chrysostom says that the apostle used to write his epistles to the church, with no reference to the clergy, except in this epistle; on account of that they sent ‘Epaphroditus’ to him with a generous gift.

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2)

Grace is the free divine gift or blessing granted by God to man; And the divine peace surpasses every mind and all imagination. The apostolic blessing in the majority of cases used to present those two most exalted gifts: the divine grace and peace; not from the apostle himself, but from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



## 2- THANKFULNESS, PRAYERS, AND LOVE:

*“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (3)*

The exulting inner nature of the apostle Paul, perpetually flows through presenting a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for His work, not only for his own sake, but for that of his ministered children.

+ As a father, he counts every gift and every success of the people as though his own; and he always thanks God in the name of his people.

(The scholar Origen)

*“Always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy” (4)*

The Philippians were always in the apostle’s mind and heart, even amid his chains, and his preoccupation with the affairs of the other churches; Remembering them in the Lord, always incites in him a desire to pray for their sake with joy and exultation.

The apostle binds thanksgiving with praying; He thanks God for their faith, love, and zeal in preaching. *“Praying always for you”*. Always caring for, and knowing the value of prayers, Paul always raised his heart with prayers for the sake of the labors and problems of those he ministered. He prayed with joy, despite being a political prisoner, who could be condemned to death. Christianity is the religion of the joyful and rejoicing heart, and of the shining and cheerful contention . The Christian is always rejoicing for his faith, for His Christ, and happy for His Kingdom.

The apostle did not refer to the sufferings that he, and his companion Silas have confronted in Philippi; when the magistrates tore their clothes, gave orders to beat them

with rods, and to cast them in the inner prison (Acts 22). But what he always remember is God's work with him in receiving faith, and the joy that God granted him amid his sufferings.

+ Not because your progress in virtue, I would cease to pray for your sake!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (5)*

The apostle does not say that the secret of his joy, is that they received faith, and always listened to the sermons, but *“for their fellowship”*; having translated their faith into a fellowship of collective spiritual love. Since the first day he came to them, and up to this very moment, they believed and stuck to one another in a collective fellowship in the Lord. It is not a temporary emotional reaction; but an exalted fellowship of love, that provoked them to persist on working together, to perpetually experience the joyful evangelic church life.

*“Your fellowship in the gospel”*: is a practice of mutual evangelic love, between all of them: congregation, and clergy; a fellowship in worship (in the Liturgy and the Eucharist); a fellowship in the material things, a desire of perpetual giving (2 Corinthians 9: 13; Galatians 6: 6; Hebrew 13: 16); and a fellowship in the testimony of the gospel of Christ, all of which are realized by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13: 14).

When we live in Christian love, this is considered as a practical preaching of the gospel. When we pray for the sake of one another, this is considered a preaching of the gospel; And when we seek the divine help for the sake of the preachers, this is considered a preaching of the gospel. All that was done by the Philippians. The principle here is obvious: that everyone who labors in the gospel, will certainly partake of the grace.

+ If the “fellowship” is to be given to us with “*the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*”, it would be fitting of us to be aware lest we bring the holy divine fellowship to no avail through committing sin; For if we do the works of the darkness (Romans 13: 12), it would be obvious that we deny the fellowship of the light.

(The scholar Origen)

+ When we serve someone who preaches, we shall share his crowns with him. In the wrestling arena, it is not only the winner who takes the crown, but it will be shared by those who are in his corner, like the coach, the trainer, and even his fans.... If we serve the saints with pure conscience and heart, we will partake of their reward; according to the words of the Savior Himself who says: “*Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations*” (Luke 16: 9).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“*being confident in this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (6)

The secret of the joy of the apostle in his ministry and his inner peace, is his percept that, it is God who commenced this ministry, and will consummate the work until the end, until the great ultimate day of the Lord. And as it is written in the first book of Samuel: “*The Lord was with him and let none of His words fall to the ground*” (1 Samuel 3: 19).

The apostle was sure that God, on His part, will not cease to work in His ministers to the account of His kingdom; He grants by His Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and sanctification, to bring forth the elect, perfect on the day of the Lord. The grace of God will never

cease until the souls are made perfect, and until He brings them forth, together with the body to the fellowship of the eternal glory.

St. John Chrysostom believes that God does not move us like pieces of chess, but would work in us if we are serious and diligent in seeking His help. That is why, while confirming that God will consummate His work in them until the end, he is commending them on account of that they are serious and diligent; and is referring at the same time to that what they practice is a gift from God, and not of their own.

+ It is not a simple matter to say that God commits Himself to work in a certain person. Not looking at appearances, once he sees our seriousness and diligence, He would help us in the good things. This is a good testimony for them that they are His stewards through whom He works; by which the apostle does not deny them their credit.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ The work on our hands will be consummated by the power of God, who is capable of turning His words into action.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

Commenting on the farewell prayer of the Lord Christ, St. Augustine says that the Lord who has sanctified His disciples, keeps on working in them to enjoy a perpetual sanctification. Our sanctification, therefore, would never cease.

+ He says: "*Sanctify them by Your truth*" (John 17: 17). Are they "*delivered from evil*"? Having prayed for their sake to be (John 17: 15)?

Some may probably wonder: How could they be "*not of this world*"? (John 17: 16), if they are still not sanctified by the truth? ... Or, if they are already sanctified by the truth, why would the Lord pray for them to be? ... Is it not that even those saints are

still progressing and growing in sanctification; and they would not be able to enjoy it without the help of the grace of God; through sanctifying their progress, even though He has sanctified their commencement? That is why the apostle says: “He who started a good work in you, consummates till the day of Christ”.

(St. Augustine)

*“Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and consummation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace” (7)*

It was not possible for the chains to conceal his love for the Philippians; but, on the contrary those chains gave him more opportunity to think of them, to keep them in his heart, to pray continuously for them, and to thank God for His work in them. The prison, the chains, and the sufferings, did not draw the apostle’s heart away from those he ministered, but gave him more opportunity to experience of the shepherding love, even before he encounters them physically.

+ How amazing, that even while in prison, and about to go to defend himself before the court of trial, he still keeps thinking of them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

St. John Chrysostom stands in awe before the attitude of the Philippians, having been preoccupied with the testimony of the gospel, as partakers with the apostle Paul of this grace. By “*defending*” here he means clarifying the issues of the gospel and explaining them to the adversaries, like those believers of Jewish origin; and “*consummating*” them in the hearts of the repentant.

+ *“in my chains and in the defense and consummation of the gospel”*. Yes indeed, he was chained to the consummation of the gospel.

(St. John Chrysostom)

His, were feelings of exalted love that surpass nature:

(1) He was keeping them all in his heart and mind, like precious pearls, any of which he could not afford to disregard.

(2) Even though he was chained in prison, yet he kept them, as though shutting them up inside heart, and binding them with the chains of love;  
hence he says *“in my chains”*.

(3) They were all -- congregation and clergy – partakers of the defense and consummation of the gospel.

(4) They were all partakers of this grace together with him; whom he sees with the eye of the Spirit in his heart, basking in the warmth of his  
love in the Lord.

(To be continued in Part 2)

(Chapter 1 Part 2)

### 3- LONGING AND PRAYER:

*“For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ” (8)*

The apostle calls on God Himself to testify to the affection of love he has in his heart toward the Philippians. This love is not only on account of that they are partakers, together with him of consummating the gospel, but he loves them in the affection of Jesus Christ for their own sake according to Christ.

*“For God is my witness”*: we do not think that the apostle Paul assumes that they doubt his love toward them, to call God as his witness, He who alone knows what is in his heart. But he calls God, who becomes pleased to see the whole congregation, together with their priests, have a special place in the heart of His minister. God’s pleasure is when the whole church enjoy the practical love, and the fellowship in the divine grace.

Like the incarnate Word of God, who so opened His heart to the whole world, that He delivered His life a sacrifice of love for humanity; He finds pleasure to see His ministers follow His lead, open their hearts wide to their brethren, and deliver their life for their sake; so that they would say, together with the apostle Paul: *“I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith” (2: 17)*.

*“with the affection of Jesus Christ”*. The true minister carries his flock in his heart, rejoices in their salvation, and suffers for their weaknesses. The prophet Jeremiah cried out: *“Oh my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent” (Jeremiah 4: 19)*. Jeremiah’s heart writhed within him, as he perceives God’s longing for him to carry his people in his heart: *“Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent” (Jeremiah 4: 19)*. And the apostle Paul says: *“with the affection of Jesus Christ” (8)*; the love in his heart is the love of Jesus Christ dwelling in

him, enflamed toward humanity. The shepherding love is that of Christ Himself, working in the heart of the shepherd or the minister.

The apostle Paul holds God Himself a witness on how great his affection is toward them; being enflamed with longing for them all without exception; he loved them all, without consideration of any special circumstances of each; only one factor, he considers, that his own flaming affection sets forth through the Lord Christ dwelling in him. He keeps them in his heart, and accordingly in the heart of Christ dwelling in him; like the love of our father Abraham toward his son Isaac in the Lord.

*“How greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ”* ... How beautiful and sweet are these gentle emotions of the apostle Paul toward his children! Which conform with those of his Lord Christ. With such rich flow of feelings, Paul longed to see everyone of them. He summarized these feelings in one word: the *“affection”* of Jesus Christ toward His children.

- + He does not say “with the love”, but says it in a warmer expression: *“with the affection (compassion) of Jesus Christ”*. It is as though he says to them: ‘having become a father to you through the relationship between us in Christ; I love you, not with natural affection, but with warmer ones, namely *“with the affection of Jesus Christ”*. It is however, impossible for me to express my longing to you with words.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Offer your son (Isaac), not in the depth of the earth, nor in the *“valley of tears”* (Psalm 84: 6), but *“on the high mountains”* (Genesis 22: 2); to show that your faith in God is stronger than the emotions of the body. Abraham loved his son Isaac; yet he put his love for God before that of the body. With the affection, not that of the body, but with the affection of Jesus Christ, namely, with the affection of the Word of God, the Truth and the Wisdom.



(The scholar origin)

*“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (9)*

The essence of the apostle’s prayer is that those he ministers will enjoy the love for God, for one another, and for the whole humanity; and that such a triple-sided love would grow in them continuously, to become like a river into which the rain of grace flow with abundance, to flow in its turn with renewed water upon the land and valleys. Having enjoyed an abundance of grace, he longed for their hearts to be enflamed more and more to gain unceasingly. As the divine grace produces more thirst for it; whenever the believer tastes it, he asks for more: *“Those who eat from me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more”* (Sirach 24: 21).

Never satisfied except with unceasing and continuous growth, the apostle Paul desires for the Philippians, full of love, to abound still more and more in love, as well as in knowledge and all discernment, and according to St. John Chrysostom, not to stop at a certain measure.

*“that your love may abound ... in knowledge and all discernment”*: Love is bound to knowledge; Once man gets interested in a certain topic, he persists on searching in, and about it, until he covers every aspect of it. When he loves somebody he desires to know everything about him. And, likewise, when man loves God, he longs to increase his knowledge about Him.

*“In knowledge and all discernment”*: The apostle does not want them to have that kind of bare emotional love, called by some “blind love”,

but he wants them rather to have that kind of love, enlightened with understanding and discernment – the love of Christ, the Wisdom of God; to have the knowledge of the divine secrets, and the discernment of God’s Word, in order to truly taste the sweetness of life and fellowship with Him.

- + The measure of love does not stop at a certain limit; he says: *“that your love may abound still more and more”*. Notice how exalted this expression is! He says: *“that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment”*. Namely, they would not stop at friendship alone, nor at love alone, but would extend to knowledge. The same love would not be presented to all, as this would be against good understanding. What he means is that love should be with understanding and discernment ... As an example, there is some danger of man getting corrupted through his love of the heretics, and by receiving the wrong teaching under the pretence of love.... Then how can the same apostle say: *“If it is possible, ... live peaceably with all men”*? (Romans 12: 18). He does not say: Love them, until you are harmed by friendship!; as it is also written: *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you”* (Matthew 5: 29).

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“So that you may be able to discern what is best, and may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ”* (10)

The literal translation is to discern the “contradictory or different things” that may cause some confusion; hence he seeks for them *“the spirit of Discernment”*. It is also translated as *“things that are excellent”*, the apostle means, that the things of Christ, being exalted, need discernment to be faithfully experienced by the believers, to enjoy the gospel of salvation, to lead a life of perfection; by which they may be

sincere and without offense in the day of the Lord, bearing the righteousness of Christ.

On the ultimate day, with the coming of the Son of Righteousness, they would be searched under the bright splendor of His Sun, to be found sincere and without offense; namely to have the one heart, and would not be faltering between the two sides.

*“without offense”*. According to the apostle Paul, the Christian life is like a sprint race to reach the ultimate goal and to receive the prize. In Jesus Christ, there would be no offenses that could hinder the believer while running this race.

The true love grants man the mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit to discern the diverse issues; and would light the heart, to make it able to discern between the voice of the true shepherd and that of the stranger; to discern between the will of God and his own will; and to discern between the contradictory issues, to be able to choose the good, and forsake the bad.

*“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God” (11)*

The Righteousness is the Lord Christ. As the Christian has to produce fruit in peace.

The fruit of righteousness is the good works. Being planted in Jesus Christ, and being grafted in Him, we are no longer wild branches, but those of the divine vineyard that carries the fruit of the Spirit. These exalted and satisfying fruit, being a divine gift to the glory and the praise of God, are the object of our cherishing, and not the cause of pride and haughtiness. By the word “righteousness” here, he means all the works of the Holy Spirit who grants us the righteousness of Christ, and the fellowship in the divine nature.

He says “*the fruit of righteousness*”, and not ‘the fruits of righteousness’. The Greek word came in the singular and not the plural form; So it also came in Galatians 5: 22; Ephesians 5: 9; James 3: 18; Hebrew 12: 11; and Romans 6: 22. As the fruit of the Spirit, despite their diversity of love, joy, peace, goodness, etc. are in harmony together, as though they are one fruit.

- + He says: “*filled with the fruit of righteousness*”; As in truth, there is righteousness that is not according to Christ, on the level of human ethics. So he says: “*that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God*”. Notice how I talk, not about my own glory, but about the righteousness of God ... he means to say: Do not let your love cause you harm in an indirect way, by not letting you perceive the good things. Beware, lest you may fall through your love for anyone. Although I wish for you to have more love, yet without being harmed.

#### **4- CHAINS AND CONQUEST:**

*“But I want you to know , brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the spread of the gospel” (12)*

Some might assume that being chained and imprisoned in Rome, would offend those new in faith, cause them to become embarrassed of what happened to him, or to fear that the same would also happen to them; And it may also cause offense to those outside the faith.

Here, Paul addresses the Philippians who love him, and whom he loves, to tell them his news, for fear that the wrong news might have reached them. He intends to assure to them that his troubles, imprisonment, and sufferings, are all according to a divine plan intended to the spread of the gospel. As it was through those who were together with him on board the ship (276 men), so it is through his preaching in

Rome the capital of the world at that time; as the prison in Rome turned to become like a little church that gathered the Jews with the Gentiles in the one Person of Christ.

*“so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my chains are in Christ” (13)*

It became evident to everyone that he was imprisoned, not for a crime he has committed, but for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ. Having been called to the Court of ‘Praetorian’, at the imperial palace of Neron to defend himself, it was a magnificent opportunity to testify to the Lord Christ before the magistrates of the state, and before many who came to that place from all over the world.

+ It so seems that the Philippians were grieved to hear that he was in chains, and assumed that by that, preaching the gospel has come to an end. Yet he promptly scattered all those assumptions; beside proclaiming to them that preaching was not hindered, and that the ministers of the gospel have not been terrified, but were rather encouraged by his imprisonment... Talking with such daring while in chains, gave them more confidence than when he was free.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (14)*

As the apostle has received the honor of suffering for the sake of the Word, the faithful did not fear to testify to the Truth, following the practical example of the apostle.

- + They were before truly brave and daring, and became more and more brave. He is as though saying to himself: 'If by my chains the others became more brave and daring, how much more should I be?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

## **5- REJOICING IN PREACHING CHRIST:**

*"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will" (15)*

Those who envied the apostle Paul found in his imprisonment an opportunity to preach, not out of love and faithfulness, but to provoke the state to hold tighter to the apostle, and to keep him in prison; Or they found in his imprisonment an opportunity to replace him in ministry, so that its success would be referred to them and not to him.

Some of them might have been those believers of Jewish origin, who held fast to Judaism, and saw in the apostle Paul an opponent to the Mosaic law and the Jewish customs. They counted his imprisonment as an opportunity to move more freely with no opposition to their dogmas. Such people whom. Those whom Paul encountered in Antioch and Ephesus, he called dogs and evil-doers, whose corrupt seeds they planted, the apostle attempted to uproot from the minds of people.

Contrary to those, there were also the faithful who moved very strongly to work out of love for the Lord Christ and for His captive apostle.

The former category worked motivated by rivalry against the apostle; while the later did for the sake of the salvation of mankind. In both cases preaching got enflamed in Rome because of his imprisonment.

- + Because of my chains there were two lines of preaching: a category of people worked with more courage out of their love for the Lord,, and another with the hope to destroy me.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains” (16)*

The words “*selfish ambition*” refer to personal benefit and rivalry.

- + They intended to add affliction to his chains.  
Although seeing him imprisoned and in chains, yet they kept on envying him.  
They intended to make him fall under more wrath by the authorities.  
He says: “*supposing*”, For what did happen was contrary to their assumption; and instead of grieving by their actions, he rejoiced for the more spreading of the gospel.
- + A good work could be done with a bad intention. Such work would, not only be unworthy of reward, but would be worthy of punishment and wrath.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“But the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel” (17)*

- + By “*the defense of the gospel*” he means that, being appointed to preach, he is committed to give an account of the task allotted to him. They have actually helped to make his task easier; with so many preaching it, and so many believing in it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice” (18)*

It was not possible for envy or for the opposition of the envious, to harm the heart of the apostle of the Gentiles. God used their efforts, whatever their intentions are, for the edification of his kingdom and the salvation of many; and the apostle rejoiced for the spread of the glory of God.

According to St. Cyprian, some used this verse to provoke on leaving the heretics to preach without any opposition of the church. He says:

[The apostle Paul, in his epistle was not talking about heretics, nor about their baptism, but was talking about those who walk disorderly in the church. He said that, while some preached the word of God persistently and courageously, others so did, out of envy and rivalry. The former category embraced toward the apostle abundant love, while the later, envy and strife. Yet he endured everything with perseverance, as long as the name of Christ reached to the knowledge of many, whether by truth or by pretence].

+ Look at the wisdom of the man! He does not violently accuse them, but refers to the ultimate result.

He says: What difference does it make to me, whether the preaching is carried out in this or in that way? ... If they intend to provoke the emperor's wrath. so be it, as long as they also preach ... *“In this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice”*. Even if they do more mischief, they are actually co-operating with me. For their intention they will be punished; whereas I will be rewarded for something I did not do!



Do not you see that he who wars against the truth is actually helpless; he rather wounds himself, like someone kicking against goads.

+ I shall not grieve nor collapse under such circumstances, but I shall rather rejoice, yes, and will rejoice; not for sometime, but perpetually; *“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation”* (19), when their animosity and envy turn out for the spread of the gospel.

Then he adds: *“through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”*. Just look at the humility of this blessed man; who has been striving so far, and is now approaching his crown; he who achieved many heroic works, and acquired salvation through limitless works. says to the Philippians: “I will probably have salvation through your prayers”.

He also seeks the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; as though he says: if I am counted worthy of your prayers, I shall receive a greater grace through the support of the Holy Spirit.

+ Just tell me: If a physician has a son who is threatened with blindness, and he is helpless to help him to recover, Will he refuse the treatment of another physician who will? Of course not! Whether it happens through him or any other, what concerns him is the healing of his son.

It would be the same concerning the call for the glory of Christ. Let us then do whatever we are committed to do, whether through us or through others; according to the apostle: *“whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached”* (18).

Listen to what the prophet Moses said to his disciple Joshua who provoked him when he found out that Eldad and Meldad were prophesying in the camp: *"Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets!"* (Numbers 11: 29).

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Preaching is 'Truth', and they are not. What they preach is the 'Truth', whereas they who preach it are not. Why? Because, in the church, they are not seeking God. If they are, they are committed to be pure. For the soul would find in God her Groom ... While he who seeks from God what is beside Him, is not seeking God with chastity.

Just meditate, O brethren, The wife who loves her husband for his riches is not chaste; She does not love him but loves his gold!

+ In the church there are those about whom the apostle talks, who preach the gospel in pretence; who seek what is for their own benefit, whether it is wealth, honor, or human commendation; namely, they preach the gospel with the desire to receive rewards by any means, and not seeking the salvation of those whom they preach.

+ The true shepherds preach Christ in truth; whereas the hired laborer does it in in pretence; seeking something else. ... Yet this and that are both preaching Christ!

+ Although they preached Christ out of envy, yet they preached Christ. You should look, not at the way, but at the subject of preaching. If Christ is preached to you out of envy, Just meditate in Christ, and avoid envy! Do not concern yourselves with the evil intention of the preacher; but with the good thing he preached to you!

+ Christ is the “Truth”. Whether the Truth is preached in pretence by hired laborers; or preached in truth by the true children of God; the children anticipate in perseverance for the sake of the eternal inheritance of the Father; while the hired hands long for the temporary wage from him who hires them.

+ Those who love me preach; and those who hate me preach as well. In the sweet fragrance the former category live; and in the same, the others will die; And yet, by the preaching of both categories, the name of Christ is glorified, and His sweet fragrance fills the whole world.

(St. Augustine)

*“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the help of Jesus Christ” (19)*

The loving God – in His goodness – would turn the works of the envious into the salvation of the apostle and of many; through the prayers of his beloved – the Philippians – and the help of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. As every suffering and persecution would turn out for a deposit to the account of the saintly apostle, he receives all with joy, seeking their prayer.

Some believe that the apostle here, talks about his salvation from the prison. As the Romans realized that the spreading of the gospel of the lord Christ, whether through the intention of envy or the love for the apostle, has not threatened the safety of the emperor or the Roman State; but it rather exhorts the believers to give the honor to whom honor is due, and submission to the authorities in the Lord. By such conviction, the imperial court realized that Paul is not an adversary of the emperor as it was previously claimed.

The apostle quoted 'Job' 13: 16 (the Septuagint version): "*This will also be my salvation*". It applies to the people of God in all eras; He who turns out the sufferings to the salvation of His people and children.

It is amazing how the apostle Paul puts the prayers of the people for his own sake, ahead of the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That is because the Holy Spirit moves much the more to save and support the believers when mutual love prevails between the people and their shepherds.

## **6- LIFE IN CHRIST:**

*"It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death" (20)*

By the courage of the believers and receiving suffering with joy and the gladness of heart, the crucified Christ is glorified; They glorify Him even in their bodies whether they live or they die; namely, if they are given the chance to work and preach, or if they die as martyrs for His name's sake. The apostle's life even in prison, or his martyrdom, would never let him lose his hope, nor take away his boldness in testifying to the Savior.

+ He exhorts us not to leave everything to the prayers raised for our sake, without contributing something on our side.

Look how he demonstrate the role of hope, the source of every goodness; according to the words of the prophet: "*Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we **hope** in You*" (Psalm 33: 22); and to those of Sirach: "*Consider the generations of old and see: Has anyone put his **hope** in the Lord and been disappointed?*" (Sirach 2: 10); and the blessed Paul himself says: "***Hope** does not disappoint*" (Romans 5: 5).

Do not you see the greatness of hope in God? The apostle says: whatever happens I shall not be put to shame; They will never prevail upon me, but by speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body.

Yes indeed, they expected to catch Paul in this trap, and to quench the preaching of the gospel; as though their craftiness had any power!

