

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

The SECOND Epistle
Of Paul the Apostle
To Timothy

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Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Translated by:
Mary Rose Halim

St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church
P. O. Box 564
Englewood - Colorado 80110

INTRODUCTION

This Epistle has a very special significance as our teacher St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, has written it to his most beloved disciple St. Timothy. He was his partner in the pastoral ministry and St. Paul had ordained him Bishop of Ephesus. This Epistle is the last one St. Paul has written from his second prison where he was waiting for the day of his martyrdom. He longed to meet with his disciple in order to deliver to him his final advice. As he feared that he would not have time, he poured out his heart as a minister, and recorded his farewell advice to his very special son, St. Timothy.

THE DESTINATION OF THE EPISTLE

St Paul wrote this Epistle to St. Timothy who was preaching in Ephesus where he shepherded the congregation. Evidence of this can be noted as follows:

- 1- He asks him to greet Onesiphorus (2 Tim 4:19), who was in Ephesus (1:18).
- 2- He charges him to pass by Troas on his way to Rome (4:13). Now this city was situated on the concrete road that stretched from Ephesus to Rome, as we understand from the passage in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (20:5, and 2 Cor 2:12).
- 3- He warns him from Alexander the coppersmith (4:14), who was in Ephesus (Acts 19:33; 1 Tim 1:20).
- 4- He commands him to ***“come to (him) quickly”*** (4:9); and adds: ***“And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus”*** (4:12). It seems that St. Paul has sent him there to replace St. Timothy during his absence in Rome.
- 5- The deviations and errors that St. Paul encourages St. Timothy to resist are the same as the ones he mentions in his First Epistle. It is as though St. Timothy will receive this Second Epistle in the same city of Ephesus where he had received the First Epistle.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

From this Epistle, it appears that St. Paul wrote it while he was in prison in Rome (1:8,16; 4:6). The year could be 67 or 68 A.D. approximately, and when he was imprisoned for the second time rather than the first. Actually he was imprisoned twice: the first time he was held inside the prison, whereas in the second time he was living in an apartment he had rent but under “house arrest” and not in an actual prison.

The following points indicate that this Epistle has been written during his second imprisonment:

- 1- He did not expect to be released soon or to leave Rome. This is different from what he says in his Epistle to the Philippians (1:24, 2:24), or in his Epistle to Philemon (22). On the contrary, here he is expecting his martyrdom. He says, ***“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”*** (4:6)
- 2- Some explain that the Apostle here is referring to his first imprisonment and the trial which ended in his release and return to the ministry, as he says, ***“At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered***

out of the mouth of the lion.” (4:16-17) However, most scholars find that the Apostle is speaking here about his expected appearance before the Roman emperor Nero at a certain time; and that the case had been postponed, so he was to stand before him at some later time. He also indicates how the ministry became fervent between the two trials and while he was in prison.

- 3- The Apostle asks St. Timothy to bring to him the robe that he had left in Troas with Carpus, (4:13), as well as the books, especially the parchment. This indicates that the Apostle was arrested by a Roman order, upon Nero’s demand and at an unexpected time. Therefore he had no chance to gather his belongings.
- 4- Some of the names mentioned in the epistles St. Paul has written while he was in prison for the first time are names of people who were with him at that time. These do not appear in this Second Epistle and this indicates that the Epistle has been written while he was in prison for the second time. For example, in his Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul mentions that Timothy, Mark and Demas are with him (Col 1:1; 4:1, 14). In contrast, here in the Second Epistle, he is writing to St. Timothy who is living in Ephesus, and he asks him to bring along St. Mark, the Apostle (4:11). He also says that Demas has abandoned him (4:10).

THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

- 1- The Apostle writes to his disciple to ask him to go to him and bring St. Mark too. He wishes to see them in his prison and before his martyrdom. He fears he will die before their arrival. Consequently, he presents in this Epistle a final farewell and fatherly advice. He underlines the necessity of struggling in a spirit of strength rather than of pessimism. This is important to preserve the upright faith and to oppose the heresies with firmness coupled with gentleness and love. He also encourages them to teach others who are needed to support the ministry.
- 2- The Apostle writes while he is expecting to die in Rome. He writes to a Church that is suffering under the yoke of the unjust Nero. Therefore he writes to encourage the Church to bear the pain without complaining or doubting. He repeats the expression “*do not be ashamed*” since affliction does not confine the Word but drives many to work without feeling ashamed of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3- This Epistle comes from a victorious servant who bids farewell to a world full of affliction. He announces that he has completed the struggle, and has kept the faith entrusted to him until the last breath, and now awaits the eternal crown

THE SECTIONS OF THE EPISTLE

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| 1- Opening Greeting | Ch. 1:1-5. |
| 2- The Spirit of Power | Ch. 1: 6-18. |
| 3- Struggle in the Ministry | Ch. 2. |
| 4- Opposing the Spirit of Delinquency | Ch. 3. |
| 5- Farewell Recommendations | Ch. 4. |

CHAPTER 1

THE SPIRIT OF POWER

St. Paul writes his farewell advice from his prison. He is writing to all his children, and specifically to his disciple Timothy and all the ministers he represents. Due to the tyranny of the Roman emperor, Nero, the Church was exposed to great suffering at that time. Hence the prevalent grace in this Epistle is the “**Spirit of Power**” that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of death has granted to us. The key to this Epistle is: “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” (1:7) That is how a servant of the Lord lives: with a spirit of power evident in his preaching of the Word, in his ministry and service to others, in encouraging servants of the Lord, in accepting brotherly love, as well as in his opposition of inventions and delinquent matters.

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| 1- Introduction | v. 1-2. |
| 2- The Apostle’s Ties with his Disciples | v. 3-7. |
| 3- Preaching with a Spirit of Power | v. 8–12. |
| 4- Holding Steadfastly to the Upright Teaching | v. 13–4. |
| 5- The Support of his Disciples to St. Paul | v. 15–18. |

1- THE INTRODUCTION

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” (v. 1, 2)

The introduction here is almost similar to the one of the First Epistle; the same Apostle sends it to the same receiver, and to the same destination. However, the following differences are to be noted:

A- In the First Epistle, the Apostle focuses on his being an Apostle by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ in order to affirm that his apostolic work does not rest on human ordination but on the will of God Himself. Here in the Second Epistle, he stresses the same point yet his eyes are focused on the eternal reward. He says, “*according to the promise of life which is in Jesus Christ.*” In the First Epistle, he struggled in his ministry as he considered that God had commanded him to be in His service. He believed that God, in His love, is obligated - if it is correct to use this word - to make him succeed in that path. However, in this epistle he realizes that he is being poured out and that the time of his departure is at hand (4:6). As a result, his eyes are fixed on the reward that he has awaited for so long. It is the dream of enjoying the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is Life indeed (John 10:1). He is our hope and our reward.

Although the theme of this farewell letter revolves around the topic of “the Spirit of Power,” yet the source of Power is “the Life” that has been granted to us since we have received the Lord Jesus Christ into

our lives. Consequently, we enjoy Him in His perfect glory and on a sublime level. It is as though St. Paul is already enjoying here the life that he is expecting as a reward. He does so through his faith that acts as a sort of security: in this life we receive Christ through faith, while in the life to come we will enjoy His presence by meeting Him face to face.

B- St Paul, the Apostle, calls his disciple his “*beloved son*.” His hour of departure from this world is drawing near and he fears he would not see him again. He therefore writes to him in a spirit of love and friendship in order to reveal his innermost and deepest feelings.

St John Chrysostom finds in the expression “*beloved son*” a declaration of the obedience of St Timothy¹. St Paul had many disciples, yet designating St Timothy specifically as “*beloved*” comes as a result of the spiritual obedience he has shown to St Paul as his spiritual father.

In general, it is clear that the letters of St Paul reflect great sentiments of love besides revealing the many sided aspects of his character: his struggle, his commitment, his firmness, and the depth of his theological understanding. St Paul lived at a level of heavenly aspiration that is hard to express. At the same time, he was a practical person who believes in the sanctity of the body with all its feelings, emotions and sentiments through the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not repress human feelings but rather sets them free in a highly spiritual manner. This appears clearly in the final part of his Epistle to the Romans where he reveals the affectionate feelings that bind him to so many names he mentions there.

St John Chrysostom speaks at length about these feelings that have filled the heart of St Paul. To mention just some of the points he makes, he says:

[Paul is really amazing. He strained his flesh, his body was broken, he traveled in the spirit to all the parts of the earth, and as though it had no body. He dismissed any boundaries and imitated the heavenly spiritual hosts. **He lived on earth as though he lived in heaven and soared with the Cherubim.**

He joined them in their heavenly praise, and he bore suffering... that same Paul would be anxious and sad when a dear one would become estranged. He even escaped from the city where he did not find the people he expected to see there. He departed from Troas for he could not stay where there was no friend: “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.” (2 Cor 2:12)

What is this, Paul? You, who have been held in bonds and imprisoned, and who carries the marks of the whip as your back was still bleeding... You, who never despised one person who needed to be saved, when you arrived in Troas, and found it a fertile place that is ready to be sown, and the harvest seemed plentiful and easy, you just let go of that important profit for which you had come? You say: “to preach Christ’s gospel” nothing would stand in your way to spread His Word. And you also say: “a door was

¹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 2.

opened to me by the Lord”, and in spite of that you escape in a hurry?

Yes, I have definitely given in to grief due to the absence of Titus that has caused me much pain. I was overcome by sadness and I found myself obliged to act in this way... those who love each other are not satisfied or comforted with being associated by the soul. They need to be present together physically too. If that is not possible, they feel their joy is greatly reduced...^{2]}

2- THE APOSTLE’S TIES WITH HIS DISCIPLES

The event of the Crucifixion revealed the ‘Spirit of Power’ of the Lord Jesus Christ. It revealed His concern for all mankind as He offered His life as a ransom for all. He even prayed for forgiveness of those who crucified Him. He did not forget His mother’s need for support, and entrusted His disciple, St. John the beloved, to take her as his mother, while introducing him to her as her son. These are expressions of great love that surpass pain and the bitterness of the Cross.

In the same way, St. Paul follows his Master and carries the “Spirit of Power” that is the “Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ” and that lives in him. He realizes that he is being poured out, and yet he neither asks for any personal requests of his disciple, nor tells him about his imprisonment and sufferings. Indeed, he speaks powerfully about his deep concern for his disciple, and says, ***“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy.”*** (v 3,4) That is how the “Spirit of Power” becomes truly evident in the lives of believers, through their loving embrace of their brothers and spiritual children. Even at the moment of their departure from this life, they do not think of themselves but they think of others. They express their love and their close ties not only through apparent acts but also through constant prayers for them before the Lord God.

Probably St. Paul recalled his own grandparents as he writes to his disciple reminding him that a pious mother and grandmother brought him up. He says, ***“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did.”*** The Apostle is evidently a grateful person who never denies his benefactors. Even though he had persecuted the Church of God, and blasphemed against her Lord – a fact he alluded to often - yet he does not deny the blessings he has received from his Jewish ancestors. They had handed down to him the true faith leading to the coming of the Messiah. With an open mind and heart, he finds in his forefathers the good roots of God’s Vineyard that gave fruit in the New Testament to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the Apostle mean by his saying, ***“with a pure conscience”***? The Apostle had been truly blasphemous and tyrannical, yet he was not driven in all that by evil intentions for he believed he was serving God. He desired to keep a good and pure conscience while performing his duty. And he preserved that goodness or purity even more when he met with the Holy One and enjoyed union with Him in the Lord

² Ep. 2:10. (Translated by Mrs. Aida Hanna Basta)

Jesus Christ. That explains why he boldly says, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). He reveals that he trains himself daily to have a conscience that resists temptations (Acts 24:16). St. Paul means by this “**conscience**” the inner life that is reflected on his apparent behavior. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [He is speaking here about his blameless life, for he constantly indicates that his life is his conscience³.]

What has drawn the attention of **St. John Chrysostom** is that the Apostle considers that it is a blessing to be able to remember his disciple in prayers night and day, and for that he gives thanks to God!

The Apostle constantly prays for his disciple so that God may grant him success in his spiritual life and in his ministry. Such prayers constitute an integral part of St. Paul’s life and reveal his embracing heart that supports all his brothers and disciples. Clearly, prayers are an inseparable part of his work as a preacher and minister. It is vital to offer constant prayers for ministers and for those they serve, otherwise preaching by word of mouth and by living, as role models would be insufficient. This is the source of the power of St. Paul the Apostle and of his spiritual children! In this present generation, I truly think that the whole world is in dire need for persons who can pray fervently, with a big heart filled with faith in God Who works through His ministers. A ministry that exists without prayers is a hollow one that will perish as it depends on the work of human beings alone!

Finally, the Apostle is inspired by the spirit of power and love to reveal his deep desire to see his disciple. As we have remarked earlier, the disciple considers that delicate human sentiments should not be repressed or smothered. The sight of a disciple weeping as he bids farewell to the Apostle, or the imprisonment of the Apostle, is not forgotten for a moment as he says, “*greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy.*” [4] The life of the Apostle and all those close to him was filled with holy sentiments and they wept when they had to leave one another (Acts 20:37, 38; 21:31). He reveals his yearning to see his children: “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:8). Also: “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire,” (1 Thess 2:17,18).

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: [What can you say, you great and big person, you to whom and for whom the world was crucified (Gal. 9:24), you who have abandoned all that which is physical, and as though you had no body? You who have reached that degree of slavery to love that you rushed with that earthly body – made of earth – is that what you see? He answers: Yes, I am not ashamed to confess to that; indeed I boast, for I carry within me a great love that is the mother of all virtues⁴.]

The Apostle does not stop at exposing these emotions as he uses them through the Holy Spirit to

³ In 2 Tim. Hom. 1.

⁴ Ep. 2:10.

encourage his children to struggle with a powerful spirit. He says, “*When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded, now lives in you also. Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” (v 5-7)

The Apostle encourages him to minister in a spirit of power, love and deliberation. He reminds him of three matters: his relationship with his family, with the Apostle, and with God.

First: His relationship with his family; St. Timothy is indebted to his grandmother and his mother for the genuine faith he has received from them since his childhood. This is what truly gladdens the Apostle’s heart as he regards the holy families as a living church in which the Lord’s children are brought up in the living faith. They receive the Truth as the source of life that they have to practice daily. It is not a theoretical knowledge or superficial observances of formalities of worship. St. John says, “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in Truth.” (2 John 4) And **St. Jerome** wrote to Laeta to guide her as to how to raise her daughter, and said: [Be a school for her, a role model for what you wish her to be in her childhood... neither you nor her father should do anything that, by imitating you, would lead her to sin... You will teach her more through your example than through your commands...⁵]

Concerning the faith he has received from his family, it is “*genuine.*” The Greek word that corresponds to that is used when liquids are tested in the sunlight to reveal their purity and the absence of any defected particles. It is as though the Apostle is saying: The faith of your family has been tested in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of Righteousness, and has been found pure and free of any blemishes. It is a faith whose goal is the salvation of the soul, and the fellowship with God. It does not seek appearances or words of praise.

It is possible to say that homes that are truly holy, that are genuinely faithful, and that are inspired by the flame of true love, offer their children the opportunity to live with God. They offer support in their youth and up to their death. As for the homes that appear holy but are devoid of true love, they present a bad picture to their children. This leads them to revolt against the faith and to hate truth even more than those who have been raised in homes filled with evil. A child can conceive what is in the heart of his parents and to discover whether their faith is genuine or fake!

Second: The relationship of St. Paul with his disciple; St. Paul says, “*I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*” [6] I have laid my hands on you so that you may receive the gift of the priesthood and the duty to shepherd your congregation. Hence my fervent relationship with you is in the Lord the Holy Fire. Your love for me reveals itself in your fervor or in your constant fanning of this divine fire by responding to the fiery work of the Holy Spirit Who lives in you. Here

⁵ Ep. 107; The author: *Brotherly Love*, 1964, p. 287 (in Arabic).

the Apostle raises the level of the relationship between them as it unites in the Lord. Hence, he urges his disciple to work constantly since the free gift of God becomes fiery only in the lives of active ministers and not in those who are lazy.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**: [Just as the fire needs fuel, so does any blessing require our activity to maintain its power.] And St. Paul says, ***“I remind you to stir up the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands.”*** [6] In other words, the blessing of the Spirit that you have received and that enables you to organize the church, make miracles and fulfill the duties of a minister, can be either smothered or nourished by us. In another verse, St. Paul says, “Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thess 5:19) Through laziness and carelessness, the gift of God can be turned off; yet by keeping vigil and struggling it retains its power. Truly, the gift of God lives in you; may you fan its fire. In other words, may you be filled with confidence, gladness, and joy...and be a man⁶.]

Third: His relationship with God; just as his relationship with his family rests in the Lord, the same applies to his relationship with the Apostle. It is the Lord Himself who grants him the Spirit of power, love, and perception. He does not grant a spirit of failure or fear. It is as though St. Paul supports his disciple by looking up to God Himself rather than the circumstances around him. There is neither fear nor dread of failure, but rather a sense of power, love, and wisdom. Regarding the surrounding circumstances, they may be summed up as follows:

- A- The burden of responsibility in contrast with his young age. In the Apostle’s previous epistle, St. Paul tells him: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity.” (1 Tim. 4:12)
- B- The imprisonment of St. Paul: probably, St. Timothy got to know all the suffering St. Paul went through during his imprisonment.
- C- The sense of loss as he would miss the Apostle on his departure from this world.
- D- The presence of opposition, whether from the Judaic population or the Gnostics with their inventions to corrupt the Christian faith.

St Paul encourages his disciple to work in the spirit of power that is capable of facing difficulties, in the spirit of love that is capable of sacrificing and giving, and in the spirit of wisdom that is capable of making clear judgments without any impulsive or extreme tendencies. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that grant believers, and especially ministers, authority to trample powerfully on snakes and scorpions and all the power of the enemy. Hence they are enabled to serve with a spirit of courage. This is not in any way apparent physical courage or any other power, as human beings understand it. That is why the Apostle associates it with love. Power here is the power of God to enflame the heart with love towards all other beings. That love is associated with ***“wisdom,”*** so that a shepherd, in his love, needs to be wise and aware by

⁶ In 2 Tim. Hom. 1.