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. I do not say that my life alone shall exalt Him, but even my death will. By

“life” he means the present time; during which they would not be able to destroy him; And even if they did, Christ will be exalted as well by his death. How is that? ... By his life, for He will be saved; and by his death, for the fear of death would never make him deny Him; As He granted him the readiness for death, and made him stronger than death.

On one aspect He set me free of danger; and on another aspect, He granted me not to fear the tyranny of death; by which He would be exalted by both my life and my death ... It is the role of the Christian life, to endure nobly both life and death.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”*

(21)

For the apostle, life is an opportunity to preach with joy amid the sufferings; And death is an opportunity to set forth to encounter with the Lord Christ face to face. In both his life and death, all what the apostle desire is to acquire the Lord Christ, being his life.

For the carnal, death is loss and destruction; whereas for the spiritual, it is gain; as in it there would be a departure from the world with all its evil to the other life with all its exalted glories.

Having become dead to sin, we are in no need for commandments to keep, but we rather need Him first, who would raise us from the dead. The Lord Christ is the Life and the Resurrection; he who acquires Him will enjoy life. Having come to deliver himself for us, we often hear Him say: "I am ...".

He asks us to acquire Him, as He is the Bread of life for the satisfaction of the soul; ... He is the heavenly Groom, if we unite with Him we would never suffer the feeling of isolation; but our life would become a perpetual wedding; ... He is the Savior who grants the eternal glory; He is the Treasure, the Light, and the Satisfaction; ..., For us He is Everything.

A business man would say: For me, life is the riches; ... A man of knowledge would say: For me, life is conquest; ... The man of lust would say: For me, life is pleasure; ... The haughty would say: For me, life is fame; ... Whereas the believer would say: For me, life is Christ; It is not riches, knowledge, fame, nor temporal honor; For me, Christ is the Way, the First and the Last.

*"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*. The Christian view of life is that it is a blessing and is worthy of living as long as it is in Christ; and that death is gain as long as it is in the Lord; By saying *"For to me"* presents to us the apostle's view and belief that his life is Christ.

+ What he means is: By death, I do not die, as my life is within me; Hence, in case they truly intend to kill me, let them have the strength to try to terrify me by taking away faith from my soul; For, as long as Christ is with me, death itself cannot defeat me; for I shall stay alive.

My life is not the present life, but Christ Himself; That is how the Christian should be! To say: "*It is no longer I who live; but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2: 20).

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ We believe that death is gain, and life is rather a kind of punishment.  
What is Christ but the death of the body and the breath of life.  
Let us then die together with Him, to live together with Him.  
Let leaning toward death be for us a daily drill, by which we separate ourselves from carnal pleasures; as though our soul becomes up  
high where the earthly desires cannot approach; Once it bears the likeness of death, it would not fall under the penalty of death.

(St. Ambrose)

+ The soul – the living mirror that bears the free will would say: "When I look at the face of my beloved, the beauty of His face reflects on  
me". And Paul imitates these words, saying: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I  
live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2: 20).

And when he says: "*For to me, to live is Christ*" (21); Paul proclaims that he has purified himself of human emotions, like gladness, grief,  
anger, fear, cowardice, pride, foolishness, evil desires, envy, revenge, love of possession, profit, or any other habit that would lead to  
the destruction of the soul. ...  
He alone fills my soul.  
I got rid of everything; and there is nothing left in me except Christ.

For me indeed, *“to live is Christ”*; Or as the bride of the Song says: *“I am my beloved, and my beloved is mine”* (Song 6: 3). This is purity, non-defilement, light, and truth, that nourish my soul. She is not nourished by dry weeds or brush, but by the splendor of His saints; by the inspiration of the lilies, by the splendor and radiation of its beautiful colors. That is why whoever feeds among the lilies would lead his flock to its pastures, to have *“the beauty of the Lord our God be upon him”* (Psalm 90: 17).

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

+ Remembering the words said by the apostle Paul in his epistle: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (21), we count it a great gain that the traps of this world will no longer catch us; that we will no longer submit to the iniquities of the flesh, will rid ourselves of the deadly claws of the devil, and will receive the call of Christ with the joy of eternal salvation.

(St. Cyprian)

*“But if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know”* (22)

The apostle sees the fruit of his strife on earth in acquiring Christ; He counts his labor as a good divine gift presented to him for the sake of the growth of God’s kingdom in the world, of God’s glory, and of the edification of the church of Christ.

In verses 22 and 23, the apostle does not know what would be better for him: Is it life, filled with the good labor and the abundant fruit to the account of Christ; ... to have the opportunity to preach to the far, to bring back the lost, and to share with those who suffer?... Or is it



death that would comfort him from his labors, and bring him forth to the glories?!

For him, life is to enjoy the Lord Christ and to minister to Him; And death is to reach Him and His glories. That is why he says: "*For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (23); as he would encounter with Christ forever and without hindrance. But for the good of his children, their growth, and their joy of faith, the apostle chose the labor and anguish of earth over the comfort and glories of eternity (24).

The apostle was unable to choose, assuming that it is up to him to do: ... Will he go on living amid the persecutions, and afflictions, testifying to the Lord Christ, Or will he depart to enjoy the encounter with the Lord face to face?!

The apostle was hard pressed between the two; not to choose between two evil things, nor between one good and another evil; but between two equally good things; namely between enjoying the blessing of strife to the account of the kingdom of God, and the inner longing to behold God in heaven. In both cases he would live in and with Christ. A choice between temporary strife, and a permanent comfort; and both are for the glory of God.

- + Here it is apparent that the present life is necessary as well, in case we use it as we should, namely, if we bear fruit; For if we do not, it would not be life. We despise a tree that bears no fruit, as though it is dry, and worthy to be cast in the fire. Therefore we do not hate life, if we live it well; And even if we do not, we do not put the blame on life, but on using it in a bad way. God granted to live for Him; but through your corrupt behavior in sin, you make yourself prone to blame.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (23)*

His expression here came to describe the condition of someone standing on the beach of a port; longing to sail to encounter his family, his beloved, and his friends at home; feeling that every minute he wastes in the port is as though equal to a whole year.

Although the apostle Paul enjoyed several visions; The Lord appeared to him on his way to Damascus; and in the temple, when He confirmed His call to him to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 22: 17-21); Yet what truly filled his life with sweetness, was beholding His Lord by the eyes of the heart through his daily life. The splendor of the glory of his Lord reflected on his depths, to be raised from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3: 18).

It is obvious that he was leaning toward the choice of dying as a martyr for the sake of Christ; as it was far better for him to depart to be together with Christ in paradise; not to forsake the world with all its evils, temptations, and afflictions, but to enjoy life with Christ.

St. Augustine often dealing with a comparison between the longing of the believer to depart to be with Christ, and his natural fear of death, sees man come to the moments of death against his will, and fear it by nature.

Although horrible and terrifying moments, yet by his holy will in Jesus Christ, he overcomes these fears, desiring his departure. St.

Augustine presents to us an example of St. Peter who feared death in his old age; and as he was told by the Lord Christ: *“When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish”* (John 21: 19). By nature, being a man, even old, he did not wish to die. ... And St. Augustine presents

to us the Lord of glory Himself, being the Son of Man, He prays to the Father, saying:

*“If it is possible let this cup pass from Me;*

*nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”* (Matthew 26: 39). He came particularly to die

for the sake of the world; and, according to the

apostle Paul: *“For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Hebrew 12: 2).

- + He gives them (the Philippians) comfort, to see him a master of his choice; which is not realized through the sin of him (who plotted for the death of the apostle), but by an ordinance of God. He says: Why are you so sad for my death? It is far better for man to depart; *“to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”*.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Could we find anyone else who can say: *“I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”* (23)?

As far as I am concerned, I cannot say such words, for I know that, if I depart, all the wood, hay, and straw in me (1 Corinthians 3: 12), will have to be consumed by fire; the revile, drinking too much wine, robbery, etc. which accumulated upon the foundation of my house. Many believers are not aware of this; they think that, as long as they do not commit adultery, they would be saved; not perceiving that: *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5: 10); And they do not put before their eyes the words of Him who says: *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities”* (Amos 3: 2).

(The scholar Origen)

- + That divine beauty, imperceptible by human physical eyes, only by the mind and the soul: when it casts its light upon a saint, it leaves him moaning with longing in

an unendurable way, crying out, being disturbed by life on earth: *“Woe is me! My soul has dwelt too long”* (Psalm 120: 5); *“When shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psalm 42: 2).

Feeling the burden of the present life, as though it is a kind of prison, the saints, under the impact of the touch of divine love within their souls, could hardly manage to control themselves,. Because of their intense desire to enjoy the divine beauty, they keep on praying that the meditation in the joy of the Lord would perpetually dwell in them.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Is it not worthy of moaning, to be present in a foreign country, and to be deprived of one’s homeland? Is it not worthy of rejoicing to be present in a secure port, in the high-up city, where there is no more pain, nor anguish, nor sighing? You may say: How can I have this when I am so sinful? ... Do not you see that it is not death that is the cause of sorrow, but the evil conscience? ... Stop being sinful, and death would become beloved to you!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you”* (24)

Despite all that longing, he still sees his departure as gain for him, and his remaining in flesh a gain for them. Being trained on giving to the account of his brethren, the apostle’s decision was the choice of remaining in the flesh for the sake of the commitment of brotherly love in the Lord.

- + He said those words to prepare them to accept his death when the time comes; Such was his way of teaching them with true wisdom.  
Death is not good in itself; What is good is to be together with Christ after death. I wish we do not grieve for the dead, nor rejoice for the living; but grieve on the sinners, not only when they die, but even as they live.  
Let us rejoice for the righteous, not only while they live, but even when they die. let us shed our tears on the sinners wherever they are, for they are away from the King, The righteous, on the other hand, being together with the King, whether they are here or there, they reach an exalted rank and closeness to the King; not through symbols or by faith, but they see him face to face (1 Corinthians 13: 12)

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Let us be foreigners to our body, so as not to be foreigners to Christ. For, even though we live in the body, yet we should not follow the things of the body. While not denying the requirements of nature, we should seek before anything else the gifts of grace: *“For I ... have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in flesh is more needful for you”* (23-24).

(St. Ambrose)

*“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith”* (25)

The apostle Paul, enjoying surety in God’s work and exalted care, is confident that what He does is for the edification of the church, and for his own benefit; That brings to him the spirit of joy in Jesus Christ, which reflects on the people to enjoy in turn progress and joy. The shepherd’s joy is the source of joy to his congregation in the Lord.

By the spirit of prophecy, the apostle has confidence that he will eventually be released from prison and remain with the people for the sake of their progress and their joy in faith, namely, for their spiritual happiness.

- + It was possible for the apostle Paul to depart to Christ (through martyrdom), yet he did not intend to do that, but preferred to remain striving for the sake of his flock... If it is necessary to remain here by any means, it will not be just “to remain”, but “**to remain with you all**”; why? “**for your progress and joy of faith**”. Here he exhorts them to care for themselves, to stay, like little chicks, close to their mother hen, until they grow feathers. That is a proof of the greatness of love.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again” (26)*

The joyful ministry of the shepherd pours joy in Christ through His servant; to make the congregation exult by the coming of their minister, in whom our Lord Jesus transfigures.

Commenting on the word “*for me*” (26), St. John Chrysostom says that their progress and joy in the Lord is in the apostle Paul; namely, that remaining among them is not against his own will, for it would be for the benefit of the apostle Paul himself (I would be more glorified when you progress more).

## **7- A CHALLENGE AND STRENGTH:**

*“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent,*

*I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (27)*

“Only” (27) binds this verse to the one before it. If the apostle Paul preferred to remain in flesh for the sake of the good of his children, he wishes to see everyone of them, a living gospel.

- + Do not you see how he turns everything he says to one thing – a progress in virtue? The word “only” means nothing but this; If we have this, no danger will dwell upon us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Here, the apostle Paul exhorts his children, in order to become saints, to live and walk according to the commandments and call of the gospel,; This is the greatest silent preaching – by the good example.

### **How would they truly live in the gospel?**

#### **(1) To stand fast in one spirit:**

He exhorts them to live as heavenly citizens, as is truly befitting of the heavenly gospel of Christ. The apostle is not preoccupied with whether he is there in flesh, or absent; As in all circumstances he would rejoice in their standing fast in one spirit in faith, and in their canonical strife according to the gospel of Christ, with the spirit of unity. The apostle concentrates on standing fast in the spiritual battle which we confront. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the unity of the church, hence any singular selfish work is against the spirit of the congregation and against the Spirit of God Himself.

+ That is what come above everything else, to unite the believers, and to support their love to stand fast: *“to be one”* (John 17: 11);

Because *“a kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand”* (Mark 3: 24); And the Lord Christ Himself exhorts His disciples, saying:

*“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13: 35).

(St. John Chrysostom)

## (2) **To strive together for the faith of the gospel:**

Nothing would bring joy to the soul of the apostle like their strife with one soul and one evangelic mind! through having the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4: 3-4). Strife against sin, to keep the one faith, to have the one mind of Christ, and to preach. ***“strive for the faith of the gospel”***, namely faith in the truth of the promises of the gospel – as how would one defend a case he does not believe in?

+ Notice how he calls the multitude of souls, “one soul”! ... It is written: *“The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul”* (Acts 4: 32), striving together for the sake of faith in the gospel.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Here he talks about the unity of spirit and the unity of soul (mind). As the Holy Spirit who supports those who work together, and who have one mind, supports them in their strife, to proclaim the good news of the gospel amid their sufferings.

## (3) **Courage in confronting the adversaries:**

*“and not in anyway terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God”* (28)



Striving under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and by the spirit of unity, their adversaries will not be able to stand against them, nor fear could infiltrate into them. They would not be terrified by the he opposition and wars of the devil however many are his hosts, and whatever are the weapons of his wars.

+ He says well “**terrified**”, as that is what our enemies intend to do, to terrify us.

He says that there is nothing to terrify us, whatever are their plans; That is the portion of those who walk upright, Their enemy can do nothing more than to try to terrify them.

When they realize that, with all their planning, they cannot terrify you, they would count it as a proof of their perdition.

When the persecutors could not overcome those they persecute; the planners could not overcome those against whom they plan;

and those of authority could not overcome those under their authority; Is it not a proof enough that their perdition is close at hand?

that their power is naught, and that what they did are vain and weak? ... The apostle says that all this is from God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### (4) **The gift of suffering:**

*“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (29)*

“For” binds what will come with what came before; Namely, standing fast with one spirit, striving with one soul, and courage to confront

the adversaries, will necessarily lead to persecution and suffering. “To you it has been granted”, namely, granted it to you by God.

Here, suffering does not appear to be a punishment from God, but a sign of His love.

Both faith and suffering are gifts from God; they are two brothers, two companions, who accompany the believer, as well as the church as a whole, along the road to heaven.

St. John Chrysostom, discerning between the gift of virtues and the gift of suffering, counts the virtues as a free gift from God; yet we are committed on our turn to do a certain role -- strive to get it. The gift of suffering for the sake of Christ, on the other hand, is a completely free gift from God; not to destroy the freedom of our will, but to make us humble and in a better situation.

+ Suffering for the sake of Christ is a grace, a free gift. Do not be ashamed of the gift of grace; for it is more marvelous than the power of raising the dead and of performing wonders; For by the later I would be indebted; while here (by suffering), Christ is indebted to me. It is befitting of us therefore to rejoice for getting this gift.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have” (30)*

Suffering for the sake of the Lord Christ, the Philippians see in the apostle Paul a magnificent role model, whether they have seen it with their own eyes or heard about it.

+ You have an example (in me). Here as well, he raises them to a higher level, showing that their struggle is the same as his, a mighty

struggle; uniting with him in enduring labor. He does not say “heard about me”, but “*saw I had*”; which indicate that he strived much in Philippi.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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## AN INSPIRATION FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(Ch 1)

### THE JOYFUL CHAINS OF FREEDOM

- + My soul set forth to the prison in Rome  
There I saw Your apostle, the prisoner, a free bird.  
Setting forth from glory to glory, to reach up to Your heavens.
  
- + Your love captivated his soul, heart, and mind.  
His chains for Your sake became sweeter and more exalted than any freedom.  
He cherished his servitude to You as a source of every freedom.  
You have purchased him by Your precious blood; so that no other master can acquire him a slave for himself.
  
- + His chains could not close his heart; he loved all humanity in You.  
And exulted in the salvation of every soul.  
The prison could not destroy the exultation of his heart.  
His prison cell turned into a holy temple for You, in which he unceasingly offers thanksgiving sacrifices;  
Which You in heaven smell a fragrance of pleasure.

- + His chains lifted his heart up to the day of Your coming.  
That he saw the whole congregation as saints.  
Clothed by Your righteousness and enjoy Your splendor in them.
  
- + His chains presented to him Your amazing mind;  
That, in every work of love, he saw a fellowship with him in the ministry of Your gospel.  
With Your eyes he saw Your people growing in love.  
And got in touch with Your grace unceasingly working.  
He saw You start work, continue, and consummate Your work until the end.
  
- + In his prison he saw a magnificent opportunity for preaching.  
In his chains, he loosened the chains binding many souls, of the officials of the state, of the imperial palace, and the prison guards.
  
- + When the doors of his prison were shut on him, he did not feel that his freedom is shut in.  
But he went deep in his soul, to find in it Your love for Your people.  
Bearing the warmth of Your compassion inside him, his heart gets enflamed with longing for those he ministers.  
He is poured before You for the sake of your children, seeking for them love, unity, discernment, and wisdom.  
He seeks for them the fruit of Your Holy spirit, the unceasing fruit of righteousness.
  
- + In his prison, no feeling of failure nor despair could crawl into his heart or soul.  
He sees Your glory glitter in his life as a prisoner.  
And would become greater in his death and departure to You.  
He discovered in truth that You are his life and the joy of his heart.  
Before You, the whole world turn into garbage;  
And for him, death becomes gain.  
He desires to depart to be with you.

But to remain in flesh is better, not for himself but for those he ministers.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **JOY IN THE GIVING MINISTRY**

#### **COST OF THE JOYFUL MINISTRY: “HE EMPTIED HIMSELF”**

Neither the prison nor the chains preoccupied the apostle Paul’s mind; but, having borne the lord Christ, the Giver of life in his depths, he reflected the spirit of joy on those he ministered, amid his and their sufferings. Hence he talked about what he acquired inside himself of a life of thanksgiving, love, joy, feeling of conquest, and an enjoyment of the new life, with a perception of the secret of strength, and a challenge of the hosts of darkness. This chapter came to reveal the joy the apostle enjoyed in ministering, and giving with the spirit of love and unity, to the account of the kingdom of Christ, despite the opposition and much trouble.

What an amazing divine planning! For the sake of mankind, the only begotten Son emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. The Lord of all took the position of a slave, and, although he is the Grantor of life, He humbled Himself more and became obedient to the point of death – even shameful way of death on the cross, as a divine cost of our new life, joyful in Him.

Through this experience, the apostle Paul quoted inside the prison a church praise (6-11) to proclaim the humility of Christ as a royal way to reach glory; which he is probably its author.

This praise includes three initial elements that led to its use in the liturgy of the sacrament of baptism:

- Confession of the faith based upon the resurrection
- Exaltation of the name of Jesus the Lord of all.
- Our conforming in the likeness of our Lord Jesus, who is an image of the Father.

1- A collective exulted life	1 - 4
2- Christ the leader and the Role Model.	5 - 11
3- Shine as light in the world	12 - 15
4- Love and joy for the shepherds and the flock	16 – 30

## 1- A COLLECTIVE EXULTED LIFE:

The apostle ended the previous chapter by exhorting them to mutual strife with the spirit of love and unity. Now, he presents to them the Lord Christ Himself, the Minister of all mankind, as a unique example of humility and exalted love; He who was Himself glorified, and glorified the Father by His humility and giving. In this he exhorts the people to the practical mutual love.

*“Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy ... “(1)*

By saying “*therefore*”, means that the talk is an extension of what came before. And saying “*if there*” does not imply doubt, but on the contrary, it carries a confirmation that there is no consolation or a word of sermon except in Christ. Namely, any sermon has to be in Christ. By (sermon) here he means encouragement and mental conviction, to instruct our souls and hold our faith fast.

+ There is no one better or more gentle than the spiritual guide, whose compassion may surpass that of any natural father (according to the flesh).

Just look at how this blessed man deals with the Philippians for their own good!

Look at how he talks to them in enflamed zeal and strong emotion!

**“If any comfort in Christ”**. It is as though he says: In case you intend to do something to my account; if you intend to show any care

for me; If you a=readily receive any goodness from my hand; Do all that in Christ ... He does not draw their attention to any carnal benefit, but spiritual ones.

He means to say: if you intend to present to me any comfort in my temptations, and any encouragement in Christ, or any consolation of love; or to demonstrate any fellowship of the Spirit; or any affection and compassion; You will be fulfilling my joy.

(St. John Chrysostom)

”**Any comfort of love**”. The apostle means to say that when our good Savior comforts us, He takes away our hidden sufferings, however intense they are, and grants us a true comfort like no other.

“**any fellowship of the Spirit**”, The Christian fellowship gathers the children of God together, and binds them together with the bond of love and giving. If any fellowship between believers, it would be in the Holy Spirit.

“**If any affection and mercy**”, These mean the intimate inner feelings, coming from love, compassion, and meekness. If you anticipate God’s affection and mercy, you have to present the same to one another.

*“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (2)*

+ He does not say “make me joyful”, but “*fulfill my joy*”; lest the commandment would seem as though given to someone slothful. He

means to say: You have already started to plant this in me; you have offered me a portion of peace; but I wish I could reach its perfection!



(St. John Chrysostom)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the Philippians, intending to present to the apostle, comfort, a fellowship of the Spirit, affection, and compassion, he firstly, instructs them to practice all these things in a spiritual way as is befitting of Christ Jesus. And secondly, to bear the unity of Spirit and mutual love among themselves, in order to fulfill his joy.

He asks them to fulfill his joy, which would not be realized except by their unity and love of one another. He says to them: If I preach to you the gospel of Christ for your salvation, I wish you become a source of joy to me. Indeed I am joyful with you, but I need to reach the perfect joy, which will not be realized except when you are like-minded, and have the same love. This epistle is that of joy, which form the golden thread by which its words are woven. Now, how can we realize the apostle's joy?

1- **Being of one mind:** Each one of us should think what is for his brother, ready to forsake our own wrong thoughts. Paul says that when his disciples become of one accord, he counts this as affection directed to him personally; showing by this the great danger if they are not.

2- **Having the same love:** "*Love covers a multitude of sins*" (1 Peter 4: 8). It is the bond of perfection. When we love the others, we become beloved by them, consummating the image of love intended by God for us. It is as though he says: If you want me to receive from you comfort of your love, a fellowship of the Spirit with you, a fellowship with you in the Lord, and affection and mercy from you, be sure that you love one another, by which I would acquire all that.

+ "*having the same love*"; namely, Unity should not be just in faith, but in all the other things as well. It is different from being like-minded but having no love.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- **Having one soul:** The soul is the center of feelings and emotions. When we have the same mind, and the same love, we shall have the same feelings; By that the image of the kingdom would be consummated in us.

+ The Lord prayed to the Father, for His disciples to be one as He and the Father are One (John 17: 22). The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are not three gods , but One Mighty God. The whole Trinity is One God; Nothing refer us to that One except if we are ourselves on one accord.

(St. Augustine)

*“Do nothing through selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (3)*

After exhorting them by positive commandments concerning humility, love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection, and unity; Now he exhorts them by negative commandments, to keep away from selfish ambition, namely, through dissension, pride, and selfishness..

**“Do nothing through selfish ambition”.** This happens in active groups, when every member has his own ambition and plans; It comes out of self-esteem, holding fast to one’s point of view, and attempting to force it upon the whole group; which would end up in dissension and division, and probably in heresies. **“Or in vain conceit”**, Conceit is haughtiness, pride, for self-glory. It is an embodiment of the ‘ego’.