“sound mind.” The Apostle may have intended the necessity to deliberate, so that the shepherd does not serve as an individual in isolation. He needs to deliberate and work in union with the total spirit of the Church, regardless of his priestly position or rank. This is what we observe in St. Paul himself in spite of the fact that he believes that he has been “separated...from his mother’s womb” to be an apostle, and that the Only-Begotten Son revealed Himself to him (Gal 1:16), that he might “preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run in vain.” (Gal 2:2)

God grants His ministers the spirit of power to enable them to work without fear, whereas the wicked “fear and dread will fall on them.” (Exod 15:16) God plants in His children spiritual courage and allows terror to corrupt the hearts of the wicked. With power, God grants the spirit of love so that ministers comprehend God’s love. Hence their hearts respond to His love and open up to love all mankind. That power is accompanied by gentleness and tenderness. What maintains a balance between power and love is the spirit of understanding and judgment. A minister would therefore know how to be courageous without neglecting to be gentle, and gentle without neglecting to be courageous. Besides, he possesses soundness of mind that implies having the spirit of mutual deliberation among ministers. This grants balance to a minister’s duties and services.

3- PREACHING THE WORD WITH A SPIRIT OF POWER

A church minister or shepherd preaches the Good News of Jesus Christ boldly. He feels no shame as he is filled with the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. St. Paul clarifies this point as follows: ***“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the Gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”*** (v 8, 9).

The Apostle advises his disciple to serve God and witness to the Gospel in spite of any suffering. The secret of his power rests in the Cross, that is the source of salvation for mankind, and the source of our sanctification. On the Cross, our Lord Jesus Christ witnessed to the divine love and fulfilled everlasting intentions. Through the Cross, the Apostle became enslaved and witnessed to his love for the Crucified. It is as though the Apostle urges his disciple to preach, not depending on his own personal human fervor and zeal, but through his joy in the Cross and Its power.

In our previous study, we saw how some Gnostics corrupted people’s minds by leading them away from faith and teaching that mere knowledge is the way to salvation. For them, faith became a mere means for creating arguments and foolish discussions. These had no other aim but to attain intellectual knowledge depending on their personal effort. They wished to ignore that the power of faith in the Cross is the mystery behind the life of a believer, granting him salvation and sanctity⁷. This drove the Apostle to underline the

⁷ The author: *The First Epistle of St Paul to Timothy*, 2002, p. 11-12.

dual work of the Cross: as the mystery behind the Lord's own testimony to the God's eternal divine love towards mankind, as well as the mystery granting salvation and sanctification to mankind.

St John Chrysostom comments on this passage as follows:

[There is nothing more evil than when man attempts to measure and judge divine matters through human reasoning (as the Gnostics). By so doing, a person falls a great distance off the rock (of faith), and is deprived of the Light. If a person tries to perceive the sun's rays with his naked human eyes, he will not only fail to see them but will also be greatly harmed. Similarly, and even to a greater degree, would a person be harmed if he attempts to perceive God's Light by depending on the insights of his own human reasoning and thereby ruling out God's gift.

Note how Marcion, Mani, Valentinus, and other heretics introduced corrupt teachings to the Church of God. They measured divine matters by the yardstick of human reasoning and felt ashamed to deal with the issue of divine Providence. When I speak about the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am not speaking about something shameful but rather about a glorious matter! For there is no greater relationship revealing God's love to mankind than the Cross. Neither heaven, nor seas, nor earth, nor the creation of all things from a void, nor anything else can be compared to the Cross! This is the glory of St. Paul: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal 6:14)

For those nature mongers, they stumble and feel ashamed... From the start, the Apostle urges his disciple, and others through him, by these words: "**do not be ashamed.**" In other words, they should not be ashamed to preach the Crucified but rather to feel glorified in him.

Death, imprisonment, and chains could all be shameful and disgraceful matters in themselves, but when the cause for them is explained, then the mystery is clearly revealed and these matters become subjects of glory and pride. It is the Death that has saved the world and destroyed death itself!

It is the Death that has linked heaven and earth, destroyed the power of Satan, transformed human beings into angels and children of God, and elevated our nature to be fit for the royal wedding⁸.]

This is the "**Spirit of power**" that manifests itself in our joy in the Cross, and in our belief that it eradicates death and grants us a heavenly life. Therefore we are not ashamed of the Cross, but rather give It a practical role in our lives and partake of the sufferings for Its sake. This is what the Apostle declares to his disciple while he offers himself as a living example since he has become captive to the Crucified Lord.

St John Chrysostom speaks for St. Paul as he says, [Do not be ashamed, for I who have raised the dead, made miracles, and turned the world towards the faith, have now become a prisoner. However, I am not a prisoner due to some evil I have done but I am a prisoner for the sake of the Crucified. If my Lord was not ashamed of the Cross, than I am not ashamed of my chains... If our Lord and Master has endured the Cross, then it is even more appropriate that we get tied with chains. Anyone who feels ashamed of what the Master

⁸ In 2 Tim. Hom. 2.

has endured – the Cross and the chains - is actually ashamed of the Crucified Himself. Now I do not endure the chains for my own sake, for we should not give in to human emotions, but you have to bear your share in these sufferings⁹.]

So that our readers do not think that bearing sufferings is in itself the price of our salvation and sanctification, St. Paul underlines that we are indebted to the divine plan and to free grace in these words: **“not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”** (v 9) It is true that the Cross, our desire to be saved, and our acceptance of the divine call are all factors that drive us to bear the sufferings of the Cross in a practical way. Yet these sufferings are not a price for these gifts, but the source of power lies in God’s own will to save and sanctify us: “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:13)

The eternal mercies and divine plans have been announced in the Lord Jesus Christ who appeared in the fullness of time and was crucified to redeem us. St. Paul explains: **“but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”** (v 10, 11)

By these words, the Apostle underlines that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His deliverance of the Gospel through His crucifixion are the mystery of our power and the source of the free Divine grace. Hence, we have been saved from death and have been offered life and immortality.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Now you can see the power and the grace granted to us not by deeds but through the Gospel! This is the subject of hope that has been fulfilled in His Body –by the Cross- and how does It become fulfilled in us? Through the Gospel¹⁰.]

In His Body the sting of death was broken on our account (1 Cor 15:26), through His carrying of the Cross. He cleared our inward eye to enable us to accept the Gospel and thereby enjoy the light and eternal life. In another passage, the Apostle confirms that the eradication of death is the ultimate purpose of His coming. “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Heb 2:14, 15)

This is what inspired St. Paul to carry the spirit of power as he preached and taught the Gospel among the Gentiles. He bore sufferings as his Master and said: **“to Whom I was appointed a preacher, an Apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”** [11]

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

St John Chrysostom comments as follows: [Why does he repeatedly call himself “*a teacher of the Gentile*”? Because he wishes the disciples to follow in his steps and carry on preaching to them! They should not fear sufferings for the sake of the Gospel since the strings of death have been overcome. He does not suffer for having committed any evil, but due to his work among the Gentiles¹¹.] Thus he presents himself as an example of shameless tolerance to sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. He says, “*For this reason I also suffer these things, nevertheless I am not ashamed.*” [12]

St. John Chrysostom says, [See how he clarifies his teaching through his deeds, and says, “*I also suffer these things,*” and “*I have entrusted for Him until that Day.*” What is that thing that he has entrusted? It is faith and preaching the Gospel. It is God who has entrusted him with them and he has diligently guarded that trust. I can tolerate everything to avoid spoiling that treasure. I am not ashamed of these matters as long as they are safe and uncorrupted. He might have also meant the trust of the believers themselves that God has placed in his hands, or those he has entrusted in God’s hands, for he says “And now, brethren, I commend you to God.” (Acts 20:30) He places the fruits of the trust put into his care into the hands of St. Timothy¹².]

St Paul is clearly a living example of the teacher who watches over the treasure entrusted to him, whether that is the upright faith or the believers themselves. He endures constant sufferings and delivers the treasure to his disciples and so encourages them to follow in the same spirit. They too would have to endure sufferings for the sake of the trust placed in their hands. Thus St. Paul presents himself as a living example of the honest shepherd, not only in that he preserves the trust but also in his ability to teach capable disciples who are able to continue his work. In turn, they would also follow the same path of enduring sufferings, as they will be exposed at some time and while guarding their trust.

It is worthy to note that when St. Paul speaks about sufferings he does not deliberately bring them upon himself. However, when they come, he counts them as instances that bring him to glory. Besides, the Geek word for “*keep*” [12] as a military expression implies “complete protection.” The real believer feels that way as he is embraced by complete divine protection. God protects believers entrusted with the faith and this fills his servants with confidence and hope. St. Peter says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” (1 Peter 4:19)

4- HOLDING STEADFASTLY TO THE UPRIGHT FAITH

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Jesus Christ. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us.” (v 13, 14)

St. Paul has clearly imprinted in the heart of his disciple a living picture of the trust of faith, which

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

takes the form of belief in *“the sound Word”* as well as the way of to walk in *“love.”* He has engraved in that disciple’s mind the code of faith and the broad lines for its practical application. Consequently, the disciple himself has become a living and influential model for the faith handed down through all generations. This is the living legacy or the tradition; it is the application of the Gospel which becomes evident in the lives of the shepherd and his children, and which is handed down through the generations to come. It is reflected as a life lived through the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can we earnestly observe and guard the trust? *“By the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us.”*¹³

St. John Chrysostom says, “The human soul cannot guard such great matters such as these. Why? Because there are many thieves laying in wait for them, and the darkness is thick while Satan is standing at the doors plotting against that trust! Then how can we guard it? By the Holy Spirit, that is if the Holy Spirit lives in us, and if we do not remove a expel grace. Then God will stand with us, for “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”(Ps 127:1) This is our fortress, our citadel, and our refuge! If the Holy Spirit dwells in us and He is our Guardian, then why would we need the commandments? In order to hold steadfastly onto the Spirit and never let Him abandon us¹⁴.]

5- THE SUPPORT OF THE DISCIPLES TO ST. PAUL

Some disciples abandoned St. Paul when he was imprisoned and in critical circumstances. This behavior represents a new form of suffering that he endured for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, some stood by him, and this left an imprint on the heart of the Apostle who was a highly sensitive person. Hence he prayed that the heavens might reward them.

St. Paul says, *“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me diligently and found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.”* (v 15 –18)

The Apostle gives his disciple examples of those who have abandoned him in times of suffering, and they were *“all those in Asia,”* who were then in Rome but had deflected. By Asia, he meant the Roman state in Asia Minor, and which had Ephesus as its capital. These were in Rome at the time of his imprisonment and had come with him as Demas had done, (4:10). While he was in jail, St. Paul needed their love and services but they returned his love with coldness. Moreover, they seized that occasion to create division in the Church and to arouse feelings against him. They might have also feared Nero and were ashamed of Paul the prisoner. Whatever their point of view, their attitude was a Cross that the Apostle endured powerfully for

¹³ To study the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us and whether he abandons us or not, review the article: ‘Do not extinguish the Spirit’ written by St. Philoxinus.

¹⁴ In 2 Tim. Hom. 3.

the sake of the Gospel. **St. John Chrysostom** comments on that by saying, [The Apostle speaks about their behavior without blaming them, yet he praises the one who showed kindness to him and prayed that he might be greatly blessed¹⁵.]

He prayed for mercy to the household of Onesiphorus¹⁶, who is the son of St. Paul in the faith. He received the faith at his hands in Iconium. He was a merchant in Ephesus, and he comforted the Apostle while he was in jail. Probably, he dressed his wounds, or visited him often in jail, thereby endangering his own life.

Some interpreters believe that Onesiphorus had already passed away at the time of writing and therefore St. Paul prayed God to have mercy on him on the Lord's great Day. This passage is used as an example for a prayer for the departed, so that we may ask God to be merciful to them. This does not mean that we are praying for them as impenitent sinners but that they might be forgiven for any carelessness or slackness a believer might have committed. That is why the Church recites in the Prayer for the departed the following: "If they have committed any carelessness or disregard while they were beings in the flesh and living in this world, we pray You Who are loving and good to grant them the remission of their sins." All the apostolic liturgies include prayers for the departed.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite says, [If the sins of the departed are contemptible then it could serve the next person beneficially, and if they are tremendously costly then God would close the doors in his face¹⁷.]

St. Augustine says, [Services are held for the departed; if the departed is a good person, the service is held for thanksgiving; if he is an evil one, then it will not do him any good even though it would give comfort to the living members attending the prayers¹⁸.]

Rev. Robertson says that surely Onesiphorus had passed away at the time St. Paul was writing, and these words are a logical proof that the departure of any person does not deprive us of the right or the duty to pray for them. We believe that such prayers for the departed have been part of the liturgies ever since the early ages of Christianity. Until now, they constitute a part of the liturgies used in a great part of the Christian world¹⁹.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ A Greek name that means 'to find rest.'

¹⁷ Fr. Marcos Daoud: *Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to Timothy*, (for Matthew Henry), 1975, p. 130 (in Arabic).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁹ Rev. Robertson: *The Expositor's Bible*, p. 324-9.

CHAPTER 2

STRUGGLE IN THE MINISTRY

In the previous chapter, St. Paul has revealed the “Spirit of Power” that works through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and fills the life of a pastor. It is the Spirit that we enjoy through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. In this chapter, the Apostle speaks about “**struggle in the ministry**,” clarifying how a minister or servant of the Church lives with a “Spirit of Power” and struggles throughout his life:

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1- Struggle and Grace | v 1. |
| 2-Teaching New Servants | v 2. |
| 3- Spiritual Military | v 3-13. |
| 4- Avoidance of False Judgments | v 14-20. |
| 5- Struggle and the Inner Life | v 21-22. |
| 6- Struggle and Damaging Strife | v 23-26. |

1- STRUGGLE AND GRACE

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (v 1)

St. Paul wishes to speak about the spiritual struggle of a minister or Church servant as he teaches others to serve in the Lord’s Vineyard, and as he seeks their salvation. At the same time he wishes to warn against the harm of engaging in false judgments or corrupt alliances that destroy one’s inner peace. He advises his disciple, as his own spiritual son, to be strengthened in his struggle by the grace granted to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and not to depend on human zeal or personal enthusiasm.

We greatly need to be empowered by grace: “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” (Eph 6:10) When St. Peter depended on his human zeal, he thought he had the power to accompany the Lord until His Crucifixion. Yet he failed as he denied Him in spite of his inner yearning to struggle. Later, and as he was supported by God’s grace, he was able to be His witness and to bear much pain in the process. Note that St. Paul speaks gently and lovingly, calling St. Timothy as his “*son*,” while he commands him to be armored by grace so that he might engage in the struggle according to the rules.

2- TEACHING NEW SERVANTS

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (v 3)

The mission of the Apostle does not end in his struggle and concern about the salvation of others, or in teaching others to be concerned with the same tasks. He wishes that those disciples teach another generation who becomes capable to teach in turn. That is the true struggle or the correct spiritual leadership; a pastor has to raise disciples who know how to school others so that they in turn can efficiently carry on the burden of teaching.

This is our understanding of delivering the trust or the holy tradition. It is a continuous schooling carried across the ages to call others to receive and deliver the trust of the living and applied faith without deviation.

3- SPIRITUAL MILITARY

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hard working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” (v 3-7)

St. Paul presents three examples of spiritual struggle: the loyal soldier serving his king (v 2-3), the competitor in athletic games (v 5), and the farmer (v 6).

A- **The good soldier**, who takes pride in his loyalty to his country and its leader, is really fighting for his country. Similarly, a Christian, in his spiritual struggle, fights against the devil and sin under the leadership of the Lord of glory Himself who has enlisted him. The Apostle calls Him “the Author of (our) salvation” (Heb 2:10), the Leader who conquered the devil on the Cross and continues to conquer him through us, (Rom 8:37).

To be counted as spiritual soldiers of the Lord is a great honor that we do not deserve. For His sake, all difficulties and pain are negligible. Since we have accepted this spiritual military, we have to remain undisturbed by the daily events of life. That is not because they are impure but because they do not fit into the devoted life of the soldiers who have become dedicated to serve the holy Word.

B- **The competitors in athletics** struggle in order to win crowns. They endure daily training, and deprive themselves of certain foods in order to win. Similarly, we need to struggle according to certain rules, or in other words, according to the Law of our Trainer, Jesus Christ in order to enjoy spiritual triumph. Truly, there are many who struggle, yet they do not follow the rules; and these are similar to those who practice sports but have no wise trainer. Such individuals usually fail. Indeed, they may deviate into a certain direction that brings them physical harm as well as failure to win a competition or crown. Hence, it is important for a believer to struggle, not on his own, but under the leadership of his Master “the true Trainer” and in the spirit of His Church and the evangelic teaching of the Fathers. In this way, he will not deviate to the right or to the left with any degree of extremism or exaggeration that would cause him to lose his life on earth and his heavenly crown. It is true that the struggle, the hardship, and the pain involved are difficult matters, yet if the rules are followed, these difficulties become a source of joy and cheer. In his writings about the “ascending” Psalms that the Levites sang as they climbed the fifteen steps leading to the altar, **St. Jerome** says, [Do not lose faith, O man, for God stands on the fifteenth step and He watches and helps you! So if you are at the first step and the distance between the first and the fifteenth step seems to be

insurmountable, do not look at the steps but look up to the Lord²⁰.] Thus struggling according to the rules is both painful and joyful; it is filled with difficulties, yet it brings peace to the spirit as it looks up to the true Trainer and is committed to the Church and her teachings.

St Ambrose finds that the struggle according to the rules or what the Apostle also calls “**the good fight,**” (4:7), simply means the complete consecration of the heart for that task, and without anxiety for other matters. It is like being engaged in the service of an emperor and therefore inappropriate to engage in other matters such as trade. Although trade in itself is not forbidden, yet engaging in it would imply disrespect and belittling to his service for the emperor²¹.