+ **“Do nothing through selfish ambition or vain conceit”.** As I always say: this is the cause of all evils, out of which come all adversity

and contentions. Love cools down when we love to be commended by others; when we become slaves of the honor given to us by others.

It would be impossible for man to become such a slave, and be at the same time a true servant of God.

+ There is nothing foreign for the Christian like being haughty. Yes, I say haughtiness, and not daring, nor courage, that are both convenient for a Christian to have. Haughtiness is something different from daring and courage.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ “**Consider others better than yourselves**” (3). By that, the apostle means to give everyone more than his due of honor and appreciation.

“**Let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ**” ... “*Let this be ...*”, Namely, it is necessary to have it in our life, being the backbone of all the upright thinking, and the only guarantee for the escape from dissensions, division, contention, conceit, pride, vain glory, and self-esteem.

Do not just think of him as greater than you, but “**better**” than you; namely more exalted. Do not marvel nor become offended if you see him honored; And even if he treats you with haughtiness, bear with it nobly; And if he reviles you, show him submission in silence. If you truly consider him better than you, you would never feel anger if he treats you badly, nor feel envy, but refer everything to his exaltation.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Let each one of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (4)*

Selfishness kills the Christian love. It is befitting of the believer to love his neighbor as himself; puts himself in his place, and even gives him priority over himself.

+ ***“Let each one of you look out not only for his own interests but for the interests of others”***. Let each one of you seek, not only what is for his honor, but what is for the honor of others.

(St. Ambrose)

+ The Lord Himself gave us an example, when he sent His disciples out two by two (Mark 6: 7). Each of them had the desire to submit to the other with joy and with his whole heart; recalling the words of the Lord: *“He who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 18: 14).

(St. Basil the Great)

## **2- CHRIST, THE LEADER AND THE ROLE MODEL:**

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (5)*

What the apostle seeks from them are not theoretical commandments, but he seeks their practical fellowship with the Lord Christ who, by His incarnation, presented a unique concept of love and humility, not for His interest, but for that of His beloved.

+ Nothing would exhort the great and wise soul on practicing good works like knowing that by that, it would be like God. Nothing could be

a better encouragement! That is what the apostle meant when exhorting them on humility.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He, who appeared in the likeness of our human nature because of His love for man, became like an apple through His fellowship with us in flesh and blood. The white color inside an apple, represents the flesh of man; whereas the red color represents his blood. ... He who came from up high, and who is above all, having been a high example for every virtue and goodness, showed us the way through His appearance in flesh; according to His own words: *“Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matthew 11: 29). The apostle dealt with the same issue when talking about humility. Let me read what he says: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave”* (5). By His own free will He partook of our life by flesh and blood.

The bride of the song says: *“Revive me with the apples”*, to be able to remain looking upward, to perpetually see the image of virtue clear in my Groom; to see in Him: meekness, no anger, reconciliation with enemies, love for persecutors, paying evil back with good; as well as power, purity, perseverance, and no trace of vain conceit or deception.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

*“Who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped”* (6)

If Jesus was a human being, and equaled Himself to God, He would be counted as ‘grasping’ the glory of God, and referring to Himself what is God’s. But, being Himself the incarnate Word of God, what He does is out of His love and humility.

**“Though He was in the form of God”** ... “*Though He was*” used here, describes certain features that would never change; As for example when we say: “Zecchaeus was short in stature” (Luke 19: 3), this feature is steadfast and could never change.

“*He was in the form of God*” means that the Lord Christ was, and still is, God in His essence with no change. The words of the apostle Paul do not mean that the Lord Christ has been in the form of God, then lost this feature when He took the form of a slave. No, He possesses the form of God before and after His incarnation and forever. Here, there would be the question: Has the Lord Christ actually and truly took the form of a slave with a human body and a human soul like ours? Yes, He did, and without any doubt, became a true slave!

**“He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped”**. This expression means that the Lord Christ does not need to grasp equality with God; for He, being equal to the Father in essence, actually possesses it;. And when He regards Himself as equal to the Father, that would not be counted as robbery or grasping; for His equality and eternity with the Father are true facts.

+ I wish he who is still unable to see what the Lord will reveal one day; does not seek first to see what he believes; but believes first that the eye by which to see is healed; as what could be proclaimed to the eyes of a slave is only the form of the slave; Because, if He, who did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, could be seen as equal to God, by those whom He desires to heal, there would be no need for Him to empty Himself, and to take the form of a slave. But because there is no way by which man could see God, except only in the human form, that is why He took the form of man; so that He could be seen, to heal what could not be seen. As He says in another place: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5: 8).

(St. Augustine)

- + By a divine ordinance, He came to be among us in our likeness; “**and took the form of a slave**”, Nevertheless He is from above; As He said to the Jews: “*You are from beneath; I am from above: You are of this world, I am not of this world*” (John 8: 23); And He also said: “*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven; that is the Son of Man who is in heaven*” (John 3: 13).

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Although He, as a Man, partook of our human nature, yet He is at the same time above the whole creation.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + “*I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage, I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hands of her enemies*” (Jeremiah 12: 7). Notice that He, who is “*in the form of God*” (6), is sitting in heavens in His house that surpasses heavens. And if you wish to see what is greater and higher than all that, His House is God, according to His own words: “*I am in the Father*” (John 14: 11); “*He left His Father and Mother*” (Matthew 19: 5); left the heavenly Jerusalem and came down to earth, saying: “*I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage*”. His heritage was actually where the angels and the holy hosts are.

“*I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hands of her enemies*”. He gave His soul into the hands of the Jews who killed Him; into the hands of the kings and rulers who gathered together against Him; as it is written: “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed*” (Psalm 2: 2).

(The scholar Origen)

*“He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (7)*

The divine Word became man; took over our manhood, He did not appear in His divine glory, but took the form of a slave, and became in human likeness. He, the true God became a real man,

- 1- **He emptied Himself** from the glory of His deity, He hid the glory of His deity inside His manhood; concealed His glory inside the veil of His human body; He hid His deity from Satan to consummate our salvation, and to let the horrible battle of the cross roll on. He emptied Himself, and did not allow His deity to alleviate the passion on His manhood; He hungered, thirst, labored, wept, suffered, and died.
- 2- **He took the form of a slave:** He appeared in the form of a simple carpenter, from a poor family, in a humble town. He took the form of a slave, to become the only slave who brought pleasure to God the Father.
- 3- **Being born in human likeness:** Yet he differed from any other man. Why?
  - a- For He is the only man without sin.
  - b- For He is the only perfect man.
  - c- For He is not only perfect and without sin, but He is God Himself.
- 4- **He humbled Himself and became obedient to the Father.**
- 5- **He became obedient to the point of death:** He, being the Holy Righteous, who committed no sin, passed through death, for he carried our sins and iniquities.
- 6- **Even death of the cross:** The most cruel and horrible way of death. He died the death of curse, the death of disgrace, the death of



scoffing, the death of offense and ignorance. He became obedient up to the end, when He cried out on the cross, saying: "*It is finished*" (John 19: 30). "***Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and 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***" (9-11) .

The scholar Origen Often commented on the saying of St. Luke the evangelist: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor of God and men*" (Luke 2: 52); confirming that, having truly emptied Himself, and became an infant, there is no wonder that he increased, not only in stature, but in wisdom as well; quoting the words said about Him by the prophet: "*He knew to refuse the evil and choose the good*" (Isaiah 7; 15-16).

- + By emptying Himself, the Word made the world full. Yet that empty vessel was Wisdom itself; "*because the (foolishness) of God is wiser than human wisdom*" (1 Corinthians 1: 25).
- + Having come down from heaven and took the form of a slave, He carried the weaknesses of our sins, and carried us. He came to those who cursed Him, and became weak among those who reviled Him.
- + The Lord came down, not only to care for us, but to carry what is of us.
- + Man was created according to the image of God; That is why our Savior who is the image of God, in His compassion toward man whom He created according to His likeness, having seen that he has forsaken His image, and clothed himself according to the likeness of the evil one, took the form of man and came down to him.

(The scholar Origen)

+ When the Lord asked the Jews: "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?*" They said to Him: the Son of David" (Matthew 22: 42). So they have learned from the prophets. He was indeed of the seed of David, yet "according to the flesh" from the Virgin Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph. When they so answered Him he said to them: "*How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord', saying: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?'. If David then calls Him 'Lord', how is He His Son?'*".

Do you marvel to see the Son of David his God? How about Mary who became the mother of Her God?

He is the Lord of David; He "*who being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped (7)*"; And He is the Son of David; having emptied Himself and took the form of a slave.

+ Let us ask the prophet who says: "*You are fairer than the sons of men*" (Psalm 45: 3); Where have you seen Him? There, I saw Him! Do you doubt that He who is equal to God is fairer than the sons of men?!

And let us ask him who says: "*We see Him, has no form or comeliness*" (Isaiah 52: 2 LXX). Where have you seen Him?

*"He emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, became in the likeness of men; humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"* There I saw Him!

Those two, in conformity full of peace, have both seen Him. What beauty is fairer than God? And what distortion is more than that of a crucified?!

+ He has forsaken his Father, so as not to appear equal to the Father; and emptied Himself and took the form of a slave. He also has  
forsaken His mother, the womb from which He was born according to the flesh, and attached Himself to a bride; namely to the church.

(St. Augustine)

+ Someone may say: I am a poor man, and might be sick in bed; Or, I am a woman, and was taken to the mill. Will I be forsaken? Have  
courage, man; ... The divine Judge does not look at appearances; He will not honor the learned above the simple, nor the rich more than the needy. ... If you are in a field, the angels will take you; They will not take the land-owners, and leave the laborers. ... Even if you are a slave, do not get offended; He who took the form of a slave, would He reject the slaves? ... Even if you are sick on bed, It is written” *There will be two in one bed, the one will be taken and the other will be left*” (Luke 17: 34). ... Even though you are unjustly committed to forced labor, man or woman, He who by His authority loosens those chained, will not pass you by.

He who released Joseph from slavery, freed him from prison and made him a ruler, will redeem you from your affliction, and bring you forth to the kingdom of heaven.

It is befitting of you to rejoice, work, and strive with zeal; You will lose nothing of your strife. Every prayer you pray, every psalm you sing will be put to your account; Chastity for the sake of God is counted is added to your credit.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

+ As Christ: “*took the form of a slave*”, and overcame the devil with humility; In the beginning, man fell through pride and vain glory by the  
deception of the serpent.

(St. Maccari the Great)

+ The bride of the song compares her beauty to the compassion of the Holy God, and imitates the Lord Christ in her work, becoming to others as how Christ was to men. Paul also imitates the Lord Christ in his readiness to sacrifice his life to give salvation to the children of Israel, saying: "*I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*" (Romans 9; 3)... We can alter these words to befit the bride of the song as follows: Such is the beauty of the Lord's Spirit and his love, who emptied Himself and took the form of a slave (7), delivering himself as a redemption for the whole world, so that we would live by his death; and "*though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

+ The bride of the song describes the groom that His shadow is on the bed "Our bed is green" (Song of Solomon 1: 16); Namely, that human nature perceives or will perceive that You will cover her with Your care. "You came", says the bride, "You, the Beautiful whose shadow in on our bed". For, if You do not cast Your shadow, in the form of a slave (7), when You reveal to us the rays of Your divine splendor, Who could behold Your splendid greatness? ... He said: "*You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live*" (Exodus 33: 20). Yet you have come to us now as a superb Person whom we can receive; You came to us incarnate as a man, to hide from our eyes the radiation of Your Divinity; ... how could the Eternal Nature unite with the mortal nature?! ... The shadow of His body took the role of an intercessor to grant us the light, we who used to live in darkness! The bride of the song uses the word "bed" to interpret in an allegoric way the union of the human nature with God.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

*“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (8)*

He received our manhood to proclaim His love, by His true passion, and His obedience in place of our disobedience, with His complete free will. He received the most horrible way of death – on the cross -- to realize our reconciliation with the Father. He received the disgrace of the cross to glorify us. He practiced love and humility.

- He emptied Himself, and hid his eternal glory by His incarnation.
- He readily took the form of man, although He is the living god.
- He readily took the last rows of humanity, having become a servant to all, longing to serve all.
- He suffered even to death.
- He chose the disgrace of the cross.; as the cross is the royal way to glory.

Emptying Himself of his glory, experiencing the disgrace of the cross, and obeying even to death; Christ was glorified above all, and carried us in Himself to partake of His glory. ... If Christ is our Role Model, we do not see a cross without a crown ... If we suffer together with Him, we shall, as well, reign together with Him.

Here, we notice the following:

1- St. Paul confirms that the complete fellowship of the Son in the divine nature, is not a kind of grasping, namely, He did not take it by force

from the Father; for He is one with the Father in eternity, being one with Him in the same essence.

2- Emptying Himself and taking a human body for the sake of our salvation, does not imply a change in the divine nature of the Son of God.

He emptied Himself, not through forsaking the divine nature, or through it being taken away from Him; but, by His own free will He carried our manhood. The incarnation deals with the will of the Son, and not with His nature. He became a perfect man, having indeed incarnated, partaking our human nature without any change in His divinity.

3- The Son emptied Himself to fill up our void. He became man, for us to become the children of God. ... We ask Him to fill up our void by dwelling in our life; perpetually hearing Him say: "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (John 10: 10).

4- The expression "**slave**" carries an amazing contradiction, with being "**in the form of God**".

5- St. Paul had a practical side beside having the depth of mind. He does not forsake us, as though on a cloud. He does not separate knowledge from work. Christianity, being in his eyes: life and faith; the doctrine of faith without life does not lift us up to anything. Having presented to us the measure of the heights in the glory of Christ, the apostle did not intend to leave us there.

+ "***He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross***" Someone may say: Well, Becoming obedient by His own free will, implies that He not equal to the one he obeyed. What an arrogant ignorance! His obedience would never belittle Him; as we ourselves could be obedient to our friends, without any effect on our honor!

He obeyed as a Son to His Father; He did not fall by His obedience into some kind of slavery; but by such behavior He revealed His

amazing sonhood above anything else. He honored the Father, not to be despised, Himself, but rather to be admired, and to appear as being a true Son to His Father above anything else..

No one honors God in this way. As much as He is exalted, and being greater than all, with no equal, He practiced humility. In honoring his Father not out of commitment, or against His will, He surpassed all; ... I am truly in a loss of words! ... It is indeed something great and inexpressible to say that He became a slave and gone through death. Yet there is something still greater and more amazing! He chose for Himself the most horrible way of death, full of shame and disgrace, to die on the cross; as it is written: "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*" (Deuteronomy 21: 23; Galatians 3: 13). That is why the Jews were very keen on killing Him by this way, to put Him in disgrace. So that if anyone is reluctant to forsake Him because of His death, he would certainly do so because of the way He died. They also let him be crucified between two robbers, to make him partake of their bad reputation, and to fulfill the saying of the Book: "*He was numbered with the transgressors*" (Isaiah 53: 12). Despite all that, the Truth shined with more splendor, more greater than what they expected, not by just killing Him, but by killing Him in this particular way, in an attempt to confirm that He is more defiled than all men; Yet they certainly did not realize their goal.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ If the Lord has not become man, we would not be redeemed of sin, we would not be resurrected from the dead, and we would not be raised up to heaven; but we would rather remain dead underneath the earth, and laid in hell.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Because the Word God took our body, and yet remained God, the apostle Paul says that, being found in the appearance as a man,  
because He was God – as I said – in our human likeness; He did not take a body without a soul, as some heretics claimed, but he rather took a rational soul.
  
- + Even if it is said that He suffered in His body, He did not receive the sufferings in His divine nature, but only in His body prone to suffering.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + According to the Book of Micah: “*Behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down, and tread on the high places of the earth*” (Micah 1: 3). That is why it is said that God came down when He condescended to care for the human weakness. That appears particularly in our Lord and Savior, who, “*not regarding equality with God as something to be grasped; but emptied Himself and took the form of a slave*”. He came down, because: “*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven*” (John 3: 13). The Lord came down, not only to care for us, but also to take over Himself what is for us, having taken the form of a slave. Although He Himself is unseen in His nature, being equal to the Father, yet He took a seen form, and “*was found in the appearance of man*”.

The scholar Origen believes that the Lord Christ, having obeyed even to the point of death, He proclaimed that He did not do that out of necessity nor commitment, but by His own free will.

- + What does it mean: “*became obedient*” (8); and “*delivered Himself for us all*” (Romans 8: 32)? It means that the Lord made Himself a lamb, for “*Wisdom has built her house*” (Proverb 9: 1); “*and became obedient to the point of death*”.



Everything you read about Christ has been realized, not out of necessity, but by His own free will.

- + He was glorified when He came to the cross, and received death. He Himself says: *“Father, the hour has come, Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You”* (John 17: 1). Even the passion of the cross were for Him Glory, albeit not the glory of haughtiness, but of humility.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The work for the sake of men has been according to the goodness of the father by the Son.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Having been mortal because of our sins, He condescended to die for us to restore us to life in Him.

(St. Jerome)

*“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name”* (9)

After recording the journey of humility from the divine throne to the cross of shame, the apostle records His victorious journey of return from Hades, over His enemies, to the throne of the Father. The following are the consequences of His two journeys:

- 1- **“God has exalted Him”**. He exalted Him from the dead to the land of the living; And exalted Him from the living to the height of heaven, and made Him sit on His right side.

- 2- **“and given Him the name which is above every name”**. The name ‘Jesus’, meaning (Jehovah saves).
- 3- **“that at the name of ‘Jesus’ every knee should bow”**. At His name every being should bow whoever he is: All those in heaven, namely, the angelic hosts; and all those on earth, namely, the monks, the cross-bearers, the righteous, and the lovers of His holy name, will all bow out of pleasure, love, and longing. And those under the earth will bow against their will, when they discover the truth of His divinity and authority.
- 4- **“and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”**. The word ‘confess’ in the Greek version bears the meaning of praising, glorifying, and thanksgiving. Every tongue will confess: that of the righteous will praise, glorify, and thank Him; and that of the wicked will confess His Lordship.

By His incarnation He took our place, and became our Representative, so that, when the Father exalts Him, and gives Him a name above every name, He would exalt us together with Him, being members of His holy body.

The apostle Paul says: *“He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (Ephesians 1: 20, 21).

He carried the name ‘**Jesus**’ when His condescension was realized by His incarnation; and when He was numbered with the transgressors, not for any sin He has committed, but to bear our sins and iniquities in His body. This name became the secret of conquest, and victory for those believing in Him, over the hosts of darkness that he conquered on His cross.

- + The word '**Jesus**' is glorious and is worthy of every worship. It is the name above every name.

(The scholar Origen)

- + "*Tell me, O you whom I love*" (Song 1: 7); I so call You, because Your name is above every name (9); It is indescribable, incomprehensible by human mind. Because it reveals Your goodness, my relationship with You is spiritual.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + The Holy Book calls the lord, not by one name, nor only by the names concerning His divinity; nor those pertaining to His greatness, but it sometimes uses His natural features as a Person: the **Son, the true Son, God's only begotten Son, the power of God, His wisdom, and His Word**; and some other times it refers to the abundance of ways by which His grace reaches His seekers, as **the Shepherd, the King, the Physician, the Groom, the Way, the Door, the Fountain, the Bread, the Ax, and the Rock**. These names do not pertain to His Nature, but to His several activities of mercy toward everyone of His creatures, and responses to the need of every one who ask Him.

(St. Basil the Great)

Knowing for sure that it is the Son and not the Father who was raised from the dead, yet the resurrection of the Son is the work of both the Father and the Son. It is obvious that the Father raised Him to life, according to the Psalm saying: "*O Lord, Be merciful to Me, and raise Me up, that I may repay them*" (Psalm 41: 10); and according to what is written: "*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name*" (9). Did Christ also raised Himself? Surely He so did; having talked about the temple as a symbol of His

body, He says: *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”* (John 2: 19); ;  
and *“I have power to lay it down, and I have power to  
take it again; No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and I have the power  
to take it again”* (John 10: 18).

(St. Augustine)

*“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”* (10)

His amazing work of salvation became the subject of praise by the heavenly creatures,  
of the salvation to men, and of the horror to the  
demons. Before His name ‘Jesus’, meaning (Jehovah saves), all of them will bow.

The heavenly creatures will bow at His name, having discovered the secret of the  
hidden wisdom; and the earthly creatures will bow to thank  
Him for reconciling them with the Father; and the demons will bow in terror and  
humiliation, having lost their authority and kingdom in the  
hearts of men.

He probably also means all mankind: those who crossed over to paradise or heaven,  
those who are still striving on earth, and those who died  
and became in graves; All bow at the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

+ His second coming, will not be silent as when He first came clothed in humility; He  
will ultimately come proclaimed in power.

(St. Cyprian)

*“and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the  
glory of God the Father”* (11)

All creation will confess and testify that He is the Lord of absolute authority. In that, there would be no contradiction with the Father; for He is One with Him in essence. What He does is in the name of the Father, and for His glory.

- + What is clearer and more obvious? The Lord has not been before in a lowly position, then was exalted; but He as God took the form of a slave, namely, He humbled Himself. Where therefore, is the wage of virtue in these things? For, if He was, being God, became man, and despite His condescendence, it is still said that He is exalted, how could He be exalted when He is God? ... He is in no need for increase; not as understood by the followers of the heretic Arius ... What is the grace that He receives, when He is the Grantor of grace? Or how He did He receive a name to be worshipped, when He is the One perpetually worshipped by name?

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

(To be continued in Ch 2 Part 2)

(Ch 2 Part 2)

### 3- SHINE AS LIGHT IN THE WORLD:

*“Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (12)*

The apostle does not present a new commandment, nor exhorts them as though they have broken an old one; for they always carried the feature of obedience; but he seeks from them more of it, whether in his presence or his absence in flesh.

+ It is befitting of us when we present advise to do it with commendation, to make it more acceptable. The way Paul did. Listen to him say:

“**my beloved**”; he does not say “**Be obedient**”, except after commending them by saying: “**as you have always obeyed**”; meaning: I am

not presenting other people as examples for you, but I present you yourselves as an example.

+ Why does he say: “**how much more in my absence**”? Yes, You probably have done in my presence to honor me; But doing it in my

absence with more zeal, it would be a clear proof that what you have done was not for my sake, but for that of God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**”; Salvation is a continuous live movement, and an unceasing behavior until they reach the full measure of the stature of Christ. There is no salvation without persistence and watching. As to **fear and trembling**, they refer to great awareness and firmness with the soul, and a perception of the truth of the battle against the hosts of darkness.

**“Work out your salvation”**: Man has a role in working out salvation. Salvation is a mutual endeavor between God, who brings forth in us the desire for salvation, grants us the help to overcome sin, and plants virtue in us; and man who consummate the salvation by doing the following:

- 1- Receives the salvation presented to us on the cross.
- 2- Receives the baptism as death, burial, and resurrection together with Christ.
- 3- Receives the sacrament of Meron (the holy ointment); practice the sacrament of repentance and confession, and that of the Eucharist.
- 4- Translate the theoretical faith to practical faith; meaning the good works; the faith working with love.

**“with fear and trembling”**. Not the fear of humiliation of the slaves, but that of the children. The fear and awareness lest we would be deceived by the ancient serpent, namely, the crafty ego, to fall and perish and bring grief to the heart of the Father.

+ Paul, himself, had such fear, when he says: *“... lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Corinthians

9: 27). If, without the help of fear, temporal things would not be realized, how much more would be the spiritual things? I would like to

know, who could manage to learn the letters without fear? Or who could manage to master any kind of art without fear?

Where does fear come from? If we count God as present everywhere, hear everything, sees everything, not only what is practiced by

work, but even what goes on secretly in the heart and the depths of the soul; *“a Discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart”*

(Hebrew 4: 12). If we perceive this, we would never do anything, utter anything, or even imagine anything evil.

Tell me, if you have to stand before the ruler, would you not stand in fear? How could you then stand in the presence of God, without due fear and trembling? Do not despise His longsuffering; as it is intended to lead you to repentance.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Paul, himself, worked out his salvation with fear and trembling; walked very cautiously amid the traps, nets, and evil desires of this world; sought the grace and help of the Lord, and hoped for His mercy, to be saved by His grace.

(St. Maccar the Great)

+ Grace is like rain; the low land become filled with water, while the high land dry out.. Why then would you marvel to hear that *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (James 4: 6). Saying *“with fear and trembling”* therefore means with humility. *“Do not be haughty, but fear”* (Romans 11: 20). Fear, to get filled; ... Do not be haughty lest you dry up.

(St. Augustine)

*“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (13)

It is the grace of God that sanctifies the will, and grants the strength to do good; namely, realize the good will by the practical behavior. God is the Creator of the soul and the body, the Grantor of the will, the Giver of the strength and all the energies in man. He so does for the sake of His good pleasure when man becomes an icon of Him.



**“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do”**. This verse should bring peace into our hearts, draw our attention to God who works in us; and grant us the spirit of hope. Feeling that the Almighty God is close to us, capable of protecting us against the wars of the devil, our hearts will be filled with comfort.

**“for His good pleasure”**. He is pleased in His children, the way He is pleased in His only begotten Son.

St. John Chrysostom wonders how would the Psalmist say: *“Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling”* (Psalm 2: 11). If it is God who works in us, why would we consummate our salvation with fear and trembling?

- + Do not be uncomfortable to hear *“with fear and trembling”*; It does not mean to stop working in despair, nor to assume that virtue is something difficult to achieve; but it means to follow its lead, and not to waste your time in vain things; because if we do, God will do everything for you. If we believe that *“It is God who works in us”*, In our turn we should have the firm, steadfast, and not slothful mind.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Do not fear, You are not defeated; Both the will of the heart and the work are from God; When we have the will, He will increase it. As an example, If I intend to do some good works, It is He who does them, and so He does in our will. According to the apostle Paul, God counts all our good works as grants of His grace.

Calling them ‘grants’, He does not belittle the role of the free will, but He gives it to us; Saying *“Works in us to will and to do”*, does not deprive us of the free will, but reveals that, by our good work itself, we increase our heartily desire in the will. Work brings forth work; and, on the contrary, non-work will bring forth non-work. When you

give alms, it exhorts you to give more; and when you do not give alms, you will become more reluctant to give.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Do all things without murmuring and disputing” (14)*

Here, the apostle presents to us seven advices which would help us to “*work out our salvation with fear and trembling*”:

- 1- Do everything without murmuring, (14)
- 2- and without disputing (14)
- 3- Become blameless (15),
- 4- harmless (15),
- 5- without fault (15);
- 6- In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (15);
- 7- Holding fast to the word of life (16)

The apostle exhorts us to practice our new life, and to keep the commandment with joy, in obedience that springs up from the depths of the heart; without hesitation, murmuring, or disputing. God gave us His commandment to find in it the pleasure of obedience to Him as our Beloved; not to become the subject of theoretical dispute that would corrupt our inner peace. As the foolish disputes would not let the eyes see the truth, nor enjoy the sweetness of fellowship with the light.

“***murmuring***” refers to the hidden complaint and hesitation, stirred up in the soul. Murmuring is considered as the first stage of rebellion, resulting from the weakness of love, lack of perseverance, and narrowness of the heart.

- + Do not you notice that he teaches them not to murmur? Let us leave the murmuring to the bad slaves with no principles. Tell me about a son who would keep on murmuring while working the things of his father! ... Why would one murmur, when he works with his free will, and not against it? It would be better for him not to anything at all, than to do it with murmur, which would corrupt the work itself.
  
- + Murmur is unbearable, very disturbing; close to blasphemy ... He who keeps on murmuring is a denier of God, and hence a blasphemer.
  
- + Finding himself with no authority, the devil draws us away from what is right; and attempts to corrupt our reward by any means. He looks  
     for an opportunity to plant pride or vain glory into our mind; and if not, he inserts murmuring, and if not, he brings forth doubts and  
     confusion.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Dispute, namely, debate and discussion with pride, and holding fast to one's point of view, are all against the loving and holy Christian life. Dispute here came in Greek as 'doubt' (see 1 Timothy 2: 8). Dispute is stirred up because of a feeling of haughtiness of one against another.

- + "*and disputing*", means the continuous debate, whether it is for a good cause or a bad one. So do not enter into disputes.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"that you may become blameless, and harmless, children of God without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world"*

(15)

Receiving the holy will from God, consummating it by His power working in us, and living without murmuring and disputes, we would enjoy a holy life which reflects on our inner depths, as well as on our behavior toward our neighbors, and toward God Himself. Hence he says: *“that you may become blameless”*, namely, bear an inner holiness, purity of heart; and no place for a blame in our depths. As to saying: *“and harmless”*, it means simple behavior toward the others, and bearing no harm to anyone. *“Children of God without fault”*; namely, to reveal our enjoyment of the fellowship of the divine nature.

By such a life with its three aspects we would become like stars, that draw their light from the Sun of righteousness, shining light in the world.

The Greek word translated as **“lights”** here, means the sun, the moon, and the stars.

**“harmless”**; namely, not revealing what we do not have inside, away from any craftiness or deception; nor mixing the evil with good.

**“children of God”**. which, while implying honor and privilege; yet it implies responsibility as well; because the children of God have to liken their Father in goodness. We should live our life with no fault, to have a portion with the rows of the saints.

**“in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”**. If crookedness and perversion are natural in the life of the children of the devil; light and shining, on the other hand is natural in that of the children of Christ.

+ The saintly fathers before us, having possessed the word of life, have become the light of the world.

(St. Cyril the Great)

St. John Chrysostom believes that the children of God shine as light among crooked and perverse generation, like the stars that shine in the dark night, and considered blameless because of their beauty. Yes, the darkness around the stars, even reflect a greater splendor on the stars; So are those who walk upright in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

The scholar Origen believes that the blameless children of God walk among a crooked and perverse generation, as did the children of Israel  
In the Red Sea, when water could not harm them.

- + If you are the spiritual son of Israel, you can walk on dry land in the midst of the sea. If you are committed to walk among a crooked and perverse people, holding the word of life like the light of the Sun of glory, the water of sin would not flow over you, and the wave of fame would not be able to strike you. He who is a heathen (Egyptian), a subject of Pharaoh (the symbol of the devil), would drown in the sea of iniquities, Whereas he who follows Christ, and walks like Him, the water will form a wall on his right and on his left (Exodus 14: 22); and he himself will walk on dry land (Exodus 15: 19), will not divert to the right or to the left, until he reaches freedom, and sing the song of conquest, saying: *"I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously"* (Exodus 15: 1), by our lord Jesus Christ, glory and authority be to Him forever, Amen. ... *"The horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the water of the sea upon them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground"* (Exodus 15: 19).

(The scholar Origen)

- + Although we became darkness because of sin, yet God shined on us beauty and splendor through His exalted grace. The soul crosses over from fault to the truth,

and the image of its dark life would change to exalted grace. The apostle Paul – the (bride) of Christ – moved from darkness to light, as he said to Timothy his disciple (1 Timothy 1: 13); he was found worthy to become beautiful, although he was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. He also says that Christ came to the world to give light to those in the darkness. He did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance; those who made them shine as light in the world (Philippians 2: 15), through the washing of the second birth that cleansed them of their early dark image.

- + Let us have for ourselves the light of knowledge, by planting the righteousness, and harvesting the fruit of life. Work is the son of meditation, something we learn among other things, to differentiate between the true and the vain light. ... Let us beware of falling into evil as though we are falling into goodness... Let us, ourselves become light, according to what the great Light, the Lord Christ, said to His disciples: “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5: 14); ... Let us shine like light in the world through holding to the word of life, namely, let us become a power that gives life to others; ... Let us hold fast to divinity, and draw light from the greater Light; ... Let us walk toward it, lest we stumble in the dark mountains; ... As long as it is daylight, “*let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy*” (Romans 13: 13); which are the evil works of the enemy.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + Let us shine with our light, in hot spirit, acquiring salvation from the hosts of darkness that brings us down to death: “*for the wage of sin is death*” (Romans 6: 23); so that the words of the apostle would also apply to us, saying: “*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*” (1 Corinthians 15: 54-55). ... I wish, by our obedience to the Sun of justice, we would be enlightened by His life, be qualified for understanding and strength, to be justified in him. I wish we, not only glitter as snow, for God promised us: “*Though*

*your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*" (Isaiah 1: 18); but should shine our light on those who approach us. I wish we pay attention to the words of the Lord Himself, saying: "*You are the light of the world.*"

(St. Basil the Great)

#### **4- LOVE AND JOY FOR THE SHEPHERD AND THE FLOCK:**

*"Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain or labored in vain"* (16)

The secret of the inner enlightenment and the shining to the world is holding fast to the word of life. namely, to the divine commandment, that exhorts us to serve the others with joy. Some believe that the apostle here, had in mind the towers built in ports in the old on which fire was ignited by night to guide the ships to port.

The apostle, beside presenting the word of God to the Philippians, trusting that it would be the source of joy to them, hopes to rejoice and be proud of God's work in them on the great day of the lord, counting that his race was not in vain, and his sufferings were not in vain, He hopes that they will be his crown in that day.

+ What does he mean by saying "rejoicing" or (boasting)? I partake of your good works and virtues, which not only save you, but bring me splendor as well. What an amazing kind of boasting, O blessed Paul! You have been scourged, driven out, and insulted for our sake; yet, you count it your right to boast on the day of Christ that your race and labor were not in vain.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Yes, and If I am being poured out as a drink of offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice in you all” (17)*

Sailors in the old days, especially when they confront mighty storms, used when they reach their destination port in peace, to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to their god, which they vowed in their anguish. The apostle sees the people of God, having reached the heavenly port in peace, offer the sacrifice of their faith; on which he would be poured like the drink of offering, a sign of joy amid the suffering of slaughtering.

- + He says: You became a sacrifice and I became a drink of offering! What a blessed soul! He believes that offering a soul to God is better than offering an ox.
- + Yes. You, offering your faith as a sacrifice, and I, offering my ministry as a drink of offering, we rejoice and be glad together.

(St. John Chrysostom)

As the divine Word emptied Himself for our sake, it is befitting of us on our side, to empty ourselves. Carrying the cross, or emptying oneself is the way of the new life in the Lord Christ. Here, the apostle Paul presents to us three examples of persons who emptied themselves for the sake of Christ:

- \* St. Paul: by partaking of the sacrifice of Christ.
- \* St. Timothy: by his obedience and ministering to others.
- \* St. Epaphroditus: by his holy love and work in Christ.



1- **St. Paul:** Perceiving the need of the people for an example, an interpreter in flesh, he clarified to them how the practical practice of the gospel is realized. Pouring himself as a drink offering on the sacrifice of their faith, he showed how he rejoiced and became glad together with them(17). In the Old Covenant, the priest used to pour wine on the sacrifice as a drink offering (Exodus 29: 40); Wine referred to the spiritual joy. The apostle Paul counts his daily sufferings even to death, like wine poured by the Lord Christ (the Greater High Priest) in the life of His suffering people. Paul rejoiced in Christ; and by the Lord Christ, he became a source of joy. By faith he, together with the people have partaken of the sacrifice of the Lord Christ. Paul counted the faith of the Philippians, their sufferings, and their ministry, a live sacrifice; which, as a priest he offers to God.

2- **St. Timothy:** (19-23). By his obedience and partnership in the ministry of the apostle Paul, he emptied himself. St. Paul, like a father gave birth to Timothy as a son; who in turn adopts the life of his father.

St. Paul refers to how difficult it is to find in anyone else, such a group of the shining features found in St. Timothy. Despite his weak health (1 Timothy 5: 23), his young age (1 Timothy 4: 12), and the unbecoming treatment by some (1 Corinthians 16: 10), St. Timothy had strength of inner insight, eloquence, compassion, and success in confronting the rebellious groups.

Some believe that the word 'obedience' in the New Testament, is a Pauline term (Romans 6: 17; 16: 19; 2 Corinthians 7: 15; 10: 6; 2 Thessalonians 3: 4; Philemon 21; Hebrew 5: 8, etc.); when in all the four gospels, it came only five times (Mark 1: 27; 4: 41;; Matthew 8: 27; Luke 8: 25; 17: 6). Finding its roots in the expression of 'hearing'; the apostle Paul created the expression "*the obedience to the faith*" (Romans 1: 5; 16: 26; and "*the hearing of faith*" (Galatians 3: 2, 5); by which he expresses the opening on the will of God according to the requirements of faith.

3- **St. Epaphroditus:** (25-30). He was a superb example of the holy emotions as a way for growth in the divine grace. And with such flaming emotions, he was distressed by the sadness of the Philippians when they heard about his illness almost unto death. He eventually became a bishop of Philippi, and died a martyr. He was a partner in ministry and a soldier in company with the apostle Paul (26).

***“I am glad and rejoice with you all”***. It is the sound of joy sent by the apostle Paul from his prison in Rome, to be heard in Philippi. There is no doubt that joy, being a commandment of God to us, grants us the strength to confront temptations,

*“for the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me”* (18)

Rejoicing in their salvation and reaching the heavenly port in peace, he asks them to rejoice together with him; his joy being like the wine that gives joy to its drinkers.

+ He says; It would not be bad for me to suffer; but, on the contrary I should rather rejoice in going to Christ. Would you not rejoice for my sake? ***“Rejoice with me”***. . . . I wish we, as well, rejoice when we see a righteous man die; and rejoice even more to see a hopelessly evil person die; as the former would go to heaven to get the reward of his good works; while the later would cease to do his evil works.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send timothy to you shortly, that I also be encouraged when I know your state”* (19)

He promise to send to them his son in the Lord shortly, if God allows, to return to him with their good news, to exult together with them, and

to partake of their joy.

+ Notice how he refers everything to Christ, even sending Timothy; saying: *“I trust in the Lord Jesus”*; namely, I trust that God will make it easy for me to do that, to encourage me when I know your state. As I made you happy when you heard my good news concerning the things for which you prayed, for the progress of the gospel, and shame for its enemies; when, by the way they meant to do me harm, it turned out into joy for me; The same way I wish to get encouraged by knowing your state. Here he exhorts them to rejoice and feel comfort in his chains, that actually brought him great pleasure.

+ What a great longing for the Macedonians; the same he had for the Thessalonians, to whom he said: *“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time,... endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire”* (1 Thessalonians 2: 17). Here he says to the Philippians: *“I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly”* to know your state. That shows his care for them; Being not able to be with them personally, and having not known their news by the proclamation of the Spirit, he sends his disciples, for he could not endure to stay any longer without knowing their state;. This is the way the soul that cares for the others would feel, and strive for their sake.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ That is how the shepherd mourn, when he searches among (the hired hands), and finds no one who faithfully loves the flock of Christ; to find only those who *“seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus”* (21). That is why, because of his great brotherly care for the flock, he had to send his son in the Lord, and to stay himself among (the hired hands). ... There are (hired hands) among us, as well, known only by the Lord; about whom He Himself said: *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”* (Matthew 7: 16).

(St. Augustine)

*“For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state” (20)*

In Paul’s eyes, Timothy was an incomparable person, in his ministry, faithfulness, and giving. Who bears his same spirit and heart.

According to St. Augustine, the apostle talks here about the multitude of (hired hands) who preached for their own interest, and the rarity of the shepherd who preaches the Truth, seeking, not what is his own, but what is of Christ Jesus.

- + He honors the Philippians by sending Timothy to them; *“For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state”*. ... I could send others, but there is no one like him; he is *“like-minded”*.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (21)*

Here, the apostle refers to the multitude of those who *“preach Christ, even from envy and strife”* (1: 15); or he so says, counting the others as such if compared to Timothy.

- + The good preacher tells you to pluck the grapes from the vine; whereas the evil preacher tells you to pluck them from over the fence. Although the bunch of grapes may grow on a branch of the vine surrounded by thorns, yet it did not grow from the thorns. Anyway, when you are hungry, beware while you pluck the grapes lest you

hurt your hands by the thorns. ... Be wise, listen to what is good in the preacher, but do not follow what is evil in him.

- + Put on the wedding garment; So I say to you who have not yet put it on. You are already inside the wedding banquet; Yet you have not put on the wedding garment to honor the Groom. ... You seek what is your own, and not the things which are of Christ Jesus (21). The wedding garment is meant to honor the unity between the Groom (Christ) and the bride (the church). Therefore, honor the Groom and the bride; For if you present the fitting honor to both, you will become their children.
  
- + It is said on the tongue of the Lord Himself to the spirit that commits adultery behind Him: [You were hoping for a greater thing by separating yourself from me]. For the sinner by his transgression or by his sin, cares only for himself, intending to please himself for his own profit. While blaming those who seek what is for their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus (21), He commands love, that "*does not seek its own*" (1 Corinthians 13: 5).
  
- + If the ark (of Noah) symbolizes the church, you will see in the present great flood in the world, that the church embraces by necessity the two kinds: It embraces both the raven and the dove. The raven refers to those who seek what is their own, while the dove refers to those who seek what is of Christ Jesus.

(St. Augustine)

*"But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father, he served with me in the gospel" (22)*

The Philippians were well aware of the strong relationship between the apostle Paul and his disciple Timothy in the Lord; through the ministry of the gospel of Christ. They know how he counts him as a true son and not as a (hired hand) (Acts 16: 1-3; 17: 14).

- + He introduced Timothy to them to honor him ; the same way he did when he wrote to the Corinthians, saying: *“No one despise him; ... for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do”* (1 Corinthian 16: 11, 10). He so said, not only because he cares for him, but for their own sake to receive a great reward.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me”* (23)

Being a captive, he was not free, nor able to fix a date; Otherwise, he would rather go to them himself (24). But wishing to have his heart at peace, he intended to send to them his beloved son.

*“But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly”* (24)

- + Sending Timothy was not that he does not wish to come to them himself; but to be encouraged when he gets to know their state.... He says: *“I trust in the Lord”*; Look at how, in everything he trust in the Lord, and does not say anything on his own.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need”* (25)

For fear that he would not be able to send Timothy soon, and in order to bring them the spirit of joy, he found himself committed to send to

them Epaphroditus, his brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier in the battle of the gospel, and the messenger assigned for ministering to them and to him.

Timothy and Epaphroditus to be sent by the apostle Paul to Philippi were not of the apostles of Jesus, nor performers of miracles and wonders, but they were faithful ministers.

- + He sent Epaphroditus with commendations like those of Timothy, concentrated in two points: the first is that he sincerely cares for their state (20), and the second is that he was justified in the work of the gospel. He not only called him his brother, and fellow worker, he even called him a fellow soldier, showing how he experienced and shared with him the dangers of ministry.

(St. John Chrysostom).

*“Since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick” (26)*

The Philippians became sad to hear that Epaphroditus was sick, and this made him sad, as well.

- + By this Paul meant to concentrate on a very important point, which is that Epaphroditus knew well how beloved he was by them, which is something important in love. He says: after being cured of his sickness, he became sad because he could come to see you to put their hearts at ease. Paul delayed sending the two ministers, not out of slothfulness on his part, but because he could not spare Timothy who was indispensable, and could not send Epaphroditus because of his sickness.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him,  
and not only on him but on me also,  
lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (27)*

Amid his suffering in prison, inability to move freely, and the sickness of Epaphroditus almost unto death, God had mercy and cured him, lest he would have sorrow upon sorrow, for he was in need of his help in ministry.

St. John Chrysostom says: Some would probably wonder, why did the apostle say: *“but God had mercy on him”*, although he said that with departure one would be together with Christ, which is far better? He answers this by saying that, the same way the apostle Paul felt that he is committed to remain in flesh for their sake; God had mercy on Epaphroditus for the sake of ministry, to gain a multitude of souls.

*“Therefore I sent him the more eagerly that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful” (28)*

Here the apostle Paul reveals an amazing mutual relationship of love. Despite his great need for Epaphroditus, yet he eagerly sent him to the Philippians to make them rejoice to see him again after his cure from his illness that made them sad. And the apostle himself would find in their joy much comfort for himself, and becomes less sorrowful.

According to St. John Chrysostom, they would rejoice to hear the good news of the cure of their beloved Epaphroditus; but their joy would be more by seeing him among them.

On saying: *“I may be less sorrowful”* and not ‘without sorrow’, according to *St. John Chrysostom* says: [He who says: *“Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I do not burn with indignation?”* (2 Corinthians 11: 29). How could such a person ever be utterly free of sorrow?!].



*“Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem” (29)*

He asks them to receive him with gladness, not for the sake of their friendship with him, but for the sake of his ministry to the Lord; to hold him in esteem, as a faithful minister hiding in the lord.

+ Receive him in a way that is befitting to saints, with all gladness. The apostle did all that for their sake, as well as for the sake of those he sent to them; as the great benefit is both for him who works, and for him who receives the good work.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me” (30)*

Again the apostle Paul reveals his emotions enflamed with love. Many Philippians wished they could serve him while in prison in Rome, but, as the situation did not allow them to do so, they felt guilty toward him. But, according to St. Chrysostom, as Epaphroditus risked his own safety, came close to death, and went through many serious dangers to reach Paul to serve him and supply his needs in his prison; the apostle counted that what Epaphroditus did was on behalf of all the Philippians; his work of love was as though they all did it.

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**AN INSPIRATION FROM PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 2** (Chapter 2)

## A CHURCH CHORUS AT CALVARY (GOLGOTHA)

- + I wonder if the captive apostle has set forth together with the people,  
as an exulting church chorus to Calvary;  
Or his prison cell itself has turned into Calvary!
  
- + I see him conduct a unique church chorus.  
A chorus enjoying the word of sermon, whose essence is an unceasing comfort in  
Christ.  
I see him practice everything with the spirit of love, that dissolves all sufferings.  
Before them all, the wounds of the crucified are open;  
To let all enter into the His love and compassion.
  
- + Together with the people, the apostle sings a song of love  
All of them practice the spirit of unity;  
The diverse strings of the violin were playing in harmony;  
To produce a heavenly symphony before which even the heavenly creatures are  
shaken.
  
- + All stand together in harmony to sing a new song;  
Standing together before the Crucified, all words flew away from their mouths!  
What love has brought You down to us, O the One whom heaven cannot  
accommodate?  
How could you consent to become a Son of Man, O the only begotten Son of the  
Father?  
We often have our souls moan inside us.  
Why should we have such a weak body!  
Behold, the Creator of all became flesh;  
Shared everything with us, except for sin;  
You have lifted our status up, O Creator of the heavenlies and the earthlies!

- + You became Man, and occupied the last row of mankind;  
Your love motivated You to become a slave.  
To set out of us, children to Your Father.
  
- + You delivered Your precious blood to acquire us a bride for Yourself.  
By the cross, You entered into the circle of our curse;  
In order to destroy the strongholds of the curse;  
To destroy its gates;  
To set us free and to carry us forth to Your heavenly paradise.
  
- + You became the Leader of our procession, O Grantor of conquest.  
You made us shine among a crooked and perverse generation;  
The darkness could not conceal Your light in us.  
You set out of us splendid stars in the midst of the darkness of this world.
  
- + Glory be to You, O the amazing good Shepherd.  
You set out of us Your exulted body, amazing in its love;  
How could we pay back Your love, humility, and might?!

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## CHAPTER 3

### REJOICING IN CHRIST

In the first chapter, the apostle Paul reveals the sufferings as a good atmosphere to enjoy rejoicing; In the second chapter, he reveals the ministry as true joy; Here, in the third chapter, he proclaims the nature of this joy, that it is in the Lord, a fellowship in His suffering and His resurrection from the dead; namely, a joy on a heavenly level.