C- **The farmer** who toils and ploughs the land in order to have fruit deserves to get a share of the harvest, even though others might have put in the seeds and others collected the harvest. Similarly, in our spiritual struggle, we work and we get rewarded even if the fruit is not harvested except after our death. So let us plough, and let others put in the seeds, and others to water or to harvest. Still, our share of the fruit is being reserved for us in the Lord.

These are the three examples that St. Paul presents to his disciple to encourage him to struggle. In the first example, he underlines our obligation to struggle for the sake of the King Jesus Christ Himself. In the second example, he stresses that the struggle should be according to the Rules and Law of God. In the third example, he asks us to struggle in order to bring fruit, even though it might come later on after we have passed away.

Finally, St. Paul advises his disciple to “*consider what (he) says.*” However, Timothy would be able to understand his advice only if the Holy Spirit granted him insight. That is why the Apostle prays for him: “*may the Lord give you understanding in all things.*” It is the Lord who grants help and by His grace we receive not only power to struggle but insight also.

Having encouraged him to struggle spiritually in the Lord, and prayed for him so that the Lord might grant him understanding, St. Paul presents to Timothy the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the “Author and finisher of our faith,” (Heb 12:2), the Conqueror of Satan, and the Destroyer of Death. He says, “***Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the Word of God is not chained.***” (v 8, 9)

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself led the spiritual struggle against death. He entered into death to break its thorn in its own domain. The Word of God became incarnate in order to enter with the body into death. However, death could not imprison Him, nor could corruption come near Him. Therefore He arose with His power so that He would raise us with Him and carry us into the new and resurrected life. The Apostle says, “

²⁰ On Ps. Hom. 41.

²¹ Duties of the Clergy, 1:36.

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4) He became a son of David, submitted to the Father on our behalf, and accepted death by His own will, so that we might be counted as being obedient to His Father through Him, and so that we might enjoy the power of the resurrection that proceeds from Him.

That is the theme of St. Paul’s preaching and mission so that we might enjoy the Lord’s risen life and victory over death, for he says, **“according to my gospel.”** The Master has endured difficulties, and was even chained as an evildoer or criminal (John 18:30), although He is the Righteous One Who knows no sin. They bound Him in the flesh as one under trial, yet He is the Giver of inner freedom that cannot be bound. **“But the Word of God cannot be chained,”** and so it is impossible to tie or restrict the divine Word and Creator! Thus, servants of the Lord may be tied physically, but no one can chain the Word of God. Indeed, the Word may be more powerfully proclaimed through the chains of the body. It is possible to bind their bodies, yet their testimony for the Lord does not stop. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Our hands are chained but our tongue is not, for there is nothing that can tie the tongue except cowardice and lack of faith. Since these two are absent in us, then preaching the Gospel will not be chained, even though we are bound with chains... It is the Word of God and not our own! Human chains cannot bind the Word of God²².]

Now that St. Paul has presented the Lord Jesus Christ as the greatest example for bearing pain and chains for the sake of our salvation, he goes on to present himself as an example of a person who has followed in his Master’s footsteps. He says, **“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”** (v 10)

The Lord Jesus Christ endured suffering for my salvation, and it was impossible for the chains to impede His work. Now I too bear suffering for the sake of my brothers who have been chosen so that they might enjoy the salvation I enjoy and so that they might partake with me of the eternal glory.

St. John Chrysostom says,

[Notice too that there is another reason for his service that the Apostle expresses as follows: “I do not bear these matters for my own sake but for the salvation of others. I am able to lead a life free of dangers and I do not have to suffer any of these hardships if I am concerned only with myself.

Therefore why do I have to bear these matters? For the sake of others so that they may obtain eternal life... he does not say it is for certain persons, but rather **“for the elect.”**

If God has elected them, then it is fit that we bear all things for their sake **“so that they also may obtain the salvation.”**

By saying **“they also”** he means that they may receive what we also have received, for God has

²² In 2 Tim. Hom. 4.

chosen us too. Just as God has suffered for us, it is fitting that we also suffer for them²³.]

The Lord has suffered for us to offer His pain as a free gift or blessing that we can enjoy. As for us, we have to suffer for others in return for His suffering on our behalf. Hence we return His love by love as we are like someone who is anxious to pay back a debt. However, whatever we do for our brothers, we will remain indebted with our whole life to our Savior.

Since we enjoy God's saving act, and accept His suffering on our behalf, we taste the promise of eternal glory. Moreover, all our suffering and hardship become insignificant as we bring our brothers to enjoy the same eternal glory that we enjoy.

Finally, the Apostle closes his words about spiritual military by a song of conquest and victory, as he says, "***This is a faithful saying, for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him, if we endure we shall also reign with Him, if we deny Him, He also will deny us, if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.***" (v 11-13)

This is the hymn that every spiritual soldier of Jesus Christ should sing during his war with Satan or against death. It is the praise of faith in the crucified Lord risen from the dead. In it, we proclaim that we accept to die with Him so that we might enjoy life in Him, and that we endure suffering patiently in order to reign with Him. If we confess before people, through our acceptance of suffering and death for His sake, then He will acknowledge us before His Father, but if we deny Him, he will deny us, (Matt 10:32,33). If we honestly struggle, we will receive crowns. If we are dishonest, He will send trustworthy pastors to watch over his people but we will not be relieved of our responsibility. We proclaim in a different way, in this hymn, the features of the spiritual soldier of the Lord: death to sin, patience in suffering, and testimony to the Lord, loyalty unto death!

St John Chrysostom comments on these words as follows: [How do we die with Him? The Apostle indicates that it is the death that takes place in the baptismal font and in suffering which he explains in these words: "carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," (2 Cor 4:10); "we were buried with Him through baptism into death," (Rom 6:4); "our old man was crucified with Him," "we have been united together in the likeness of His death." (Rom 6:6,5) However, the Apostle also mentions the death that occurs as a result of false judgments, especially as he himself was suffering as a result of these at the time of writing this epistle. That is what he intends when he writes here about "***if we died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with Him.***"²⁴]

He also says, [***If we deny Him, He also will deny us.***" Hence the reward corresponds to the good as well as to the bad circumstances... yet it does not equate the act, for it is us who wickedly deny Him whereas

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

He Who denies us is God... and what a vast difference there is between man and God?... Another view point is that we harm ourselves by such acts while He remains untouched, and this is clarified in the following words: ***“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”*** This is, if we do not believe that He is risen from the dead, our disbelief will not harm Him... Since He is God no harm can ever touch Him due to our denial. Indeed, He wishes us to acknowledge Him for our own benefit²⁵.]

4- AVOIDANCE OF FALSE JUDGMENTS

A pastor or Church servant walking in the Spirit of Power refuses to participate in false judgments. He also calls upon believers to avoid them so that they may not be spiritually destroyed. The Apostle says, ***“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.”*** (v 14) The Apostle asks St. Timothy to remind the people and advise them before the Lord to avoid off long conversations that destroy the soul. He also asks him to be personally involved in a practical life of struggle rather than in false judgments. And tells him: ***“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”*** (v 15) Thus, all his thoughts should be devoted to gaining approval before God rather than achieving victory through conversing with men. He needs to devote all his efforts to be a worker who is not ashamed of bearing suffering for the sake of the Gospel that is having pleasure in the Word of truth.

St John Chrysostom finds that the words ***“rightly dividing the Word of truth”*** imply that the focus of struggle should be on the proclamation of the Truth and the uprooting of all extraneous babble. It is as though a good pastor has to tear away from his preaching all that is foreign to the Truth by the sword of the Spirit. In this way the Apostle inoculates his disciple against the Gnostics who corrupt their time with what they wrongly label as “knowledge,” and which is really a philosophy of playing with words that do not carry the spirit of purity and which is far removed from faith.

This tearing away or amputation has great importance as it ends the wave of increasing evil caused by Gnostic inventions, and which he explains as follows: ***“But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer.”*** (v 16) False words led them from one evil to another so that they became like a growing ulcer that corrupts the body. They believed that through ***“gnosis”*** arguments could be a substitute for faith. Through this knowledge they believed that the body is an element of darkness and that its creator, if he is not evil, then he is a lesser one than the creator of the spirit. This belief led them to reject the belief in the resurrection from the dead, as they considered that spiritual resurrection has been achieved for the soul on earth, and that it is not realized for the body, which is an element of darkness. This thought has brought a corrupt meaning to their minds concerning marriage and certain foods, as they have become forbidden and unclean matters. This has also driven some of them to neglect the sanctity of the body as they considered it an element of darkness and therefore gave it free reign

²⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

to indulge in its lusts. In this manner, they deviated from one thought to another, and from one evil to another, and as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [They do not stop at that, for they present something new from which they fabricate new ideas constantly, and in this way their deviation away from the haven of security is continuous and is limitless²⁶.]

The Apostle presents examples of the deviation of these inventors as he says, **“Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.”** (v 17) They said that the resurrection has already been realized in our spiritual life and that it will not happen later on to the body.