St. Paul tells us that man's life is the backbone of God's plan, in whom He has pleasure as a son and an exulting living icon of Himself. Therefore I am committed to bear this plan which is my heavenly life in Christ, which also has its positive and negative costs:

(1) The negative cost of the exulting new life:

**1- To be aware against the literality of worship (2-3):** Namely, getting rid of the spiritless formalities. The believers of Jewish origin

taught that all new believers have to submit literally to the Mosaic law, particularly to the rite of circumcision, without which, according to them, salvation would not be realized. St. Paul attacked those people, calling them by the same name they used to call the Gentiles: "dogs"; and compared their circumcision to some heathen practices, like cutting off certain body members, which he calls '*mutilation*'. The apostle could have boasted his own literal keeping of the Mosaic law; but by his own free will he forsook all that, for he intended to bring them over to the New Israel, the church of Christ, in which God is worshipped by the Spirit.

**2- Not trusting in the flesh but in the Spirit**

**3- All things are counted as rubbish if compared to the Lord Christ.**

**4- Forgetting those things which are behind, reaching things that are ahead.**

**5- The glory of this world is shame.**

(2) The positive cost of the exulting new life:

**1- Worshipping by the Spirit.**

**2- Hoping to transform our lowly bodies** to the likeness of the glorious body of Christ (21). Despite not trusting in the flesh, yet we

would not despise our lowly bodies. There will be no change in its material, but they will have the experience of Christ resurrected from

the dead, His glorified body. They will cross over from lowliness to glory, and will receive non-corruption.

**3- Gaining Christ, our satisfaction (8), and our righteousness (9).**

**4- Growing in the knowledge of Christ, the crucified and resurrected from the dead (10, 11); To** have the fellowship of His

sufferings, being conformed to His death; by which we would become like Him. Faith (10) grants us the fellowship in the life and the

resurrection of Christ; It is an opening on the work of God in our life, to receive Christ our righteousness. It is also befitting of us to

perpetually strive to reach the heavenly prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (12-16); to perpetually strive, for we are not yet perfect.

**5- Our citizenship is in heaven (20).** It is befitting of us to live as citizens of the most exalted state, the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord

has indeed dwelt on earth in flesh more than 33 years; Yet that did not make out of Him an earthly citizen, holding fast to the world. We, having become members of His body, should never forget that we acquired His citizenship. *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12: 2).

1- The inability of the law to realize joy	1 - 11
2- A race to reach perfection	12 - 16
3- The prize – a heavenly citizenship	17 – 21

**1- THE INABILITY OF THE LAW TO REALIZE JOY:**

*“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things again, and it is a safeguard for you (1)*

Now, the apostle Paul writes to His beloved congregation of the church of Philippi seeking from them to rejoice in their ministry. It is amazing that he writes his epistle while shackled in chains, and sends it to a church, although “*safeguarded*” and flourishing, Yet disturbed by those believers of Jewish origin. Troubles from within or without, should not deprive the believer or the minister of his joy in the Lord. The more we exult inside, the more we would become ready to receive suffering for His sake; and no power could ever separate us from Him.

+ Paul put the hearts of the Philippians at ease, after being greatly depressed. They did not know how things were going on with Paul;

assuming that they were getting worse for him, as well as for Epaphroditus, and for the ministry as a whole. Having put their hearts at ease, and confirmed to them that things were getting better on all fronts, he says: “*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord*”. It is as though he says to them: You have no cause for being depressed: Epaphroditus for whom you were sad is now with you, so is Timothy, and I myself intends to come to you; and above all, the gospel is progressing. What more do you want? Rejoice!

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“My brethren”** This term is used to express great love, cherishment, brotherhood, and fellowship for the Philippians. He calls the Galatians “**My children**” (Galatians 4: 19); while here, he calls the Philippians “*My brethren*”. When he intends to correct a certain thing, or to show his compassion, he calls the addressees ‘his children’; and when he addresses with great reverence, he calls them ‘his brethren’.

**“Rejoice in the Lord”**; Joy is the golden thread that goes through the whole epistle. The cause for joy is not the apparent success, nor the outer possibilities, but *“in the Lord”*. There is no more secure stronghold for the human soul than to rejoice in the Lord. *“It is a safeguard for you”*. How amazing it is when the apostle writes to them about joy, while he is going through anguish and suffering, which in turn is accompanied by sadness. But suffering together with joy is not realized except in the Lord.

**“Rejoice in the Lord” ... Why?**

- a- For the Lord is “the Pantocrator” (the Controller of all), and “the Philanthropic” (or Lover of Mankind).
- b- For the Lord cares for all our affairs, and grants us everything.
- c- For, underneath His cross we lay all our sins, transgressions, and worries, to be carried by the Crucified with pleasure and compassion.
- d- For He saves us from our enemies, the seen and the unseen; turn evil into good, and the afflictions into blessings.
- e- For rejoicing in the Lord grants us strength in our spiritual strife.
- f- For He is the One to enlighten our darkness.

+ **“Finally, my brethren, Rejoice in the Lord”**. He well says **“in the Lord”**, and not according to the world, which is no joy. All troubles according to Christ bring forth joy.

+ **“It is no trouble for me to write the same things again; and it is a safeguard for you; Beware of dogs”**. Do you notice how he uses perseverance to present an advice. After presenting great commendation, and showing admiration, he then presents the advice, then again he repeats the commendation. Because this way of talk probably was difficult for them to appreciate, hence his attempt to cover every aspect of it.

(St. John Chrysostom)



*“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!” (2)*

“**Beware**”, namely be alert, which is repeated three times, a sign of the importance and seriousness of the issue. Once the apostle started his preaching, those believers of Jewish origin were stirred up against him, and did their best to bind Christianity to Judaism, as though it is one of the Jewish sects.

St. John Chrysostom believes that those who corrupt the faith by calling for the importance of the literal practice of the law, like the circumcision, and keeping the Sabbath, to enter into the way of salvation; are like dogs, barking and attacking to harm; distorting faith in the Savior, and depriving the believers of their surety in His work on the cross.

+ The holy books speak of two kinds of dogs: the useful dogs that defend the church, as mentioned by David, saying: “*The tongues of your dogs may have their share of your enemies (in the temple of the Lord)*” (Psalm 68: 23). And here, the apostle Paul talks about a contradictory kind of dogs; meaning those believers of Jewish origin, the opponents of the Word, the “*workers of evil*”, whose only concern in life is the literal keeping of the practices of the law, without knowledge of God; hoping for salvation through them.

(Marius Victorinus)

“**Beware of the dogs**”: The Jews used to call the Gentiles by this name (the dogs). Here, the apostle Paul inverting the image; and even including himself among the Gentiles, likened the Jews who call for the return to the literality of the law to “the dogs”. Why? Because, instead of preaching with the language of love, and embracing the souls with spiritual fatherhood, they bark like dogs, with voices disturbing to the soul, and harming the simple by their biting mouths. While seeking the literality of the law, to get purified, they are defiled like dogs (see Deuteronomy 23: 18; Psalm 59: 6, 14, 15; 2

Peter 2: 22). They bear animosity to the cross of Christ, by referring to Him the inability to realize the reconciliation with the Father without keeping the literality of the law. The Jews, who used to call the Gentiles by the name “dogs” (Matthew 15: 26); because of their unbelief they lost their position as the true Israel, to become themselves “Gentiles”, and be called “dogs” as they used to call the Gentiles.

- + Now, who are they he calls “dogs”? In those regions there were some of those lowly Jews to whom he referred in all his epistles, who, being greedy for ugly profit and vain authority, they corrupted the gospel, and did their best to draw a multitude of believers to themselves, through mixing Christianity with Judaism.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“Beware of evil workers”**: By distorting the gospel through robbing the work of the cross, they became **“evil workers”**, preaching with deception, not to the account of the kingdom of God, but to the account of that of the darkness and evil.

- + “Beware of evil workers”, who work with evil intention; a kind of work worse than vanity, by which they take away and uproot what is planted with good ordinance.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“Beware of those who mutilate the flesh”**: Instead of saying “the circumcision”, he uses the term “mutilation”. Circumcision was meant to be a sign in the flesh of receiving the Covenant with God; But, having rejected the New Covenant, and accordingly losing their stature as the spiritual Israel, their circumcision turned from being a sign of the Covenant with God, to a mere meaningless and powerless mutilation of the flesh. By that he reveals their misunderstanding of the true concept of circumcision, having deprived it of its spiritual concept and goal, turning it to mere mutilation of the flesh, not much different from the pagan practices, banned by the law. It is as though, while attempting to literally keeping the law, they break it. Some, though, believe that the

apostle does not mean by “mutilation” the circumcision, but refers to the practices of wounding oneself to express grief on the death of some beloved ones. Anyway, those people boasted the mutilation of a part of the flesh as making them the people of God; while disregarding the spiritual significance of the circumcision, which is a covenant with God, and a dedication of the heart to Him.

+ He says: “***Beware of those who mutilate the flesh***” As the rite of circumcision was greatly honored by the Jews, having opened the

way to become the people of God; and even counted the Sabbath as less than circumcision, and could be done on a Sabbath; He does not say that circumcision is evil, and pointless, lest he would terrify the Jews, but he dealt with the issue with wisdom, disarming it of its importance.

+ Refusing to call it even by its old name, but calling it “mutilation”; Why? Because they intended to ‘cut’ the church into two parts. It is as though he says: In case you seek the true circumcision, you will find it with us, for we worship God by the Spirit, namely, spiritually. Now, answer me: Which is more exalted: the soul or the body? Obviously the soul; hence the circumcision (of the soul) is more exalted as well; Or let us not say: “more exalted”, for it is the only circumcision; As the symbol comes to an end, it is written: “*Circumcise your hearts*” (Jeremiah 4: 4); and in the same way, he wrote to the Romans, saying: “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that in the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God*” (Romans 2: 28-29). Its name itself was finally taken away, It is no more ‘circumcision’ but “mutilation”; As once the truth comes, the symbol has the name no more.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ “*Reject a divisive man after the first and the second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned*” (Titus 3: 10-11). I wish we, as

wise sailors, sail in our faith along the sound path to cross over more securely,  
following the coast lines of the holy books

(St. Ambrose)

*“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (3)*

While seeking the carnal circumcision, those believers of Jewish origin, to be counted as those of ‘the circumcision’, have become instead spiritually, those of the ‘non-circumcision’. We, on the other hand, as we practice the circumcision of the Spirit, have become the ‘circumcision’; *“who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”*.

Our teacher Paul mentioned three signs of the true spiritual circumcision:

- 1- **Worshipping God in the Spirit, not in the deadly letter:** In order to enjoy the deep fellowship with God, who is Spirit and Life. We present to Him the heart to sanctify by His Holy Spirit, and to set out of it a temple for Himself. Worshipping God in the Spirit, does not mean though, a cancellation of the rites and the spiritual ordinances, if they would help us in our spiritual worship.
- 2- **Rejoicing in Christ Jesus:** grants us boasting and cherishing of the Lord and His cross.
- 3- **Having no confidence in the flesh:** Beside ordaining our spiritual life, our salvation is set upon the work of the Spirit. We do not practice the carnal worship that concerns the body without the Spirit, nor have confidence in the flesh. We would not be self-trusting in our worship, namely, pleasing ourselves would not be the motive of our worship.

- + He had to say: *“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord”* (Jeremiah 4: 4); As the circumcision from the carnal aspect, was not confined to those of circumcision according to the Mosaic law, but applied to a multitude of other people. The Egyptian priests were circumcised to the idols, and not to the Lord. Thus, if we have perceived the significance of circumcision in the literal sense, let us now move to its symbolic significance, in order to know how, among those circumcised, there are those who are circumcised in the Lord, and those who are not.

There are other words beside the word of Truth, namely, the church doctrine. Those who practice philosophy, have circumcised their ethics and hearts, and practice what we can call ‘self-control’. The heretics, probably circumcised in flesh, practice self-control; yet their circumcision is not to the lord, but according to a false doctrine. But, when you go to church, and follow its true teachings, you will be, not only circumcised, but circumcised in the Lord.

(The scholar Origen)

*“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness under the law, blameless”* (4 – 6)

The apostle presents himself as an example of not having confidence in the flesh, but in the work of God in him. As far as the outer physical privileges are concerned, the apostle Paul has incomparably more of them to boast; His reluctance to do that is therefore is not because of lack, nor of inability to realize.

The apostle boasts seven of such privileges:

- 1- **Circumcised the eighth day:** Which is a proof that he is born a Jew, and is not a proselyte; because a proselyte is circumcised the day he becomes a Jew.
  - 2- **Of the stock of Israel:** He does not forget the Jewish religion established by God on Mount Sinai.
  - 3- **Of the tribe of Benjamin:** the youngest, and the only son of Jacob born in the promised land, from his beloved wife Rachel.
  - 4- **A Hebrew born of Hebrews:** There is a difference between, an Israeli and a Hebrew. The Israeli is a circumcised Jew, yet, he does not necessarily speak Hebrew; Whereas the Hebrew is an Israeli who does. It also means that his ancestors have not mixed in marriage with the Gentiles, as many Jews who have a Gentile origin have done.
  - 5- **A Pharisee:** namely, separated and dedicated to God; who cherish practicing the religious rites and statutes.
  - 6- **A persecutor of the church:** Saul, having been very zealous on his Jewish religion, could not endure to see anyone out of the Jewish fold. That is why, when Christianity started to draw a multitude of his own race, the fire of jealousy burned inside him, committed many transgressions against the church, persecuted many believers, and was in accord of the stoning of St. Steven.
- &- **As to the righteousness under the law, blameless:** He consummated all the requirements of the law; all the commandments and statutes.

As to his possibilities to boast and to have confidence in the flesh, he enjoyed having everything cherished by the Jews.

- + By all those privileges he confirms that he is of the stock of Israel, not a proselyte, nor born by proselyte parents, as also proved by being circumcised the eighth day.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + He says that his full Jewish identity is not doubted; he is of pure stock; the son of the beloved Rachel, for whose sake the Patriarch Jacob endured servitude.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

They were not more zealous than him on the literality of the law, on the traditions of his fathers, and on cherishing his nation. He did his best to persecute the church as a service to the law and to Israel; something that no one could deny. As to his personal life, according to the law he was particulate Pharisee, counted righteous in the eyes of the Jews.

According to St. John Chrysostom, after proclaiming what could be the subject of boasting, all of which are not of his own making; as for example, having been circumcised on the eighth day, being of the stock of Israel, etc.; he goes on to talk about what could be of his own choice. He could be a Pharisee, yet not so zealous about the law, as some high priests were. According to the law, he was zealous, righteous, and blameless.

- + He says that he persecuted the church, not out of love for honor, or vain glory, like other Jewish leaders, but out of flaming zeal for the law.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

- + Before his belief in Christ, he consummated the law in a superb way; yet out of fear of God's punishment, and not out of love of righteousness.

(St. Augustine)

*"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (7)*

Despite all what he achieved in the sight of Israel, and of all the privileges he enjoyed, the apostle Paul, having perceived that they all would benefit him nothing; he cast everything away, counting them as loss, to gain the Lord Christ, who alone can justify him. He who attaches himself to the letter of the law would fall into loss, as long as he loses Christ the Source of his life and satisfaction. The apostle counted the honor he got from his people because of his zeal on the literality of the law, as loss to his depths.

- + He wonders why, if, concerning his pure seed, zeal, behavior, and way of life, he has surpassed everyone else; Why then would he reject all these privileges, except because he found that things of Christ are far better! So he adds: "*What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ*" (7). ... As for us, we unfortunately, would rather be deprived of the eternal life, than to be denied the vain worldly pleasures of our present life.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Let us now listen attentively to what Paul says: He does not say 'The law is a loss', but he says: '*I have counted it loss*'. Yet when he talked about gain, he does not say 'I counted it', but says: "*they were gain to me*" ...  
Is the law not gain? It is loss for the sake of Christ  
How could the law be gain and counted as loss at the same time?  
Just think about how great it was! ... It brought forth those who were carnal in their nature, to bear the form of men.  
If it was not for the law, grace would never have been granted. Why? As it was impossible to ascend up from man's state of intense lowliness, it came as a kind of ladder. Yet, he who has already used it to ascend, is in no more need of a ladder. Not despising the ladder, he is grateful for what it did for him, lifting him up to a higher position.



Lifting man up, the law was a 'gain'; Yet, concerning the future, it would be counted as loss; not that it is loss in itself, but because grace is greater!

If someone poor found silver, then found gold; In case he is not allowed to keep both, he would discard the silver and keep the gold; he

would count the silver as loss, though in itself it is not, but compared to gold it is.

The law is not a 'loss', except for him who attaches himself to it, and leave Christ. It is a 'loss' if it leads us away from Christ; Hence Paul's

words: *"I have counted it loss for Christ"*.

The apostle tells us that the law was given to lead us to Christ, who is the Consummation and the Goal of the law. It leads us to Christ if

we so wish. He who obeys the law, would forsake it, once it leads him to Christ.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom*

*I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (8)*

Having encountered the Lord, saw Him, and opened his heart for Him to dwell, all those privileges fell as rubbish, not worthy of thinking about, and not worthy of keeping, but should be cast away. What he used to cherish before, became repulsive for him, to cherish only the disgrace of the cross, the poverty of Christ, and His unique sacrifice, capable of opening the gates of heaven, for every believer to enter and settle down in the divine bosoms in eternal glory.

***"for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"***. Once he got up from his fall after hearing the voice of our Lord Jesus, he knew for sure that everything he counted as gain for himself, is actually a loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Chris Jesus.

**“for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish”**. Saul lost all his previous privileges; lost his position as someone close to the religious leaderships; lost his position as a well-known zealous leader; and lost his position among his friends and acquaintances. He lost all those privileges and counted them as rubbish. As a matter of fact, for St. Paul it was a process of exchange; he exchanged those fancy, mortal, and temporary gains, for true gains that would stay with him forever.

+ Are the world and the present life not good? They are! Yet if they drew me away from Christ Jesus, I would count them as loss. Why?

**“for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord”**. Once the sun rises, sitting beside a candle would be counted as loss. Loss therefore is relative matter, based on comparison.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ The apostle read how Abraham, once he confessed that he is *“dust and ashes”*, he found favor with God for his strong humility (Genesis

18: 27); He also read how the righteous ‘Job’, when he sat in the middle of the ashes (Job 2: 8), he restored all what he lost (Job 42:

17); And read the prophecy of David that *“God rises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap”* (Psalm 113: 7).

(St. Ambrose)

+ I do not flee from them (the law commandments) as something lowly, but I prefer what are more exalted. Once I taste the grains, I throw the rubbish (their covers) away.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

+ Great is the gain that we acquire by goodness, namely, the riches by God, and not the mortal riches; The grace of God is perpetual and would never come to an end.

(St. Ambrose)

+ Who among you would expect to hear the voice of an angel say to him: "*Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me*" (Genesis 22: 12); or the wealth, the honor, or the ambition of this world; since you have despised everything, counting them as rubbish, to gain Christ; since you sold all what you have and gave to the poor, and followed the Word of God (Matthew 19: 21). ... Abraham heard that voice!

(The scholar Origen)

*"... and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (9)*

**"that I may gain Christ and be found in Him"** (8, 9). Namely, be united to Him. By saying: "**be found in Him**", reveals that he was lost, and had no place to rest or settle down, then was found by the Lord Jesus, who brought him into the heart of His love, there to settle down in security.

Thinking that he was righteous according to the law, he was actually lost; then he found his place of comfort and settlement in Christ, and clothed himself in His righteousness as his own righteousness. That is the faith in Christ as a divine gift.

+ If he who had his own righteousness, ran toward the other righteousness, counting his own righteousness as nothing; How much more would those who have no

righteousness of their own, run to Christ? He said well “*having my own righteousness*”, not that which I acquire by my labor and toil, but which I found by grace. If he, who has such a great exaltation, has been saved by grace, How much more would it be fitting of us?... As they could say that the righteousness coming through labor and toil is greater, the apostle revealed that it is rubbish, if compared to the other righteousness... What is this other righteousness? It is that which comes through faith in God, namely, given by God; This is the righteousness of God, which is wholly a divine gift. The good works coming through our strife are of no value if compared to God’s gifts..

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (10)*

Why did the apostle Paul put the resurrection ahead of the sufferings? Because he first encountered, in his life, the Lord Christ risen from the dead, then he entered into the arena of sufferings. The Lord Christ first proclaimed to him the glories of His resurrection; then He told Ananias about how much he (Saul) would suffer for His name’s sake (Acts 9: 16). There is no separation between “*I may know Him*” and “*the power of His resurrection*”; For the most important thing in knowing Christ is getting to know the power of His resurrection, which was for our sake and not for His.

**“The fellowship of His suffering”**: Paul, suffering in his prison and chains, while innocent, knows that his sufferings are but a fellowship with the suffering Christ.

Instead of being preoccupied with the deadly letters, which he previously thought to be the way to righteousness, Paul entered into Christ, and Christ dwelt in him by faith; by which he acquired an exalted knowledge. He recognized Him, and would keep on drinking from that spring of knowledge and wisdom to perceive the power of His resurrection, to experience the fellowship of His sufferings, and to enjoy the likeness of His sufferings. He no more endures to waste his time with a debate around what concern the flesh, and to forsake his perpetual enjoyment of an unceasing and a renewable knowledge of the Heavenly, who is capable of justifying all by His precious blood, and by the joy of His resurrection, as justification for him (Romans 4: 25; 1 Corinthians 15: 17).

- + By saying: "By faith to know Him", he means that without faith it would be impossible to get to know him. Why? And How? By faith we know the power of His resurrection ... If the resurrection of Christ according to the flesh is to be known by faith, How could we by the mind alone, perceive the birth of the Word of God? ... His resurrection is easier to perceive than His way of birth ... For there are several examples of resurrection from the dead; whereas His way of birth is unique; No one has ever been born from a virgin!
- + These things (the resurrection and birth from a virgin) grant righteousness. That is how it is befitting of us to believe Him capable of doing. As to how, ... that is what we cannot prove. By faith we can enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, but how? ... Unless we believe, we cannot endure the sufferings; ... Unless we believe that if we endure, we shall also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2: 12), we would not be able to endure the sufferings.... Whoever believes that Christ is risen, would deliver himself to dangers, and have fellowship in His sufferings; he would have fellowship with Him who is risen, with Him who is living.
- + Persecutions, sorrows, and tribulations, should not disturb us; as by them we liken His death; namely we become conformed to His likeness. As he says in another

place: “*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus*” (2 Corinthians 4: 10). This comes by the great faith. We not only believe that He is risen, but that, even after His resurrection, He has a great authority; that we could depart along the same way He took; namely, we would become His brothers in this thing as well. It is as though he says: We became (Christs) in this thing! ... How honorable are the sufferings! We believe that through them, we could be in the likeness of His death!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (11)*

What perpetually preoccupies the apostle Paul’s mind is his daily setting forth on the way of resurrection, through his fellowship with the Lord Christ in His sufferings and crucifixion; When he would enjoy the honor of fellowship with Him, and of entering into the heavenly glories.

The resurrection from the dead meant here by the apostle is the one and only general resurrection of all the dead, the righteous and the wicked; which takes place in an instant, to be followed by the reward and the punishment.

**“I may”** used by the apostle here, does not mean doubting his resurrection, but refers to the difficulty of attaining it; for it needs a lifelong strife.

According to St. John Chrysostom, if all men will be resurrected, what does the apostle mean by saying: “*I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*”? [Some truly are resurrected to be honored, and others to be punished ... By the resurrection referred to here, he means the resurrection that leads to Christ Himself]

- + That is because Paul was still persistent on the fellowship of the sufferings, that was almost like death itself. By saying: "*I may attain the resurrection from the dead*". he has no doubt, whatsoever, that he will attain the resurrection from the dead; ... But what is the attainment of the resurrection from the dead? It is the perfect and consummate life of every man, coming, by every means, from the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, which is obviously realized at the end of time with the resurrection from the dead; namely, when the dead come back to life.

(Marius Victorinus)

- + The Song of songs lead us now to the desire to think deeply in that great beauty; Yet our souls suffer knowing that we cannot attain it. How could one not be sorry to know that the attainment of such beauty is something beyond his capacity; The pure soul may rise up by love to share such beauty, Yet it is obvious, according to the apostle Paul, that so far, it is not able to achieve what she is looking for (Philippi 3: 11).

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

## **2- A RACE TO REACH PERFECTION:**

*"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on ,  
that I may lay hold of that for  
which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (12)*

The secret of the strength of the apostle Paul is his perception that he has not yet attained perfection; not with a spirit of despair and slothfulness, but by pressing on and striving, perceiving that the Lord Christ Himself seeks to lay hold of him to redeem him as His son. While

desiring to lay hold of Christ, he knows for sure that Christ has already laid hold of him.

The apostle's zeal for his own salvation is not to be compared to Christ's zeal to acquire him for Himself.

***"I press on, that I may lay hold..."***. The apostle has not yet attained the reward, nor enjoyed the perfection of glory, nor completed his strife; but what supports him is that the Lord Christ works in him with His grace; started with him, walks along with him on the way of his strife, and He, Himself, is his goal. The time is short, and the strife is long, yet his possibilities are enormous and capable, being the possibilities of God working in him. It is a strong and obvious expression of the life of strife ***"for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me"***. The Lord Christ laid hold of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, arrogantly and haughtily riding his horse, filled with anger and envy, on his way to consummate his iniquity by persecuting Jesus Christ in the persons of His children. Once He laid hold of him, evil, pride, and envy fled away from him.

- + There are two forms of perfection: a regular form, and another exalted; one acquired here, and the other later on; one according to human capabilities, and the other concerns that of the world to come. God, however, is Just through all, Wise above all, and Perfect in all.

(St. Ambrose)

- + We are now, so far, not perfect; but there, where everything becomes perfect, we shall be. If the apostle Paul says: *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected"* (12), will anyone dare to refer perfection to himself? ... Yes, we should rather perceive our non-perfection, in order to gain perfection.

(St. Augustine)



- + The apostle probably means to say: if I assume that I am qualified to attain the glorious resurrection, I would endure all struggles, to attain it, and to be risen in glory. My life is still far from the ultimate end, I am still far from the crown, I am still running toward the goal. He does not say: "I run", but says: "*I press on*" with zeal.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Our souls should change and turn from its present condition to another, to a divine nature, and become a new creation instead of the old one; namely, should become good, compassionate, and faithful, instead of being in bitterness and un-faith. So that it would be fitting to dwell again in the kingdom of heaven. The blessed Paul writes about the change by which the Lord Christ laid hold of him, saying: "*But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me*" (12). How has the Lord lay hold of him? ... That may happen when a tyrant drives on a group of captives before him; then the true king lays hold of them and save them from his hands. When Paul was under the unjust authority and influence of sin, he used to persecute the church, yet he was doing that in ignorance and with the wrong zeal ... That is why the Lord did not forsake him, but laid hold of him; the true heavenly king shined with His light on him.

(To be continued in Part 2)



(Chapter 3 Part 2)

+ the Spirit teaches us the true humility that we are not able now to reach; yet He teaches us, without labor or being forced, to “*put on tender mercies*” (Colossians 3: 12), and all the commandments of the Lord.

(St. Macarius the Great)

+ I marvel at the Gnostics who claim perfection for themselves, who imagine that they are better than the apostle. They are arrogant and haughty, while the apostle himself says: “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected*” (12). Yet, he counts himself as perfect, having separated himself from his past life, pressing on toward a better one, not claiming perfection in knowledge, but seeking it. Here he also exhorts us to follow his example; clearly describing perfection as forsaking sin, a renewal in the perfect faith, forgetting all our past sins.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

“*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*” (13)

Despite the greatness of what the apostle Paul has already gained; yet, he counts them as nothing, compared to the glories prepared for him by the Lord. Enjoying new blessings every day, he cries out: “*Behold, everything has become new*” (2 Corinthians 5: 14). He forgets the past, for he is preoccupied with a glorious present; which would still be nothing if compared to what he is going to get tomorrow. He is in a perpetual race, with the spirit of hope, joyful in the Lord.

God grants man a continuous longing for growth and progress; that “*he forgets those things which are behind and reach forward to those*

*things which are ahead*" (13). If he enjoys the glory of the stars, he would, by the divine grace, desire to reach the glory of the sun. The apostle says: "*One star differs from another star in glory*" (1 Corinthians 15: 41); as it is written: "*The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matthew 13: 43). And in the Old Testament, it came in the law: "*Everyone ... shall camp by his own standard (flag)*" (Numbers 2: 2).

**"But one thing I do ..."** (13). A sprinter in a race concentrates his thoughts and his energies on reaching the goal in the best of time. He, who so does would realize a better result than he who is preoccupied by many things, who may even realize no success whatsoever.

Here, the apostle Paul presents a borrowed image of the chariot race, which was so popular in the first century A.D. in which the racer had to be a Roman citizen. So are we, beloved brethren, all came out of the font of baptism, carrying the heavenly citizenship.

**"forgetting those things which are behind"** ... I refuse to look even at the place of sin; for looking back at the past would hinder man's walk toward the kingdom. By looking at his past, boasting his good works, depending on them, and feeling that he is perfect, man becomes spiritually old. And if he looks at it with all its faults and sins, and remembers the details of those sins, man could stumble again in them.

**"and reaching forward to those things which are ahead"**. Namely, concentrate my time and my effort on the duty allotted to me, and my responsibility toward my God and my church.

In his talk about marriage and virginity, St. Augustine says that he does not condemn marriage. He who is married thinks no more of what he

used to do before marriage, but would reach forward to the things which are ahead, to live joyfully in his new married life. The virgin, likewise, who put marriage behind him, does the same: he forgets the things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead.

- + When Lot's wife looked behind, she turned into a solid pillar; Let us then take care not to look behind, but look ahead following Christ.
- + Our hope in the things which are still not realized, could be compared to an egg that has not yet produced a chick ... Hope exhorts us to disregard the present things, and reach ahead to the things to come. Let us, together with the apostle "*forget those things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead*".

(St. Augustine)

- + The Lord has no end, and could not be apprehended in a perfect way; Christians would never dare to say: "*We have apprehended*" (13), but would press on with humility day and night.

(St. Maccari the Great)

- + Those who ascend a mountain and head toward its top, should concentrate on their act of ascending, to avoid feeling dizzy, until they reach their goal. They should be aware of looking down at the distance they managed to climb; and concentrate only on that they have yet to ascend.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Creation includes two distinct divisions: One is sensual and material, and the other is mental and spiritual, The later division – the mental and spiritual, has no limits, and could not be contained by anything. ... The spiritual nature, likewise, has two aspects:

(1) The Creator holds fast, and does not allow for the Truth to change to become more or less.

(2) The creation always keep on looking at its beginning, and its prime goal, by partaking of what is beyond the limits.

The creation abides in what is good; and on a certain aspect, being not limited, it continues to change to what is better in her growth and perfection, and could not be stopped. Its present state, even if great and perfect, yet it is only a beginning toward a better state which surpasses the limits. Therefore, the apostle's words are realized: "*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*" (13). The good things that are higher than what is already attained draw the attention of those who contributed in them, and would not allow them to look back to the past, for they enjoy what is worthy, forgetting the lowly things which are wiped out of their memory.

+ When the great apostle wrote to the church of Corinth about his heavenly vision, he was not sure whether he saw it only by his Spirit or by his Spirit and body together. And as he does here, he sighs, saying: "*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what is ahead*" (13). It is obvious, therefore, that Paul alone knew what is beyond the third heaven, which Moses, himself, did not mention when he wrote about the creation and origin of the universe., after hearing the unutterable secrets of paradise, Paul continued to ascend, and did not stop, nor allow the exalted state that he reached to put a limit on that desire of his. He confirms to us that, although what we know about God is limited, as God's nature is eternal, unlimited, and more exalted than what we already know; Yet those who unite with God, their fellowship

with Him would keep on growing and increasing in the eternal life; which conforms with the words of the Lord Christ: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5: 8). They will know God according to the capability of their minds to apprehend; Yet God the Limitless, and the inapprehensible, would perpetually stay beyond their apprehension.

God's great glory is limitless, as testified by the prophet David (Psalm 145: 5, 6); and would stay that way to those who meditate in the highness of His heaven. The great David attempted with his whole heart to ascend by his mind to the high frontiers, and managed to go from strength to strength (Psalm 84: 7), Yet he cried out to the Lord, saying: "*But You, Lord, are on high forevermore*" (Psalm 92: 8). It is obvious therefore, that he who runs toward God, would become greater, the higher he goes, and would continue to grow in goodness, according to the level he reaches in ascension. Although this happens in all generations, yet, God remains the Greatest and the Highest, now and forever, and will always be, Higher and more Exalted than the capabilities of those who attempt to ascend high.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + Those who start putting their hands on the plow, reach to what is ahead, to plant, and have forgotten what is behind, have given their back to the wicked things they have done in the past. But those who put their hands on the plow, and look behind, those are bringing back to mind their evil deeds, and are seeking the sins they have already forsaken.

All those who, after hearing the Lord's call for repentance, have turned back to corruption, whether they are Christians, who forsook their past heathen life, or believers who progressed in faith, then fell down and refused to repent; would be acting according to the arrogance of their evil heart.

- + The righteous man forgets what is behind, and reach to what is ahead; Whereas the unrighteous would do exactly the opposite; And through remembering what is behind, he refuses to listen to the words of the lord Christ, saying: "*He should not go back to take his garment*" (Mark 13: 16); and His saying: "*Remember Lot's wife*" (Genesis 19); and: "*No one, having put his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9: 62). In the Old Testament it is written that the angels said to Lot after coming out of Sodom: "*Do not look back nor stop anywhere in the plain, flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed*" (Genesis 19: 17). You have forsaken Sodom, so you should not look back at it; You have forsaken evil and sin, so do not look back to them. It would not be enough to obey the first command, but you should obey the second command as well: "*Do not stop anywhere in the plain*".

If we started to progress and to grow spiritually, we should not stop anywhere within the limits of Sodom, nor look back at it; "We should flee to the mountain; as only there we could be saved. The Mountain is our Lord Jesus, to whom is the glory and the might, forever, Amen.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The whole human life is so truly set. Do not be content with what you have already achieved, and do not feed upon the past, as you should do on the future. For, how could man be in a better condition, if his stomach which was full yesterday, is empty today? The same way, the soul gains nothing by its virtue of yesterday, unless it is followed by a fitting behavior today.

(St. Basil)

*"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (14)



He sees the goal very clearly; and before him there is a mark, from which the eyes of his heart never divert. For the sake of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, no temporal events, with pleasures or sorrows, nor the earth with its beauties and troubles, would be able to draw the apostle's heart away from heaven, whose advance payment is already in his heart. He runs with every breath of his life, and carries with him many in the Lord, so that all will find a place in that eternal dwelling place.

This race of his is a high call (Galatians 4: 26; Colossians 3: 1); a heavenly call (Hebrew 3: 1). As to the prize, it is the crown of righteousness (1 Corinthians 9: 24; 2 Timothy 4: 8); the crown of life (1 Peter 5: 4); an unending crown.

***“I press forward toward the goal (the mark)”*** (14). And according to Adam Clark: “I press forward toward the (line)”. This refers to the white lines drawn on the ground of the stadium to indicate the start and the finish, on which the sprinters should concentrate their eyes; beside a set of longitudinal lines within which they should run, and in case they get out of them, their race would be counted as not canonical, and they would be disqualified.

***“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”.***

The goal toward whom I press forward is Christ. If Christ Himself is both the Way and the Prize, the Prize itself would motivate me to press on to acquire it. ... When it was said to Diogenes (A Greek Philosopher who believed that virtue is self-control): Now, having become an old man, Why do not you relax a bit? He answered: If I have zealously run in the arena of life all that time, Shall I become slothful when I am already close to the end? Would it not be fitting of me instead to hasten ahead even more?

Commenting on the expression "*in Christ Jesus*", St. John Chrysostom refers to the humility of the apostle Paul, who knows for sure that his prize is in heaven where the splendor is; which he would never reach except in Christ Jesus.

- + This temporary and simple suffering, will definitely turn into an eternal prize of honor and splendor.

(St. Cyprian)

- + Paul danced (spiritually) when he reached forward for our sake, and forgot what is behind, putting his goal before his eyes, aiming toward gaining the prize of Christ ... This dance is accompanied by faith and grace.

(St. Ambrose)

- + While running on the ground, he was looking up at the prize hanging down from heaven before his eyes; But he ascended to heaven by the Spirit.

(St. Augustine)

- + If you bow down while running, you would grow feeble and would probably stumble; You should instead hold yourself aright and look up at where the prize is; as by seeing it, the strength of your will become stronger; and the hope of getting it would make you endure the labor of running, and would make the distance seem shorter. ... What is this prize? Is it a crown of palm leaves? No! It is the kingdom of heaven; the eternal comfort; the glory together with Christ; the inheritance; the brotherhood; things which could not be named; and whose beauty could only be described by him who receive and apprehend it. It is not made of gold, nor adorned with precious stones, but of such value that gold could be counted as mud, and the precious stones could be counted as bricks in comparison. If you get that prize,

and you take your way to heaven, there, you would walk with great honor, attached with great confidence to angels.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind, and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you” (15)*

Concerning this thing, true believers who have reached perfection or maturity; are not children anymore in their spiritual life, and in their Christian behavior; have no more confidence in the flesh, and have set their hearts on the eternal life; are all with one accord (1 Corinthians 14: 20), follow the rules of the race (2 Timothy 2: 5), and will enjoy the complete victory and the eternal crown.

It is befitting of us, as mature strivers, to follow their lead, and run the race according to the rules; and should not be like babes in understanding, but, as men of deep experience (1 Corinthians 2: 6), we should utter wisdom among the perfect, the mature in the Christian knowledge, until we reach to a perfect man (Ephesians 4: 13), to the Christian maturity (Hebrews 5: 15).

**“to be of the same mind”** ... This phrase is mentioned about ten times in this epistle, a number that expresses perfection, as well as responsibility. Our responsibility is to have the sound thinking, that of Christ.

**“those of us who are mature”**; By ‘mature’ here, he means those who are spiritually mature, who strive to reach the perfect life, and have surpassed the stage of spiritual childhood.

**“and if you think differently”**, Namely, if you get preoccupied with other things, which, although not evil, yet would hinder your progress in the spiritual race; ... What would then be the solution?

**“God will reveal to you”** God by His Spirit dwelling in you, will reveal the truth to you.

- + **“God will reveal to you”**; Paul teaches, but God leads. God will reveal to them through their ignorance. He so uttered, not concerning the doctrines, but concerning the perfection of life, and not counting ourselves as being perfect; For he who counts himself as have apprehended, will acquire nothing.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The apostle talks about himself as being both perfect and imperfect. He counts himself imperfect, seeing how much righteousness he still lack; But he is perfect, by not feeling ashamed to admit his imperfectness, yet striving to reach perfection.

(St. Augustine)

*“Only let us hold fast to what we have already attained; let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” (16)*

The apostle, fearing for himself, as well as for them, lest, after running such a great distance, abiding to the rules of the race, they may lose what they have already enjoyed; by diverting from the white lines set for them to run in between. It is befitting of them to abide to those white lines, while concentrating their eyes on the glorious prize, presented by God by Christ Jesus.

**“Let us hold fast to what we have already attained”**, namely, let us hold fast to the distance we have covered in the race of our spiritual

life, ... to what we have achieved with such a great effort,

**“Let us walk by the same rules”**, namely, let us all walk along the path of the kingdom, in regular rows, according to the law of spiritual behavior; the law of spiritual strife.

**“Let us be of the same mind”**. Namely, let us have the same mind in the spiritual strife, each according to his own stature, and to his own strife.

+ He says: Let us hold fast to what we have managed to attain: love, peace, and being with one accord ... He wishes to make his commands a law to us; on account of that anything added or taken away from the law, would corrupt it. **“by the same rule”**, namely, by the same faith, and within its limits.

(St. John Chrysostom)

### **3- THE PRIZE – A HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP:**

*“Brethren, join in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you” (17)*

The apostle counts himself as the white line on the race course within the limits of which they should all run; imitating him and his fellow ministers, like Timothy and Epaphroditus; he presented himself and the faithful ministers as living role models (16). Now he warns them against the wicked false teachers (18-19), who bear the name of Christ, yet they are the enemies of his cross. They are only preoccupied with being justified by the Leviticus rites, not by the sacrifice of Christ. In their teachings they sound as believing in the cross, yet in their life, they reject and oppose it.

**“Join in following my example”**; Compete with one another in following the apostle’s example. Why?

1- He draws their attention to the spiritual principles he preaches; and in particular, as the gospel was not yet written, the apostle puts before them the living gospels, represented in him and his fellow spiritual partners.

2- For he, personally follows the example of Christ.

**“Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you”**; As there are spiritual things which we should observe and in which we should meditate; there are, as well, carnal things that we should disregard. The former edify, while the later destroy. Here, the apostle switches from talking about himself to talking about the group; and from the allegoric analogy of the race that of the life pattern.

+ He previously said: *“Beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers”* (Philippians 3: 2), intending to lead them away from the false teachers. Now, he leads them toward those he wish them to have as examples. He says: Let him who wishes to follow my lead and walk along the same way I do, watch me closely; Although I may be absent, yet you are, for sure, aware of my way of life. He did not teach them just by words, but also by works. The apostles were examples and role models, in their particulate way of life, like living laws. What they said in their writings, they also proclaimed by their works. By such a good way of teaching the teacher could influence his students; Whereas, if he only talks as a philosopher, while in his behavior, he goes un the opposite direction, he would not be counted as a good teacher, who, by being respectable, he makes his students submit in obedience.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ” (18)*

It is amazing how the Lord Christ proclaims that His own are “*little flock*” (Luke 12: 32); while the false teachers are a multitude, whom, the apostle mentions weeping bitterly with grief on their perdition, and on their deception of the simple; Among whom are:

- 1- Those who, **holding fast to their Judaism**, became the enemies of the cross, by:
  - a- Their call for the commitment to the statutes of the Mosaic law, particularly that of the circumcision.
  - b- Their evil intention to erect a wall separating between the Jews and the Gentiles.

2- **The Gnostics** ... who also became the enemies of the cross, by:

- a- Believing that the matter is evil and sinful; And as the flesh is material, it would abide in its evil and sin.
- b- As the flesh abides in its evil and sin, they provoke their followers to commit all kinds of sins and iniquities, and let loose the reins of the body.
- c- They call that as man practices virtue and the life of goodness, to practice, as well, iniquity and the life of sin.

*“whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things” (19)*

**“whose end is destruction”**; The apostle grieves for their eternal perdition, as they carry the following serious features:

- a- **“whose god is their belly”**: Out of their bellies they set gods to worship. They do not live for the sake of eternity, but are only preoccupied with the pleasure and satisfaction of eating food, which they prefer to the commandments of the gospel. It is well known that the demon of greed is always followed by that of adultery.

According to the scholar Origen, man is in need of circumcising his taste; so that “*whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, does all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10: 31). But for him, with an uncircumcised taste, his god is his belly, dedicating his life to the pleasure of taste.

- + For the four-legged creature, having his head bowed toward the ground, he looks down at his belly and seeks what is hers. But man, on the other hand, having his head directed up toward heaven, his eyes look upward. That is why, when you bring yourself down by the desires of the flesh, and become a slave to your belly and to the other lower parts of your body, you would become as one of the lower animals.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Not recognizing any other god, let us not behave like those greedy people whose god is in their belly (Ephesians 3: 19), nor like those money-lovers, who are actually idol-worshippers.

Let us not set other gods for ourselves; but let us have one God who is above everything, “*one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Ephesians 4: 6).

Being preoccupied only with the love of the true God, and united to Him with love, we would say: “*Behold, we came to You, for You are the Lord our God*”.

- + That is why the Lord said to the children of Israel: “*Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours*” (Jeremiah 5: 19). Namely, any man who makes for himself a god of anything, is serving a foreign god.



In case you deify food and drink, your god would be your belly (19)  
And if you count the riches of this world a great thing, wealth would be your god, about which the Lord Christ says: *“No servant can serve two masters, for he will be loyal to the one and despise the other; ... You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Luke 16: 13).

He who cherishes wealth, and seats the rich in a prominent place, and despises the poor, deifies wealth.

If there are in the land of God, namely, the church, some people who worship other gods through deifying lowly things, they will be driven away to a foreign land, where they could worship their gods.

I shall now meditate in how God, in His care, when His people worshipped foreign gods, He drove them out of His land to a foreign land (the land of Satan), and said to them: *“Why is it, O Israel, that you are in the land of your enemies, ... that you are counted among those in Hades? Is it not that you have forsaken God the Fountain of wisdom? If you have walked in the way of God, you would be living in peace forever!”* Baruch 3: 10-12).

(The scholar Origen)

- + The human race is preserved through two carnal ways: Food and sex; to both of which the wise and prudent submit as something natural; The ignorant rush to them with lust and desire, and make them their entire life, as though they live just for their sake. When men normally eat to live, they live to eat. Those are despised by every prudent, and in particular by the Holy Book who condemn the greedy whose god is in their belly (19), who are moved by the lust of the flesh.

(St. Augustine)

- + No man under heaven, who submits to such practices, could become wise, whatever admirable his natural ingenuity is ... He would be as though burying his mind in his belly ... Such a man has his faith in his belly.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that Plato's call for moderation in eating habits, was set upon his knowledge of what the prophet David did when he distributed among all the multitude of the people of Israel, both the women and the men, a loaf of bread, a peace of meat, and a cake of raisins (2 Samuel 6: 17-19).

b- "***whose glory is in their shame***" (19): Because of their wrong concepts, they see glory in their shame, justify evil, commit sin, and boast in it.

- + Some people boast in that, being the children of rulers, they could bring down priests from their clergy ranks; Some others boast their authority to execute people; and others boast in their worldly riches. The glory of all of those people is in their shame (19); for all those things are not even worthy of consideration, let alone of boasting or being proud of.

Things to be truly proud of, are to be wise and prudent; to boast of not having done, all along the duration of ten years, any carnal pleasures and lusts; or of not having done them since childhood; or boast in carrying chains for the sake of Christ. And yet, even these things, as well, if we use our good sense, are not worthy of boasting.

The apostle Paul had many things worthy of boasting; as for example the visions and proclamations he enjoyed, the miracles and signs he performed; the sufferings and afflictions he endured for the sake of Christ; and the multitude of churches he established in several locations in the world. In the sight of men, boasting in these things would seem natural; And yet, God, with His mercy and compassion, *“lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to him, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.... Concerning this thing he pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from him; and He said to him: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’* (12 Corinthians 12: 7-9).

+ Those who set their minds on earthly things, do not allow for the establishment of new things; nor for the purification of old ones.

+ *“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God”* (Wisdom 3: 1). Whereas those of the wicked are not worthy to be.

(The scholar Origen)

c- ***“Those who set their minds on earthly things”*** (19); who forget that the love of the world is animosity to God; they are always preoccupied with material and earthly things, and have no place for the spiritual and divine issues in their hearts and minds. Commenting on God’s promise to Abraham: *“I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the sea shore”* (Genesis 22: 17), the apostle Paul says that the church – the descendants of Abraham – embraces many who could be compared with the stars of heaven in their spiritual splendor; as well as many who *“set their minds on earthly things”*; who, because of their sins have become heavier than the sand that is on the sea shore.