St Augustine comments as follows: [Many deny the resurrection of the body as they affirm that the resurrection has already occurred through faith... They say that it has occurred in a way that they do not expect it to happen later on. Indeed, they blame those who expect the resurrection of the body since the resurrection, which has been promised us, has been realized in the mind only and through faith²⁷.] **St. Augustine** also says, [Truly, there is a resurrection that is realized now, for unbelievers were dead, and the wicked were dead. However, the righteous are alive, and they have crossed from the death of disbelief to the life of belief. Yet this does not imply our disbelief in the future resurrection with respect to the body²⁸.]

When the Apostle speaks about the avoidance of Gnostic arguments and judgments that create confusion, leading some to imagine that they have silenced the Word of truth, he confirms that God protects his believing children in the path of truth. He says, **“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.”** (v 18- 20).

No matter how many deceptions and inventions are spread, yet the foundation of God is steadfast and His Church stands. His children are known and protected, sealed by the Holy Spirit as they are called by the name of Christ. They are vessels of gold and silver in God’s House in Heaven, adorned with glory! It is true that some vessels choose destruction for themselves. They are the ones who are unable to bear the truth, accept the work of the Holy Spirit, and to become members in the Body of Christ. These are the ones who are made of wood and clay and are held in dishonor.

St Augustine says that when a person looks at a tree, he sees that it has many leaves, yet its fruit is often hidden behind them like the fig tree. Similarly, the Gnostics and the wicked are apparent, and the believers seem to be nowhere. However, any one who comes closer to the tree and possesses spiritual insight realizes that the children of God are there though hidden away. These are established on Jesus Christ

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *In Ioan. tr. 19:14.*

²⁸ *Ibid 22:12.*

Himself, and according to the Apostle “no one other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 3:11) He also says, “*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.*” (v 20 –22) This is the mystery of the Power of the Spirit within us. We are established on Christ Himself, we carry the seal of His Holy Spirit, and through that “*The Lord knows those who are His.*”

We have previously mentioned to “*the Seal*”²⁹ as a sign of God’s possession. According to **St. Didymus of Alexandria**, [When we are plunged in the baptismal font, through the will of God the Father, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, we get stripped of our sins. We get rid of the old man, and are renewed and **sealed by His power** thereby becoming His private possession. When we come out of the font we are invested in our Lord Jesus Christ as though wearing a dress that does not get old, and we are worthy of the honor of the Holy Spirit Himself. It is the Holy Spirit that has renewed us and marked us by His Seal...No one can receive the heavenly gifts, however perfect and spotless his life may be in all other ways, unless he is renewed by the Holy Spirit of God and driven by His Holy Seal³⁰.]

The Seal is also an indication that one lives under the protection of God. According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa**: [The sheep that are marked cannot be easily stolen, whereas those that do not carry the Seal are food for thieves³¹.]

The Seal constitutes a mark of spiritual militancy, and as **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** tells those requesting to be baptized, [Every one of you should come and present himself before God and in the presence of countless hosts of angels. Then the Holy Spirit places the Seal on your souls. In this way your souls are enlisted in God’s great army³².]

This Seal is permanent and works for our glory or indictment. **St. Augustine** explains this as follows: [Hold steadfastly to what you have received for it does not change. It is a royal badge!³³]

St John Chrysostom notes that the message of St. Paul that is in our hands deals with two matters: a warning not to neglect the Seal that we have received by the Holy Spirit, and encouragement so that we do not fear the presence of heretics or wicked ones. He comments as follows: [May we never remove the royal Seal from us, for it is a royal sign, and without it we will be counted among those who are unmarked and become unhealthy. It is fitting that we become established steadfastly on the Foundation and thus do not get carried away here and there³⁴.] He also comments: [The Apostle intends to say, “Do not be disturbed by the

²⁹ *The author: The Holy Spirit: The New Birth and Constant Renewal, 1981, p. 62-68 (in Arabic).*

³⁰ *De Trinitate, 2:12.*

³¹ *PG 36:364.*

³² *PG 33:428A.*

³³ *In Ioan, tr. 16.*

³⁴ *In 2 Tim. Hom. 6.*

presence of corrupted and wicked ones, for in a big house many such vessels can be found... but they do not receive honor³⁵.”]

There are faithful and believing teachers who are like vessels of gold and silver in a big house. They are honored in the Lord. Gold indicates their new heavenly nature, and silver indicated their love for the Word of God and that is purified, as silver, seven times. A true teacher is one who lives with heavenly thought and whose heart is not attracted to material things or matters. His heart does not cling to temporary matters, while he holds on to God’s Word (silver), and hides behind It. Thus, he does not offer harmful arguments and babblings, but rather presents a true apostolic life. As for the harmful heretics, they are referred to as wood that gets consumed by the fire of lust and cannot be found. They are likened to clay as they embody earthly thoughts and pray for material things. They are unable to witness the heavens or to recognize them.

What we say about teachers and heretics applies also to a congregation to some degree. There are some who are gold or silver, while others are wood or clay.

But are we the ones to judge and make distinctions? St. Cyprian answers as follows:

[It is vanity and arrogance that would drive someone to dare or imagine that he could do what God has not granted even to His disciples, and to think of choosing the gold and silver vessels while shunning or expelling the wood and clay ones. Yet we know that the vessels made of wood will not be burned by the consuming divine fire except on the Day of the Lord; and the vessels made of clay will be ground only by the One who has received the iron rod³⁶.]

He adds: [although there seem to be adulterers in the Church, yet our faith and love should not be deterred. Consequently, we should not abandon the Church due to their presence. On the contrary, it is fitting that we struggle ourselves to be good corn so that when the time comes to collect the harvest we may receive the fruit of our toil and work... Beloved brothers, let us struggle to be vessels of gold or silver. The Lord alone has the right to destroy the vessels made of clay for He has been given the iron rod. The slave cannot be greater than his Master, and he cannot claim his own that which the Father has given to the Son only. Hence, he cannot think that he can hold the sickle and collect the harvest... or that he can separate the corn from the chaff by his own human wisdom³⁷.]

Neither do we possess the right to condemn nor to separate the corn from the chaff, or those worthy of honor from those worthy of dishonor. Conversely, we need to be confident that the Lord will not neglect the corn due to the chaff; neither will the vessels worthy of honor lose their reward due to dishonor. St. Paul says, **“The Lord knows those who are His.”**

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ep 51:52.*

³⁷ *Ep 50:3.*

In this context, **St. Augustine** says, [the wheat will not be consumed with the chaff (Matt. 3:12), and not because of bad fish will nothing be gathered from the net into the vessels, (Matt 13:47)... We have seen previously how we have been chosen even before we were born, and we have been surely promised: “whom He predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these also He glorified.” (Rom 8:30)³⁸]

St. Augustine goes on to say, [If though the corn is hidden among the chaff yet the owner of the field is aware of it, and no one can deny when it was a seed. Hence, even when the corn is among the chaff, the eyes of He who planted us will not be deceived³⁹.]

5- STRUGGLE AND THE INNER LIFE

In the great house there are vessels worthy of honor and others worthy of dishonor, and God is glorified in the one just as in the other. A person may believe that he is blameless for the evil he commits since he is a vessel of dishonor, believing that he has been created to be so. That is why the Apostle stresses human freewill that the Lord sanctifies and praises in these words: ***“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter – (dishonor) - he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”*** (v 21) What is the meaning here! That a person should cleanse himself, and this confirms man’s freewill. It is a rejection of those who claim that there is a good and an evil creation... The Apostle confirms that a human being has complete freedom and can consequently change from being a vessel of dishonor to one of honor. However, this cannot be achieved by one’s own power but by the work of God’s richest blessings and grace.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Notice that it is not due to man’s nature or due to an edict that a person is a vessel is gold or clay. This is achieved purely by our own will; otherwise a clay vessel will not become a gold one. Judas was a gold vessel and he became clay one⁴⁰.] **Origen** has used these words of the Apostle to affirm the free will of man that glorifies God⁴¹.

St Paul, the Apostle, urges us, through this epistle, to struggle by purifying our inner life and transforming it from a clay vessel to a golden one. In other words, to transform that which is earthly and material into that which is heavenly. This is possible through the grace of God that is active within us. It is the work of the fiery Holy Spirit as He sanctifies the inner depths of the soul to invest it with the image of the Creator. This transformation occurs through the new birth we receive in the waters of the baptismal font as well as the continual and unceasing renewal. Our ultimate goal and hope is to reach the full stature of our heavenly Savior.

³⁸ *On Ps. 89.*

³⁹ *On Ps. 50.*

⁴⁰ *In 2 Tim. hom. 6.*

⁴¹ *De Principis 3:1.*

St Paul wishes to proclaim that it is impossible to achieve any successful ministry without the sanctification and the perpetual growth of the pastor's life. It is a message for his disciple, St. Timothy, as well as to all pastors. The first enemy to this sanctified life and which turns a vessel into clay or earthly is physical lust. That is why St. Paul says, "***Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.***" (v 22)

The Apostle focuses on the two aspects of a pastor's spiritual growth: the positive and the negative. The negative aspect constitutes a pastor's obligation to flee from stumbling blocks and youthful desires; the positive aspect is his commitment to pursue righteous, faith, love and peace. It is not enough to flee from evil, for it is essential to be filled with good. It is not enough to abandon sin; for it is vital to receive the Lord Who is our righteousness, our peace, and the source of our love and faith.