+ There is nothing more foreign to a true Christian than to seek an easy and a comfortable life, or to get completely indulged in the present life.

Your Lord has been crucified; Will you seek comfort?

Your Lord has been nailed; Will you live in luxury?

Would these things suit you as a true soldier of Christ? Hence the apostle says: "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ*" (18); He said that on account of those who pretend to be Christians, and yet walk along the way of comfort and luxury.

The cross belongs to a soul in the battle, longing to die, and never seeking the easy way.

Those, claiming to be for Christ, are actually enemies of the cross; For if they love the cross, they would strive to live the crucified life.

Is your Lord not on the cross? Follow His lead: Crucify yourself, even if no one crucified you!

Crucify yourself! ... Do not kill yourself; Far from it, as that would be evil; But say together with Paul: "*The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*" (Galatians 6: 14).

If you love your Lord, put yourself to death, the way He did.

Learn the greatness of the power of the cross; and the goodness it realizes; Doing that is a surety to your life.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"For our citizenship is in heaven; and from there we also eagerly wait for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ"* (20)

Our home or our citizenship is in heaven; Being foreigners and sojourners on earth, how could we get attached to it? If the Roman citizenship at that time had its great value and special privileges (Acts 22: 28), How much more would the heavenly citizenship have? Of its privileges is that the devil would not be able to catch or crawl into us.

+ “*For the enemy has persecuted my soul*” (Psalm 143: 3) ... We would be able to escape this persecution if we find for ourselves a place where he (the devil) cannot get in, ... Where would be this place but in heaven? ... But how can I get there? ... Listen to the words of the apostle who had the same kind of body we have: “*Set your minds on things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God*” (Colossians 3: 2-3); And, “Our (way of life) crosses over in heaven” (20).

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He, who rejects this world should believe for sure that it is befitting of him, as from now, to cross over with his mind and spirit to another world; There would be our citizenship, pleasure, and enjoyment of the spiritual goods.

+ The prince of evil, who, himself, is the spiritual darkness – the darkness of sin and death – is like a violent wind, although hidden, yet he shakes all mankind on earth, leads them by the wrong unstable thoughts, seduces the hearts of men by the lusts of the world, and fills every soul with the darkness of ignorance, blindness, and forgetfulness; ... Except for those who are born from above, and who moved by their hearts and minds to another world, as it is written, their citizenship is in heaven.

+ Although we are on earth, yet “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (20). While, conscious or unconscious, we practice all our activities in this

world. When the physical eye is clear, it can easily see the sun, So the utterly pure mind can always behold the glory of the light of Christ, and can be with the Lord day and night.

+ This could not be realized except when the Christian denies this world and believes in the Lord with his whole heart. In this case the power of the Spirit can gather the heart scattered all over the whole earth, and the Lord's love will bring it together with the heavy-laden mind, over to the eternal world.

+ He who truly desires to be a follower of God, has to tear apart the chains that bind him to this life, which could be realized by complete isolation, and forgetting the old habits. Unless we pull ourselves out of all the physical bonds and the temporal society, and move on as though to another world through our life behavior; on account of that, according to the apostle: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*", it would be impossible to realize our goal to gain the pleasure of God. And as the Lord Himself elaborately says: "*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all what he has cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14: 33). Doing that, we should intensely watch our hearts, not only to be aware lest we would lose God's mindset, or distort the memory of his wonders by vain fantasies, , but to carry as well God's holy mindset, sealed upon our souls, as a perpetual seal that could never be wiped out, and a pure memory.

+ It is a loosening of the bonds of this mortal material life, and a liberation from human bonds, in order to be more prepared to be on the way leading to God. That is the unhindered motive to acquire and to enjoy those very precious goods, which are "*more desirable than gold and precious stones*" (Psalm 19: 10), In short, it is a move of the human heart to a heavenly way of life; to be able to say: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*". Moreover, as a main point, it is the first step toward acquiring the likeness of Christ, who, "*though He*

*was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor*" (2 Corinthians 8: 9). Unless we gain this likeness, it would be impossible for us to reach the way of life according to the gospel of Christ.

- + While dragging our body like a shadow on the ground, we keep our souls in the company of the heavenly Spirits.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + "Babylon is a golden cup of fury in the hand of the Lord from which all the nations of the earth will become drunk" (Jeremiah 25: 15). If you wish to know how would the whole earth become drunk from the cup of Babylon, think of the sinners who fill the whole earth. You may say that the righteous did not get drunk from the cup of the sinners; So how could the Holy Book say that the whole earth got drunk from the cup of Babylon? Well, do not think that the Holy Book does not say the truth when it so says, for the righteous actually are not earth (ashes or dust); and consequently, the whole earth means that the sinners alone would become drunk from the cup of Babylon; while the righteous, although they are on earth, yet their (dwelling place) is in heaven (Philippians 3: 20). Therefore it would not be fitting to say to the righteous: "*You are dust (earth)t, and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3: 19); But the Lord will say to him, as long as he has borne the image of the heavenly One (1 Corinthians 15: 49): "You are heaven, and to heaven you shall return". Therefore, the cup of Babylon will not make drunk except those who are still earth.
- + "The righteous is not earth" (dust); For, although he is on earth, yet his citizenship (nationality) is in heaven; and will not hear the words: "*You are dust (earth), and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3: 19), but he will rather hear: "You are heaven, and to heaven you shall return"; For "*you bear the image of the heavenly One*" (1 Corinthians 15: 49).

- + Depart from everything not consecrated nor dedicated to God; to which you may respond by saying: We depart, not from places, but from works; not from persons but from ways of life. The same word to mean 'consecrated' in Greek (hagios), means that the thing referred to is out of the world; For he who dedicate himself to God becomes qualified to be out of the earth and out of the world; and could afford to say that he, although walking on the earth, yet he has the "citizenship (the way of life) of heaven.
  
- + The soul that sins is said to be (of the earth); Yet this does not apply to him who says: "*Our citizenship is in heaven, and from there we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (20). So, how can I call that soul "of the earth", when it has no fellowship with the earth, but is wholly in heaven, living where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Colossians 3: 1); and eagerly waiting to return to be together with Christ, which is far better; yet is committed to stay in flesh to our account?

(The scholar Origen)

- + The hearts of believers are a heaven which they daily lift up there when the priest, in the holy Liturgy says: 'Lift up your hearts', and they respond by saying: 'We have them with the Lord'; and according to the apostle: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*" (20). Now, if the citizenship of the believers is truly in heaven, having the true love, the roots of that love is planted in heaven. On the contrary, the roots of greed in the hearts of the haughty are planted in hell; as they perpetually seek the earthly possessions, lean toward them, love them, and put all their hope on the earth.

(Father Caesarius of Arle)

*"Who will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, by the power that also enables Him to subdue all things to Himself"* (21)



The heavenly Head has preceded us, and carried our nature in Himself, which is sanctified and glorified by His resurrection, and prepared for heaven; So that, bearing the image of His glorious body, we can cross over, by and with Him, to our heavenly home. That will be realized on the great day of the Lord, when we are raised up in bodies in the image of Christ resurrected from the dead. The way we were clothed in the image of Adam of dust, we shall be clothed in the image of the Spiritual Adam, to enjoy the glorious body (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44). Now we gain the spiritual resurrection for our souls as a deposit of the resurrection of the body (Romans 8: 11).

**“will transform”** ... This reminds us of when the body of the Lord Christ was transformed on Mount Tabor.

**“Our lowly body”** ... Christianity does not despise the body, but rather honors it immensely. After the incarnation of the Word of God, the human body received an honor with no precedence. As the body is a partner of the Spirit in the journey of life, and in the strife; it will share its glory. But why then does the book call it *“our lowly body”*? That is on account of that it is prone to weaknesses, infirmities, and falls.

**“that it may be conformed to His glorious body”** ... Our lowly body will be conformed to the glorious body of Christ after resurrection, that came out of the grave while being closed.

**“by the power that also enables Him ...”** Which he can, having been risen from the dead by his own power; and will come on the last day to raise us up.

In a talk by St. Hilary, bishop of Poitier, on the Holy Trinity, he refers to the phrase: *“subdue all things to Himself”*, he clarifies that He subdues the devil under His feet; subdues death, taking away its authority, and granting eternity; and subdues the human nature, not to destroy man, but to let his nature be swallowed up in a new glorious nature.

- + The submission of His enemies entails the defeat of death, to be followed by eternity. Here, the apostle also tells us about a special prize to be granted through the submission by faith. There is another submission that realizes the transformation from one nature to another, submits to it, and becomes in its likeness. Yet that does not imply the end of its existence, but its progress to a more exalted status, by being intermingled with the image of the other nature which it receives, to submit to a new form ... We submit to His glorious body.

(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)

- + He says: “**our lowly body**”, for it is now lowly, submitted to perdition and sufferings; seems as though valueless, with nothing more exalted than other animals; “**that it may be conformed to His glorious body**” .

How could this be? How could our body be conformed to the likeness of Him, who sits at the right hand of the Father, before whom the angels worship; and the incorporeal hosts stand; who is higher than any other system, authority, and might?

Is it not worthy of wailing by the whole world on those who fell short of this hope? For despite the hope given to our body to be in His likeness, man still walks together with the demons? I do not care much for hell down there; as whatever is said about it, hell would be counted as nothing, compared to falling from such a great glory.

- + “**by the power that also enables Him to subdue everything to himself**”. He says that He has the power to subdue everything to Himself, even perdition and death ... He has actually shown greater works of his authority to let us believe ... This hope of ours (namely, the enjoyment of His glorious image) is enough to lift us up from our great apathy and slothfulness.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + All those who come to Him wishing to partake of that spiritual image through their progress, are renewed day by day in their inner man (2 Corinthians 4: 16); according to the image of their Creator, until they become in the likeness of His glorious body; Yet everyone according to his ability.

(The scholar Origen)

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PHILIPPIANS 3**

(Chapter 3)

### **YOU ARE MY FOUNTAIN OF JOY**

- + In the midst of my sufferings, when I see You carrying the cross;  
My soul exults to share Your passion.  
And in my ministry to my brethren, when I see You as a servant of all;  
I joyfully desire to give together with You.
- + You are the Fountain of my joy;  
I worship You, not by vain formalities;  
But by the Spirit and the truth, I abide in You, and You in me.  
You renew my nature by Your Holy Spirit;  
To make me perpetually bear a joyful nature;  
In You I find my satisfaction;  
And by You I get justified before God Your Father.

- + My soul exults when You grants me the knowledge of Your secrets.  
When You bring me into Your secret place;  
To experience amid my sufferings, the power of Your resurrection;  
When You lift my soul up to Your heavens;  
There I find refuge;  
That the enemy would not be able to crawl into me;  
And his snares would not be able to catch me;
  
- + You transformed my life into a joyful race;  
I perpetually forget what is behind;  
Desiring to reach You with the Spirit of conquest;  
You are my crown and my eternal conquest.

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## CHAPTER 4

### A PERPETUAL JOY

After this wonderful talk about the joy of Paul the captive, proclaiming that no prison, or planning by the wicked against him, nor the emperor's wrath, could take his inner joy away from him; he ends his epistle by presenting the requirements of that joy, which he describes as a common popular church joy.

1- The source of the joy	1 - 4
2- The secret of the joy:	5 - 9
a- Not to be disturbed by anything.	
b- Praying for everything.	
c- Thanksgiving for everything	
3- A mutual practical joy	10 - 20
4- A final greeting	21 – 23

#### 1- THE SOURCE OF JOY:

*“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved” (1)*

*“Therefore”, binds what came before with what is coming after. As long as you, beloved brethren, anticipate the coming of the Lord, you have to hold fast in the Lord until the last breath.*

In the middle of the race, he establishes the believer in the crucified Christ, so as not to divert to the right or to the left; and that no one nor any event could distract his sight away from the high prize, but to live in the heavenlies, and to practice his citizenship in it. This personal relationship with the Lover of mankind, opens up the believer's heart to follow the example of his Savior, by bearing his brethren in his heart by love, to find in them his joy and crown; yet not outside his Savior.

Talking about race, strife, and battle, the apostle calls on the believers, “his beloved and longed-for brethren”, to support them with love and compassion. Amid the sufferings, man needs the support of those faithful to him in the Lord.

He calls them his joy and crown, not only because, by their salvation he would enjoy a heavenly crown, for the sake of his love and strife for their sake; but, as a true father, he sees in their eternal joy, his own joy; and in their enjoyment of the heavenly crown his own enjoyment.

What brings joy to his heart is to be himself the last of all, even in heaven, to rejoice in their exaltation, joy, and crown. Hence he exhorts them, saying: “*stand fast in the Lord, beloved*” For to him, their standing fast, is as his own standing fast in the Lord.

- + For a Christian, love is the top of every virtue, which is not realized as is befitting, except when the believers stand fast united as one person, having the same mind in conformity. That is what the apostle means by saying: “*Stand fast in the Lord, beloved*”. Calling them “*(very) beloved brethren*”; the mutual love is the fruit of thinking in harmony, and of abiding together in Christ; when all have equal faith in Christ, and all stand together in Him.

(Father Marius Victorinus)

- + Look at how, after warning, he again adds another commendation, calling them: “*My joy and crown*”. He not only say “*my joy*”, but adds “glory”. What could be equal to that?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The very wise Paul boasts in those called to faith by him, saying: “*My joy and crown*”. The other disciples of Christ never said such a

thing; they only rejoiced that “*the demons are subject to them in the Lord’s name*” (Luke 10: 17).

(St. Cyril the Great)

*“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord” (2)*

After addressing the epistle to the church as a whole, congregation and priests, he now addresses certain persons in particular, who had a leading role. He starts by two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who seemed not to go along too well, either in between themselves, or between them and the priests or the ministers. Some believe that they were deaconesses in the church of Philippi. He implores them to have one mind, to live in the peace and the love of the Lord, so as to enjoy, together with the Philippians, the joy of Christ.

The word ‘Euodia’ means (a temporary journey), and the word ‘Syntyche’ means (the lucky); they partook together with Paul of the ministry of the gospel; but they seemed to have some controversies that hindered their work.

+ He seeks from those two women, through their faith in Christ, to be committed to have the understanding of what the gospel says about Christ. Notice how he says to them: “*I implore*”, and not “I command”!

(Father Marius Victorinus)

*“And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also,  
and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”*

(3)

Here he addresses his talk, most probably to his disciple Timothy, or to Silas (Acts 15: 40; 16: 19), who ministered together with him in Philippi; or to the bishop responsible for the church there.

As a partaker of the ministry, let him also partake of bearing the yoke, by supporting those two deaconesses, whom, according to St. John Chrysostom, had their leadership role in the church, and the ministry of the gospel, together with Clement, and the rest of the apostle's fellow workers.

It is to be noticed that the first one to receive faith in Philippi was a woman – Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16: 14); and those two deaconesses were probably among those who attended the service on the riverside, mentioned by Luke the Evangelist, saying: “*we spoke to the women who met there*” (Acts 16: 13); They probably have been elected to minister the word of the Lord among the women.

He also asked him to care for Clement who became later on the bishop of Rome, who had an epistle addressed to the Corinthians, which I have translated and published.

He asks him as well to give special care to the rest of the fellow workers who ministered together with the apostle Paul, whom he did not mention by name; but said that their names are written by the Holy Spirit in the book of life.

+ It was necessary for Jesus' name (at his birth) to be written in the census of all the world. By being written with every one, he sanctified everyone; In the census, He was connected to the world, and the world was connected to Him. Then, all the saints who believe in Him had their names written in the book of life together with Him.

(The scholar Origen)



*“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (4)*

Referring to the relationship of the bishop with the ministers, he asks all workers in the vineyard of the Lord to rejoice always, confirming the necessity of joy, as the way of the successful spiritual ministry. Christ is our true joy; in Him we find our life, resurrection, satisfaction, and glory; and consequently our perpetual joy. And as no one, nor any event, could separate us from Him, our joy could never be taken away from us.

Whoever has his joy temporally connected, would lose his joy with the change of circumstances and events. Whereas he whose joy is connected to his abidance in Christ, would enjoy perpetual joy in Him.

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; Again I will say, rejoice”***. The apostle, at the end of his epistle, again confirms that joy is its goal; the joy of the kingdom, abiding all the time: in abundance and in need; in comfort and in labor; in happy times and in miserable times; in great riches and in immense poverty; and in complete health and in deadly illness. The joys of the kingdom provide the strength to confront all problems and sufferings.

- + The Lord Christ blesses those who mourn (Matthew 5: 4), yet not over the loss of someone beloved, but those whose hearts goad them; who mourn over their faults and feel sorrow for their own sins or for those of others. Joy here is not contradictory to this mourning, but would emerge from it; for whoever mourns over his sins and confesses them, would rejoice. Moreover, we can mourn over our sins, hand in hand with rejoicing in Christ.

You have to suffer; *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”* (1: 29). Hence he says: *“rejoice in the Lord”*; which means that, in case you have such a kind of life, Or, when your fellowship with God is not hindered, you will rejoice.

If the scourges and chains, that seem so painful, bring forth joy, what could cause us sorrow?!

- + The true joy is that of the other life, where the soul of a Christian would not suffer, and his lust would be torn apart, not by violent physical ecstasy, but by the true happiness, that provides the soul with freedom, an attractive freedom, rich in true pleasures.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + When you unite by heart, you rejoice in the Lord; and when you rejoice in the Lord, you unite together in Him.

(Father Marius Victorinus)

## **2- THE SECRET OF THE JOY:**

*“Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near”* (5)

The word ‘gentleness’ here bears the meaning of compassion, longsuffering, gentleness in dealing with others and yielding to them; together with keeping away from dry and pointless debates. It is, according to Adam Clark, a collective expression.

A gentle person, taking the feelings of the others into consideration, would not stubbornly stick to his point of view, but would listen and appreciate the other view in the Lord.

By saying, "*The Lord is near*", he reveals that a minister or a believer who practices gentleness, will receive its reward promptly from the Lord, who, Himself, is meek and humble in heart, who will soon come to reward those who partook of His features, and bore His cross with joy.

"*The Lord is near*",... This fact is an immunity for every soul against sin; For, as long as the lord is near, "*how could I do such a great wickedness, and sin against Him?*".

+ Having previously said concerning the adversaries: "*whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame*" (3: 19); the apostle Paul probably noticed that the congregation had the intention to enter into hostility against them; Hence he exhorts them instead to avoid having any fellowship with them; bear up with them with gentleness; to bear up, not only with their brethren, but with their adversaries and opponents as well.

"*The Lord is near*"; Therefore, there is no cause for anxiety ... Do you see the wicked live in comfort, while you live in anguish? Well, the judgment day is near, when they will have to give an account of their works; and all things will be settled.

Are they plotting against you and threatening you? Do not be disturbed; If you deal with them with gentleness, it would not be for their benefit (as long as they have not repented), but for yours. The reward is at hand.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Demanding from them to let their gentleness be known to everyone, he does not mean for them to seek commendation by others; but that they would be a role model to them. Nothing would draw souls to faith like the longsuffering and gentleness of believers.

- + They will be blessed, not only when they practice the good works, but also when they inspire the others to do likewise.

(Father Ambrosiaster)

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (6)*

Man may assume that the commandments of gentleness, meekness, and longsuffering are difficult to keep, especially with the presence of opponents; but the anticipation of the near coming of the Lord would take away from the soul any anxiety or confusion. The believer’s weapon for this is prayers with supplication and thanksgiving; As the Lord would respond to him who prays and gives thanks.

As the Lord alone is the true helper; by resorting to Him by prayers and supplication with zeal, together with thanksgiving for the sake of His gifts, He would give more support and help. Here, the apostle binds not getting anxious, to praying, supplicating, and thanksgiving.

**“Be anxious for nothing”**: ... This does not mean for us to become slothful and to care for nothing; but to cast the worries away from ourselves, and not to get confused before the different temptations. For the peace of God is capable of guarding our hearts,

***but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving***". Prayer is the only way to the true comfort. Every time we pray with faith, we feel that God is near us, hears us, and responds to our supplication. Prayer includes praise, worship, and seeking; whereas supplication is seeking; and both of them should go hand in hand with thanksgiving, which brings pleasure to God and comfort to us.

***"Let your requests be made known to God"***, ... God knows everything; but what is meant here is His response to our requests, positively, negatively, or anticipating.

- + Here is another comfort; Here is medication that treats sorrow and depression. It is the prayer and thanksgiving for everything. He wishes that our prayers would not be mere requests, but should be, as well, accompanied with thanksgiving for what we already have. As how could man requests more, if he is not thankful for what he already has? We should give thanks for everything, even for the things that seem serious. That is the role of the thankful believer: Concerning the joyful things, it is only natural to give thanks; while here, thanksgiving comes forth from a thankful soul, and from someone drawn with zeal toward God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Do not be anxious about yourselves, Do not let pointless thoughts, and confusion because of temporal things of this world dwell upon you. God provides you with everything you need in this life, and you will be in a better condition in the eternal life.

(Father Marius Victorinus)

*"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (7)*

The peace of God is a free gift presented to the soul that puts all its hope on Him; it would not get disturbed, but at the time of anguish, it prays, supplicates, and gives thanks; and the gates of heaven would open, and the exalted peace of God would that surpasses mind would flow on it. This divine inner peace is capable of guarding the heart and mind in Jesus Christ, and of granting man a kind of harmony between the soul and the body, between the heart and mind, and between the will and the behavior. The believer would be without any inner conflicts, for the Spirit of God would grant him an exalted inner unity; so that no sin could ever crawl into his depths to spoil his peace; and the devil would not be able to approach him, being unable to endure the heavenly divine light.

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding”**: Coming to the Savior, the sinner gets **“peace with God”**; then, by living the life of faith, he will experience **“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding”**. This peace is referred to God Himself, to whom we, as well, are referred; He is our refuge; and with Him we put forth our requests, knowing that He will respond, and that He will take over Himself to provide us with all what concern us. That would comfort our hearts, even if we do not get a response according to our human mind. It so often happens that we cry out to Him for the sake of a certain anguish that disturbs us, and we receive complete peace, even though the subject of our request is still there; For He lifts us up above it, that it could no more disturb us. This way, the sting of the apostle Paul remained as it was, yet without ever disturbing his peace.

+ The peace of God which He grants to men surpasses every understanding and every word; for who could expect or hope for such things to happen? ... He did not spare His only begotten Son for the sake of His enemies who hate Him, and

persisted on forsaking Him; in order to make peace with us. This peace, namely, the reconciliation and the love of God, which guard our hearts and minds.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The apostle Paul had such great love for his people, which he never ceased to express in every possible way: sometimes by encouragement, and other times by advise, and all the time by praying for their sake. Here he seeks for them the divine peace which surpasses every understanding.

- + That is the role of the good teacher, not only to give advice, but also to pray, that through his supplications he supports his listeners, that they would not fall into temptations, nor deceived by the devil. He, as though says to them: I wish He, who has granted you that kind of unperceivable thought, would Himself securely guard you, so that no evil would approach you. He either means that or he means that peace about which the Lord Christ says: "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you*" (John 14: 27). This peace that surpasses the understanding of man would guard you,
- + By saying: "*In Christ Jesus*"? He means that Christ guards us in Himself, to hold fast, and not fall from His faith.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Once the peace of God dwells upon us, we perceive God, Adversity and dissension would have no place in us; and nothing remain unanswered. Although that would be difficult to happen in the worldly life, yet it could happen if we have the peace of God, and consequently the understanding; for peace is a state of actual enjoyment of comfort and security.

(Father Marius Victorinus)

*“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is of good report, if there is anything excellent, and if there is anything worthy of praise  
-- meditate in these things” (8)*

When God reigns inside, and sets His exalted peace, all man’s energies would transform into meditation and thinking in what is the Lord’s alone,

**“finally, brethren”**, The word **finally**, here, refers to that the epistle is coming to an end.

The apostle set the following seven gates through which any thought would pass, to decide whether we receive Him or reject Him;

1- Truth      2- Honor and reverence      3- Justice      4- Purity      5- Pleasure and joy  
6- Good report 7- Worthiness of praise.