It is worthy of a servant to beware of youthful lusts and not to think that he is invulnerable due to his past history of purity or on account of his age. Moreover, he should not consider such caution to be a sign of weakness as it is a sign of strength and discipline.

What does the Apostle mean by "***youthful lusts***"? **St. John Chrysostom** explains: [This does not imply adulterous lusts only, but includes all abnormal desires. I wish the elderly would learn that they should not engage in youthful acts. If anyone submits to arrogance, or love of power, or wealth, or physical pleasures, then these are considered youthful and stupid lusts. Such matters reflect a heart that is unsettled as yet, and a mind that is confused and lacks a deep foundation. So what does the Apostle recommend so that these matters do not attract a person? "***Flee...youthful lusts***" and, on the contrary, "***pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.***" St. Paul generally equates virtue with "***righteousness***" as it strengthens life, faith, meekness, and love. What does he mean by "***those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart***"? It is as though he is saying, "Rejoice in those who call on Him in truth and faithfulness. Adhere to such persons, for they are not hypocrites and they come to Him in peace, rejecting all disputes; rather than in those who simply call on the Lord. As for the others, do not ally yourself with them, but try to be as peaceable as you can ⁴²."]]

Generally, faithful pastors are renowned for their caution from all that might constitute a stumbling block, and for their struggle to enjoy all that which is edifying in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are excerpts of their sayings:

- ❖ I believe that wisdom dictates that we adhere to the traditions of the clergy, especially of those who have actually served in the priesthood. We should - specifically - avoid the celebrations of foreigners, provided that this does not interfere with the hospitality we owe to travelers.
- ❖ Concerning young clergy, they do not need to go to the homes of widows or virgins except for limited

⁴² In 2 Tim. Hom. 6.

visits. If such visits are necessary, an elderly one, such as a protopriest or bishop, should accompany him. Why do we need to give the world a chance to criticize us?

St. Ambrose⁴³

- ❖ Give equal concern or equal negligence to all the virgins of the Lord, without making any distinctions. Do not prolong your stay under one roof with them, or depend on your history of purity. You are not more holy than David or wiser than Solomon. Watch out for all that might be a cause for doubt or stumbling. Avoid scandals, and shut out all acts that could arouse doubt.

St. Irenaeus⁴⁴

6- STRUGGLE AND DAMAGING STRIFE

Just escaping from youthful lusts and being upright do not achieve the sanctification of the inner life. It requires the rejection of corruptive alliances, which claim to defend the truth as a means of purifying the soul. St. Paul explains this thought as follows: *“But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snares of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”* (v 22-26)

The duty of the pastor to preach the Word of Truth uprightly and to protect the Trust delivered to him against deviation or delinquency. This does not mean that he is to take part in foolish or ignorant disputes that would lead to divisions. Such actions destroy the purity of the soul and rob it of its inner peace.

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: [Even if he takes part in arguments, he should avoid divisions since he is God’s servant, and since God Himself is a God of peace⁴⁵.] Consequently, it is not appropriate to present the Truth by engaging in argumentative disputes. Actually, gentleness - even in disputes or warnings - is more effective upon others than violence or harsh disputes even if they are used for the sake of the Truth.

St. John Chrysostom explains this thought as follows: [It is befitting that a teacher be especially concerned with achieving his task humbly. A soul that seeks to learn rejects knowledge that is delivered in a harsh and contentious manner⁴⁶.] Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the greatest Teacher and Who knows the secrets of our souls, is entitled to condemn and reprimand us, yet this was said about Him: “He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will any one hear His voice in the streets.” (Matt 12:19) Is it not, therefore, befitting that we treat our brothers humbly as we teach them; and as we ourselves are exposed to the same weaknesses

⁴³ *Duties of the Clergy* 1:20 (68, 87).

⁴⁴ *The author: Pastoral Love*, p. 667 (in Arabic),

⁴⁵ *In 2 Tim. Hom. 6.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

that afflict them?!

St Paul presents **four important features** of a good teacher:

First: He should be gentle with every one without giving up on anyone. He should not turn away from any one. Probably he wished to oppose the thought of the Gnostics who classified believers into separate ranks: some were perfect and others were simple-minded.

Second: Besides being humble, gentle, and pure, a pastor needs to *“be able to teach.”* God is Wisdom in Himself and the Teacher of the universe, and He desires His pastors to be learners as well as teachers so that they do not get destroyed or bring others to destruction⁴⁷.

Third: Patient in dealing with difficulties. He needs to be like a farmer who toils for years in anticipation of gathering fruit from the trees. In this sense, a teacher would have to work hard in order to gather children who are the fruit of his labor in planting the trees.

Fourth: Humble as he corrects others in order to work in the humble Spirit of His Lord and claim sinners who have been seized by the devil and do his will.

If the enemy captivates human beings by his slyness, it is inappropriate for pastors to use violence in order to save them. Indeed, a gentle spirit has the power to reclaim them. An entrapped soul becomes broken, confused, and captive to the thoughts of the enemy. It therefore needs a gentle heart, filled with tenderness and compassion in order to support it and restore it. The soul does not need someone who would cause more harm by violent and admonishing words. **St. John Chrysostom** explains that a wound does not need material that would inflame, but it would rather need a soothing oil to heal it.

⁴⁷ Review the sayings of the Fathers on that subject, (*Pastoral Love*, p. 681, in Arabic).

CHAPTER 3

OPPOSING A DEVIOUS SPIRIT

Besides his personal struggle to sanctify himself and be devoted to God, a pastor needs to rely on heavenly wisdom as he fulfills his duty to oppose all inventions, heresies, and devious teachings or conduct. St. Paul elaborates on these issues in this chapter:

- 1- Heresies and Evil v 1-5.
- 2- Corrupt Teachers v 6-9.
- 3- Tolerating their Harm v 10-13.
- 4- Reliance on God's Word v14-17.

1- Heresies and Evil

Speaking about foolish and corrupt arguments, the Apostle begins by discussing deviousness, especially that concerning conduct. Often, heresies and inventions are closely associated with an evil life. This is essentially a life that is rooted in the ego or selfishness, vainglory and love of divisions. Thus, thought that deviates from the truth becomes closely linked with evil conduct.

St Paul says, *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves.”* (v 1, 2) By *“last days,”* he means the days after the coming of the Son, the Incarnate Word. In the fullness of time, God proclaimed His love by offering us redemption through the crucifixion of His Son. At the same time, Satan instigated those working on his account to oppose truth. To believers, these are times of grace, yet they are hard times for those who are deceived by the tricks of the devil and his falsehoods.

Under any circumstance, God proclaims His love throughout the ages. At the same time, Satan aroused his followers mislead people. St. Paul gives examples from the age of Moses, the prophet, and says, *“Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.”* (v 8) Hence the fault does not lie in the times but rather in the wickedness of a man's heart. This is what **St. John Chrysostom** expresses when he says, [Do not blame the days or the times, but rather blame people across the ages. We have become accustomed to speak about good times and bad times when we refer to events caused by people's deeds and which ultimately affect us⁴⁸.]

The root and basis of all evil is the ego. In other words, it is man's love for his ego. Hence, he becomes self-centered and sets his ego as his deity; wishing that all serve his ego rather than serving others. Consequently, he harms himself without realizing it.

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: [He who has concern for others actually has concern for

⁴⁸ In 2 Tim. Hom. 7.

himself... He who neglects the needs of others actually neglects his own needs. Since we are members of one body, what benefits our brother also affects the whole body positively and is not limited to just one member. Similarly, the harm that comes to our brother does not end there, but affects painfully the rest of the body. This also applies to the Church; if you belittle your neighbor, you are actually harming your own self⁴⁹.] He also comments on the Apostle's words: "***For men will be lovers of themselves,***" by saying, [He is indicating the root or basis from which all evil arises... We say about a person who loves himself (the ego), that he does not love himself; as for a person who loves his brother, we consider that he really loves himself in the true sense of the word⁵⁰.]

Thus the Apostle indicates that the love of oneself, or love of the ego, or conceit, is the basis of evil and heresy. That explains why **St. Augustine** speaks about heretics and says the following: [How do they oppose truth except through the conceit in their false and towering pomp. However, whereas they set up themselves as the great and righteous ones, they pass away as an empty wind⁵¹.]

The heart of man becomes extremely limited due to egotistic love or pride. He is solely concerned with his own needs to fulfill his greed or lusts. Consequently, the heart is led from one sin to another: the one delivering him into another so that he becomes a puppet of sin and defilement. He loses his freewill and his holiness as he chooses to live in humiliation and weakness. St. Paul says, "***For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!***" (v 2-5)

St. John Chrysostom notes in his comments on the previous verses that every sin leads to the next sin. This is his explanation: [Love of money arises from love of the ego... From the love of money arises love of greatness. Out of that comes pride, and out of pride comes blasphemy and disobedience... A person who is haughty towards people easily acts haughtily towards God. In this way, sin is generated and develops from a simple level to higher levels. A person who deals morally with men will show even more devotion towards God... One who is gentle with his slaves or with his fellowmen will be even gentler with his master. If a slave despises his co-worker, he will end up behaving in the same way towards God. Therefore, may we not despise one another, for this is a wicked experience that leads us to despise God⁵².] Thus **St. John Chrysostom** notes that although sin is at first directed towards men, it ends up by being directed towards God.