+ The Song of songs tells us about the kind of food presented by the Good Shepherd to His flock, He would not let His sheep come to feed into a desert or near locations where there are thorns and thistles, and instead of a pasture of weeds, he would give them lilies to eat.

The Word of God teaches us by parables, that the Power prevailing over everything, prepares a place for those who receive Him with purity; who have a garden full of a diversity of virtues, to which the Groom would add flowering lilies, and an abundance of fragrant spices.



The lily symbolizes the shining pure mind, whose sweet fragrance does not conform to the evil smell of sin. The bride says that the Lord recognizes His spiritual sheep, and nourishes them in His garden with lilies He gathers.

The great Paul picks up from the holy house of food, lilies to feed us: "*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is of good report, and whatever worthy of praise*" (8). This is I believe, is the lily by which the Good shepherd and the Great Teacher feeds His flock.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + "***Whatever is true***", What are these things that are true? They are the things told by the gospel concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God, and all the good news. When your thoughts are true, it follows that they are honorable. ... Whatever is true could never be corrupt, namely, is honorable; and whatever is not corrupt is true; ... Whatever is true and honorable is just or realize justice; And whatever is just is pure, worthy of being sanctified by God. ... Whatever is just, honorable, true, and pure, is pleasing; As who would not love these holy virtues? ... Some of the items in this list concern the true virtue itself; while other items concern the fruits of virtue. What concern the virtue are: love, truth, honor, justice, and purity; While what concern the fruits of virtue are being pleasing.

(Father Marius Victorinus)

"***Whatever is true***", Wherever there is no place for sin, nor vanity, the divine Truth would be apparent in the soul and the mind; for man's mind to become a throne for the Lord Christ who says: "*I am the Truth*"; and never to become a theater for the devil and his vain thoughts. By "*whatever is true*" he means all the aspects associated with truth; truth in everything: in the mind, words, behavior, according to the

commandments of the gospel, namely, in things which spiritually benefit, and do not bring sadness to the heart of God, of man himself, or of the others.

- + The saints always exult when they see the fruits of Truth practically realized before their eyes.

(Hilary, bishop of Arle)

- + If we so armor ourselves; and If we gird our waists with the truth, no one could overcome us; Whoever seeks the truth would never fall.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Christ is not only God, but, He is the true God; a true God from a true God; as He Himself is the Truth.

(St. Ambrose)

**“Whatever is honorable”**, Perceiving their position as sons of God, the believers, having got the liberty of the children of God (Romans 8: 21), could not think except in everything fitting to their honor in the Lord, namely, in whatever is honorable and revered; things that are awesome and holy, and not things of no value; they would not think or do except what befit their new position in the Lord, their inner glory; according to the words of the Lord Himself: *“I will be the glory in her midst”* (Zechariah 2: 5).

- + Those who are enlightened receive the features of Christ ... On everyone of them the form, image, and features of the Word would certainly be printed; that Christ

would be counted as being born in everyone of them by the work of the Holy Spirit ... and those baptized would be other Christs.

(Father Methodeus)

“**Whatever is just**”, Justice performs the due duty toward God and men by faithfulness and loyalty. No thought against others could cross over the minds of the children of God, who are sanctified in Him; for wherever love reigns, no injustice or hatred could crawl.

- + Anger was given to us, not to commit violent acts against our brethren, but to work without failing on correcting those fallen into sin. Anger was planted in us as a kind of spur, to grind our teeth against the devil with a lot of violence against him, and not against one another. This weapon is given to us to fight against the enemy, and not to fight one another.

Are you anger ridden? Be so against your sins. Chastise yourself, and scourge your conscience. Be a firm judge, and mercilessly condemn your sins.

This is the way to benefit from the anger; and this is the reason God planted it into us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“**Whatever is pure**”, Purity of the heart and mind from the defiled thoughts. The mind of the believer, sanctified in the Holy Lord. enjoys an abundance of purity and chastity.

- + Actually, all those who are not purified by faith in Christ, are not pure, according to the verse: “*purifying their hearts by faith*” (Acts 15: 9).

- + We need chastity, which we know, is a divine gift; namely, for the heart to refrain from leaning toward evil talk, together with presenting no excuses for our sins.

We need chastity to overcome sin and not to commit it; and in case we do, we do not justify it by evil pride.

All in all, we need chastity to keep away from evil. And beside it, we need another virtue, the righteousness, to do good, according to the exhortation of the psalm, saying: “*Depart from evil and do good*”. ... For what goal should we do that? ... “*Seek peace and pursue it*” (Psalm 34: 14). We shall have complete peace when our nature is securely attached to its Creator; so that within ourselves, we would have nothing contradictory to ourselves.

This as, as well, was what our Savior Himself wished for us to understand, saying: “*Let your waists be girded and your lamps burning*” (Luke 12: 35); As what are the girded waists but controlling our desires, which is the work of chastity?; And what are the burning lamps, but giving light and shining by good works, namely, by doing righteousness?

Here, the Lord, to make the goal of doing these things more clear, adds: “*You are like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding*” (Luke 12: 36), to reward those who kept themselves from lusts, and did works of love; so as to reign in His complete and eternal peace, namely, without wrestling against evil, but with rejoicing in goodness with exalted joy.

(St. Augustine)

“***Whatever is pleasing***”, We should think of what would please the others, bring forth love, and make glad the hearts by compassion, endurance, and not of reviling nor condemning others. The believer becomes flooded with unutterable pleasure and joy, joy of the Spirit, being

the natural atmosphere that prevails over the kingdom of God in the heart. In his depths, the believer feels that he is the happiest creature on the face of the earth.

**“Whatever is of good report”**, Good report for the children of God, entails keeping away from uttering ugly words, but uttering instead what glorify their heavenly Father. The true believer is testified to, even by enemies, as everyone feel the riches of God’s grace on him, and seek the blessing of the Lord dwelling in him. His thoughts are perpetually for the good of all mankind, and their edification; and shines over all around him by the light of Christ in him.

**“And if there is anything worthy of praise, meditate in these things”**, The believer becomes like a bee that sucks the nectar from every flower, to produce and to give delicious honey. He sees in everyone, even those claimed to be wicked, a good side to learn from. By such an attitude, he would never cease to learn from everyone what is good and of benefit; and his mind, behavior, and words would be commendable by men. Yet, even that does not preoccupy his heart, as he would rather be commended by the Lord, and not by men.

+ Whatever is true is actually a virtue. Iniquity together with its pleasure is vain, its glory, and everything in it are vain. ... Whatever is pure is against thinking in the earthly things.... Whatever is honorable is against those whose gods are their belly (3: 19).

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ We become like the food we eat. Let us take an example of an empty crystal vessel; whose contents are clearly seen from outside. Likewise, if we put the splendor of the lilies in our souls, it would radiate and show from outside. ... The

Spirit would be nourished by the virtues, symbolically called the lilies; and the person concerned would be shining, showing every kind of virtue in his life. Let us assume that the pure lilies are the self-control, moderation, righteousness, and courage; and everything said by the apostle as true, honorable, just, holy, compassionate, worthy of love and of glory (8). All these virtues form in the soul as a result of the pure life, and adorn the soul that possess them.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

*“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the Lord of peace will be with you”* (9)

Together with his written epistles, the apostle commands them with the language of receiving, imitating, and following his example. They are committed to what they learned from his epistles, orally, and to what they received, heard, and saw in his practical life; For he presents the gospel of Christ, the Source of inner peace, who loves peace, and keeps it in all circumstances, to be with, and in them.

+ This is the way he teaches and advises, to present himself as a role model, *“you have us for a pattern”* (3: 17). Here he says: *“which you learned and received”*, namely, what you learned by the mouth, and *“what you heard and saw in me”*, whether in my words, works, or behavior. ... As it would be difficult to present an elaborate expression of all the things concerning our entry, exit, talk, moves, and deals – which a Christian needs to think about – that is why he summarized them by saying: *“what you heard and saw in me”*; Namely, I lead you forward by my work and words. Do these things, not just by words, but also by work.

***“and the Lord of peace will be with you”***; namely, you will be in great tranquility and security, will never suffer anything wrong, nor what is against your will; As when we are in peace with Him, and He with us, it would be through the virtue; As

He who loves us, and shows compassion toward us, will show more love toward us, once He sees us hasten toward Him. There is nothing with more animosity against our nature like iniquity. Whereas virtue bears friendship toward us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Someone may probably wonder if the oral tradition ceased through the appearance of the books of the New Testament; to which we respond by saying that the apostles themselves kept on reminding the believers of the oral tradition, when they wrote their epistles to the early Christian congregations; as through the oral tradition they can get an understanding of the Christian truth.

*“Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink, but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full” (2 John 12).*

*“... and the rest I will set in order when I come” (1 Corinthians 11: 34)*

*“For this reason I left you (Timothy) in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”(Timothy 1: 5).*

In many circumstances the apostle Paul commands his disciples to observe the tradition, deliver it to others, hold fast to the tradition learned orally or through his epistles, and *“to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3: 6)*.. He told us as well *“to beware against “any tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2: 8).*

- + In case we attempt to disregard any of the unwritten traditions on account of that they are not important, let us beware lest we do harm to the evangelic preaching , and make it just a name with no content

(St. Basil the Great)

### **3- A MUTUAL PRACTICAL JOY:**

*“And I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me flourished again, though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity” (10)*

The apostle Paul feels great gratitude to the Philippians for their care for him, exulting in the Lord who granted them such a gift of love and compassion, which was translated in action whenever they had the opportunity to express it.

Here we come to the last part of the epistle, and might be the reason why he wrote it in the first place; which deals with his appreciation of the Philippians' love, and his thanksgiving to God for the flourishing virtue in their life, their help to him, his acceptance of their help, and seeking from God to pay them back a good heavenly wages according to His rich glory.

**“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly”:** The apostle Paul rejoiced in the Lord despite his chains in prison; yet the reason of his joy was their love and help, that God moved their hearts to do ... He also rejoices because God blessed his effort by letting the tree which he planted grow, flourish, and produce flowers and fruition.

- + I often said that alms are not given for the sake of their receiver, as much as it is for the sake of their giver, who has a greater benefit of it. The Philippians sent to



him something, even though after a long time, and did the same thing to Epaphroditus. Here, while planning to send Epaphroditus to carry this epistle to them, the apostle commends them, yet shows that this work is more to their benefit as givers, more than it is for that of the receiver. He so did, lest those who give him a gift would be puffed up with pride; and to exhort them to zealously keep on doing the good work. The Lord Christ Himself says: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20: 35).

When he says: "*I rejoiced greatly in the Lord*"; he means to show that his joy is not of the worldly kind, of this life, but it is in the Lord. It is not that I received a sustenance to live by, but it is for the sake of your progress, which is rather my true sustenance.

(St. John Chrysostom)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the apostle's talk here carries both a commendation, as well as a gentle admonition; on account of that, although they cared for him, and sent him a gift, yet it was after a long time, Yet he finds for them an excuse, that they lacked the opportunity.

St. John Chrysostom also says that the apostle Paul was careful to avoid any offense, as far as the material issue is concerned. "*So that no one should make his boasting void*" (1 Corinthians 9: 15), he worked with his own hands to fulfill his needs and that of those around him.

*"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I had learned in whatever state I am, to be content"* (11)

He does not write to thank them, because he is in need, nor to ask for more, for he learned in whatever state he is, to feel satisfaction and to

be content, even though he is in chains in prison, or going through afflictions and persecutions; according to the saying: "The content mind is in a continuous feast".

**"Not that I speak in regard to need"**, Knowing for sure that ministry is not a way to earn a living, nor for personal profit; lest someone might think that he accepted the gift and is asking for more; and for the sake of his great love for the Philippians, he intended to confirm that, in whatever state he is, he learned to be content.

- + Speaking to those who were well aware of the actual facts; intending to admonish them, and to let them feel some remorse for their delay; he says: "*I learned in whatever state I am, to be content*".

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The great man with the good counsel says: "*I learned in whatever state I am, to be content*", having known that "*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Timothy 6: 10). He means to say that he is content with what he has; whether it is much or less, it is much for him. ... He says: I shall never need, nor abound; I shall never need, for I do not seek more, nor abound, for what I have is not mine but of many. He so says about money, but he could say the same about everything; as he was content for all what he has; ... he does not seek more honor, nor more vain glory, nor ask for a word of thanks, for he feels that he did nothing to warrant it. But he was perseverant in his labor, knowing his worthiness. Anticipating the end of his strife, and knowing for sure that the situation requires from him more endurance, he says: "*I know how to be abased*" (12).

(St. Ambrose)

- + Although it is customary to look at suffering poverty as a tribulation, yet having abundance, as well, could become an equal tribulation. A wise man knows how to control himself, lest he becomes weak through having abundance.

(The scholar Origen)

- + All kinds of men could at times truly suffer poverty; But to know how to endure it is a sign of greatness. ... Yet knowing how to abound, namely how to feel abundance with thanksgiving, this only concerns those who are not corrupted by abundance.

(St. Augustine)

*“I know what it is to be abased, and I know what it is to have abundance. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (12)*

That is the exalted work of God; to grant the believer to practice the life of humility as a fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His humility; and to feel the abundance of God’s gifts to him; Not only to feel content, but to feel the true unceasing longing to give; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”* (2 Corinthians 6: 10) .. He bears the nature of giving, of flowing with love, compassion, peace, and material, mental, and spiritual giving. In all that, he knows how to be abased, on account of that he knows for sure, that what he gives is not his, but a gift from God for the sake of his brethren.

Our teacher the apostle Paul here, does not only boast what he received with content of abundance, and satisfaction, but also with want, hunger, and thirst; although he refers everything to the Lord Christ.

*"I can do all things through Christ who  
strengthens me" (13)*

It was not possible for the apostle to enjoy that inner feeling of satisfaction, nor of flowing himself on others; without the strength of Christ working in him; for the sake of which he keeps praising him, saying: "Christ is my strength".

+ Success is not my own, but that of Him who gives me strength.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in  
my distress" (14)*

Although I enjoy the gift of content, satisfaction, and am not in need for anyone, yet you are worthy of commendation, for you have shared my distress. My heart's desire is to see you all filled with love; not out of greed on my part, nor of need for anything from anyone. You shared my distress by love, and translated it by giving amid my affliction.

It is customary when one writes down a 'thank you note', to start by that at the beginning; but Paul left it to the end ... why? For he intends to start by giving them spiritual lessons, bringing them forth to joy, then ends up by thanking them.

**"You have done well"**, He appreciates their love and kindness, with generosity and abundance.

**"in my distress"**, referring to his difficult circumstances in his prison.

+ Because what he said before has cooled down any probable haughtiness on their part; he followed up by encouraging their readiness to work; saying: *"Nevertheless you have done well that you shared my distress"*. Do you notice how, after putting

himself aside, he comes again to unite with them? That is the role of the true spiritual friendship. As though he says to them: [Do not think that, because I am content, I do not need such a good work on your part. I do need it for your sake]. He did not say: “You gave”, but said: “*You shared* “, to confirm to them that they have benefited as well, having become fellows in his distress. He did not say: “you alleviated my distress”, but said: “*you shared in my distress*”, which is more exalted.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only” (15)*

In the beginning of his preaching in Macedonia, no church shared in the needs of the apostle, other than the church in Philippi, who not only did that while he was there in Philippi, but they sent to him when he departed to Corinth (2 Corinthians 11: 8-9).

+ How great was his commendation of them, which stirred up the Corinthians and the Romans when they heard it. The Philippians were the initiators to give, as proved by the phrase “***In the beginning of the gospel***”, when there was no other example to follow.

They not only did that when he was dwelling among them, but as he says: “***when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only***”. He does not say: “no church gave me”, but says: ‘*no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving*’. It is all a matter of sharing!

He also said: “*If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*” (1 Corinthians 9: 11); and again: “*your abundance may*

*supply their lack*" (2 Corinthians 8: 14). How did those people share? By giving the things that pertain to the flesh, and receiving what pertain to the Spirit.

It is like when those who sell and buy share with each others the things which they have.

There is nothing of more benefit than such a trade and exchange, which starts on earth and consummates in heaven. Those who buy and sell are on earth, yet they buy and profit what concern the heavenlies, while paying earthly price.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities"* (16)

When he was establishing the church in Thessalonica, he used to fulfill his necessities and of those who were together with him, partly through the work of his own hands (1 Thessalonians 2: 9; 2 Thessalonians 3: 7-9); and from the help sent by the church in Philippi

+ Here, as well, is a great commendation; as while dwelling in the capital of the whole province, a small city (Philippi) took over the responsibility of his sustenance.

(St. John Chrysostom)

In the Greek version, the word came as "necessities", and not "my necessities", which, according to St. John Chrysostom, he purposely used, as he often did, to demonstrate to them that it is, not out of his need, but for their own sake; and lest they would otherwise probably lose some of their enthusiasm.

*“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account” (17)*

The apostle did not desire a gift from anyone, as much as he only desired the fruit of the Spirit, practically proclaimed by giving, and fulfilling the necessities of the ministry of the gospel.

All what man presents of alms and humility, is deposited in, and added to his account in the kingdom. Although Paul apparently received the gifts, yet, it is God who actually received them.

- + There is a difference between he who is in need, yet seeks nothing; and who is in need, and does not so counts himself. The apostle says: “***Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account***”. Do you see that the fruit come from them? He says: This I say for your sake, and not for mine; for your salvation; for I profit nothing when I take, but the grace is enjoyed by those who give, and the reward is there in the storehouse for the givers; while the gifts themselves are consumed by the receivers.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Ephroditus the things which were sent from you, a sweet smelling aroma, an appreciable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (18)*

Here the apostle Paul expresses his appreciation of the generosity of the Philippians, who, not only presented his necessities, but what is more; that he became overwhelmed, not by the gift, but by the breath of love coming from their hearts; he smelled their work as a sacrifice offered to God and not to Paul, an appreciable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

- + Saying: “***Not that I seek***”; and lest they may probably lose some of their enthusiasm to give, he added: “*I have all and abound*”; namely through that gift suited to him who is in need; by which he makes them more zealous. As those who give, seek from those who receive to show their appreciation; he says to them that they, not only presented what is lacking, but exceedingly surpassed that.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“A sweet smelling aroma, an appreciable sacrifice, well pleasing to God”**. Paul described the gifts of the Philippians as follows:

- 1- A sweet smelling aroma
- 2- An appreciable sacrifice
- 3- Well pleasing to God

These descriptions conform with those in the old Covenant, referring to the sacrifice of the cross.

**“A sweet smelling aroma”**. ... The aroma of love, presented by the children of Christ to the minister of Christ.

- + Having received from Epaphroditus the things they sent, as a sweet smelling aroma, an appreciable sacrifice, well pleasing to the Lord, It is not I who received your gift, but God through me. Although I am not in need, Just think that God who needs nothing, received it. from your hands. Indeed you know how our souls become pleased and exult by smelling the sweet fragrances, and how the holy books did not hesitate to use this human expression and to apply it to God, saying: “*God smelled the pleasing odor*” (Genesis 8: 21); to show men that their gifts are well appreciable by God; It is not the fat or the smoke that make it appreciable, but the thought behind offering it.

(st. John Chrysostom)



- + It is true that mercy toward the poor are like oil poured on the sacrifice offered to God; Whereas the service offered to the saints is like the sweet fragrance of incense.

(The scholar Origen)

- + When the brethren in Philippi shared the distress of the blessed apostle Paul, he said that their good work is a sacrifice presented to God .... When someone shows compassion toward the poor, he is as though lending God, and giving Him spiritual asacrifice, a smell of pleasure.

(St. Cyprian, the martyr)

*“And God (our Father) shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ” (19)*

As much as they measure to the apostle with the measure of abundant love, God will measure to them according to His riches to enjoy an abundance of heavenly glories in Jesus Christ. Having not forsaken Paul in his time of need, God will not let them in need of anything. Being not able to pay them back, Paul presented the bill to the One who sent him – Jesus Christ – who alone can pay back the debts of His apostles and disciples.

**“our Father”**, We deal with a Father whose eye is on us, feels our needs, and cares for us.

**“according to His riches”**, If the poor gives according to his poverty; the rich according to his riches; the king according to his greatness; How about the King of kings when He grants.

**“in glory”**, Glory is an attribute pertaining to God since eternity. He is glorified in Himself, and awes His glory to no one.

- + Look at how he seeks the blessings to dwell upon them, the way the poor do when they receive a gift from someone. If Paul blesses those who give, how much more should we do to those who give us ; not that we are in need, but we should rejoice, not for our own sake, but for that of the givers, and we, ourselves will get a reward for rejoicing for their sake. I wish we do not get offended in case people do not give, but we should rather be sad for their sake; we could make them more zealous if we let them know that we are not doing this for our own sake, but so that the Lord may supply all their need with His grace or joy according to His riches, namely, according to His free gift, which, for Him is easy, possible, and swift.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Now to our God and Father be glory forever  
and ever, Amen” (20)*

That mutual love between the apostle Paul and the Philippians glorifies God the Father of all who rejoices in the work of His grace in them.

- + The glory he speaks of does not concern the Son alone, but the Father as well.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Here, and in Philippi 4: 19, he does not separate between Him being God and being a Father, but prays to *“our God and Father”*. He calls Him *“God”* for reverence, and calls Him *“Father”* for honor; and because everything began with Him.

- + Here, he praises the Father alone, while in some place else he praises the Son alone (Romans 9: 5) ... He does not separate the Son from the Father, nor the Father from the Son. He presents the praise to the divine Nature as a whole.

(Father Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

#### **4- A FINAL GREETING:**

*“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you” (21)*

The apostle Paul wishes that the church would relay to every one of its members his personal greetings and that of those working with him; It is an epistle to the church as a whole, as well as to every member individually.

- + Not anyone who calls himself a saint. Is a saint; but he who believes in the Lord Jesus, and who lives according to His teachings.

(Father Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

*“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household” (22)*

In his eyes, the Philippians, as well as the Romans, and even the Christians in the household of Caesar, are all saints.

By “**Caesar’s household**”, he does not mean ‘Neron’ and his family, but some of his officers and members of the Court who believed.

- + He lifts up and strengthens their psyche by showing them how his preaching has reached even the household of Caesar. If those in the emperor’s court have despised everything they have for the sake of the King of Heaven, how much more

befitting of them to do? Another proof of Paul's love for the Philippians, is that he spoke of them to Caesar's household, whom they did not see, which made them long for them, and to send them their greetings.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen" (23)*

The apostle Paul, finds nothing better to end most of his epistles, than to present our Lord Jesus Christ to his beloved addressees. This is his greatest desire for everyone. He starts his epistle and ends it by grace ... Grace is the work of God with the human soul which is not worthy of it.

"Written and sent to the Philippians from Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus"

As the apostle Paul's hand was bound in iron cuffs, he dictated his epistle to Epaphroditus, who had the blessing of writing it, as he had the blessing of the apostle.

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**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE  
APOSTLE  
TO THE PHILIPPIANS  
(CHAPTER 4)**

**YOU ARE MY PERPETUAL JOY**

- + How could my soul not exult;  
When You are inside me flowing with the joy of Your Spirit?  
How could my soul be disturbed,  
When You are the Almighty, the Leader of my life?  
How could I fear the future,  
When our prayers, open all the closed doors?  
How could I not practice the heavenly life,  
When You have changed my denying nature.  
And granted me fellowship in Your thanksgiving life?
  
- + You are my perpetual joy.  
That I experience in my depths where You dwell,  
And I experience together with my brethren,  
In Your church, Your exulting body;  
To rejoice here on earth,  
Where my heart has crossed over to Your heavens.

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# **THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

**BY**

**FR. TADROS Y. MALATY**

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