St. Cyprian states that the predictions of St. Paul have been fulfilled: [The end of the world is

⁴⁹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 7.

⁵⁰ In 2 Tim. Hom. 7.

⁵¹ On Ps. 37.

⁵² In 2 Tim. Hom. 7.

drawing near, and the signs indicating that are apparent in the domain of mankind and in the changing times. Sins are masked, and the enemy (Satan) is becoming increasingly wild, violence is more brutal, jealousy more inflamed, greed more blinding, evil more attractive, pride more pompous, division more bitter, and anger more contagious⁵³.]

We will briefly enumerate the evils that the Apostle mentions:

- A- Love of the Ego:** We have noted that this is the root and basis of all evil. It is a state in which the soul or heart shuts out the love of God and men.
- B- Love of Money or Greed:** An egotistic person desires everything for himself. Hence he is greedy for money and honor at the cost of others as well as his own. **St. John Chrysostom** finds that this sin is closely associated with ingratitude. He explains: [How can greed express thankfulness?! Towards whom could a greedy person be grateful? No one, for he considers that all men are his enemies and envies all what they have. If you spend all what you have on him, he will not be grateful. Indeed, he will be angry because you do not possess more and are consequently unable to give him more. If you set him up to rule the whole world, he would be ungrateful and believe that he has not received anything. This voracious greed is unquenchable as it is a sick lust... It is like someone suffering from a fever and feels thirsty. He does not get appeased but keeps asking for water. The same applies to someone who lusts for wealth; he cannot be satisfied however much you gave him. He will continue to feel dissatisfied and unthankful⁵⁴.]
- C- Love of Greatness and Vanity:** Just as egotism generates unending thirst for money and wealth that the world cannot quench, so can the same disease generate a thirst for vainglory and temporal honor... These are matters that cause a person to lose his inner peace.
- D- Blasphemy:** Man's thirst for earthly matters, whether in the financial domain or in the domain of love for temporal honor, distracts the inner perception away from God Himself. Hence the soul despises her God and cannot interact with His redeeming work and His free gifts. All this ultimately leads to blasphemy.
- E- Disobedience to Parents:** A person who disregards God will also disregard his parents. By his blasphemous attitude he wishes to liberate himself from the divine Fatherhood since this represents an authority that eliminates his freedom. By disobeying his parents, he displays the same attitude towards his natural parents and the blood ties that relate him to them.
- F- Ingratitude:** We have seen that this is a natural outcome in the life of a person who lusts after money. It is a sign of the inner void that the world cannot satisfy however much it offers to him. This is in contrast to the heavenly ones who enjoy spiritual fulfillment and whose life is marked by thanksgiving evident in the praise, which they offer continuously.
- G- Ungodliness:** Just as the inner void generates an ungrateful nature that cannot be thankful, it also drives a person to lust in order to distract itself. He believes that indulging in lust would bring him satisfaction and physical and psychological pleasure.

⁵³ *Treatise on the Unity of the Church*, 16.

⁵⁴ *In 2 Tim. Hom. 7.*

- H- Lack of Tenderness:** This means lack of natural emotions. A corrupt person seeks his own satisfaction, and even though he might show love yet it is not one that springs from a concern for other people's welfare but rather from a desire to satisfy his own pleasure. A clear example of that is Amnon who became very sick due to his corrupt love for his sister Tamar. When he obtained what he lusted for, he threw her out, Similarly, the wife of Potiphar loved pure Joseph in a physical way and therefore delivered him to be jailed and endangered his life when he spoke to her gently and rejected to act wickedly.
- I- Dissatisfaction:** This means renouncing the covenant and the commitment to it.
- J- Slander:** Accusing others wrongly. Added to the act of breaking promises which a person has willingly committed himself to keep is the act of wrongfully accusing others. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Those who feel there is nothing good in themselves while they commit multiple sins and delinquent acts find comfort in damaging other people's reputations⁵⁵.]
- K- Meanness and Immorality:** This is due to man's inability to control himself with respect to his tongue, his desires, and all other senses. He wishes to indulge in pleasure without restraints. According to **Origin:** [He who follows pleasures loves the wide road and deviates from the narrow and difficult path of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 7: 13, 14). It is a path, which has no turnings and no corners whatsoever, (Matt 6:5)⁵⁶.]
- L- Brutality:** The nature of sin degrades man of his humanity. Hence he becomes brutal and opposes others for no real reason.
- M- Despisers of Good:** In other words, there is contempt for good acts that are regarded as petty issues.
- N- Treason:** The Apostle uses this expression to indicate men's betrayal of their covenant with God. In another sense, it could refer to the betrayal of a natural commitment such as the father delivering his son, or the son delivering the father to death (Matt 10:21), or the betrayal of friendship.
- O- Aggressors:** those who interfere wickedly in matters that do not concern them.
- P- Stubborn:** or haughtiness and lacking reflection.
- Q- Lovers of Pleasure:** Devoid of love for God. Man's love to satisfy his desires becomes a barrier preventing him from loving God.

The Apostle concludes his words about evil men by saying the following: *“having the form of godliness but denying its power.”* (v 5) That is the most dangerous type of evil: when man appears so deceivingly glamorous while the inner being is filled with corruption. **St. John Chrysostom** comments that hypocrisy is a dangerous thief in disguise that robs religious people of all their possessions. Other sins are obvious and it is easy for a sinner to confess them and repent, whereas it is difficult for a hypocrite to be aware of his sin since he not only deceives others but himself as well. He believes that he is better than others and rejects learning or advice.

⁵⁵ In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

⁵⁶ On Prayer 19:3.

2-CORRUPT TEACHERS

“And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.” (v 6-9)

Corrupt heretics were able to creep into homes and act under cover. This was especially easy in the case of compulsive women who adopted whatever was new. These women were attracted to the Gnostic thoughts and delivered themselves to some of those teachers who belittled the sanctification of the body since they considered it an element of darkness that will neither be resurrected on the Day of the Lord, nor receive reward or glory. Hence it was given free reign to satisfy its desires.

It seems that some women, in their thoughtlessness, abandoned their husbands and followed these deceivers. Hence they deviated from the path of holiness and truth. The Apostle calls them *“gullible,”* that is “foolish” or “witless.”

They accepted devious thoughts delivered by corrupt teachers who have crept into their homes. It is as though they have repeated the act of their first mother when the old serpent crept into her home in Paradise and entered her heart and mind in order to introduce its deceptions. In the same way, the heretics crept into the homes of believers by approaching witless women.

Here the Apostle does not only blame the heretics whom he knows are deceivers and corrupt, but he also blames the witless women who open to them their homes, hearts, and thoughts. Moreover, they deliver their bodies to them as they neglect to be spiritually vigilant and particular. The heretics found that such women responded inwardly even before they were attracted physically. They were inclined to be evil and so the way was open to their corrupt hearts and minds.

The Apostle gives an example of heretic teachers by relating the events that occurred in the days of Moses, the prophet, and Aaron. They were faced by the defiance of the deceptive magicians Jannes and Jambres. St. Paul knew about them from the Jewish tradition and not from the Holy Bible. These magicians deceived the Egyptians through acts that seemed to resemble those of Moses and Aaron. However, they were actually corrupt and arrogant men who lacked faith. Through deceptive appearances they sought to lead men into foolish paths.

The Apostle wishes to underline that in every age we find divine action and it is counteracted by satanic deceptions. When Moses and Aaron stood for God, Satan confronted them by raising deceptive magicians. In this context, **St. John Chrysostom** says,

[If any one denies that there are heretics now, let him know that they have been there from the beginning of time, for Satan is constantly creating deviousness to confront the Truth. In the beginning, God

promised good things, and Satan too made his promises. God created Paradise, and Satan deceived man by telling him **“you will be like God.”** (Gen 3:5) Therefore, even though he could not offer some kind of tangible act, he offered promises that were mostly just words... and that is intrinsic to the nature of deceivers.

After that, we get Cain and with him came Abel,
The sons of Seth and with them the daughters of men,
Ham and Japheth,
Abraham and (in his days) the Pharaohs,
Jacob and Esau,
Then came Moses and Aaron and the magicians came forward,
The apostles and the false apostles,
Christ and the Antichrist will come.

That is what happened before, and what is happening until today... In short, there was never a time when evil was absent to oppose the Truth, therefore do not be anxious⁵⁷.]

3- TOLERATING THEIR HARM

Now that the Apostle has ended his teachings about the presence of heretics who oppose the truth in every age, he clarifies the importance of steadfastly tolerating their harassment. St. Paul explains: **“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra- what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me,”** (v 10, 11)

Here the Apostle presents a practical meaning for delivering the trust or the apostolic traditions. It does not merely involve the delivery of a doctrinal or ideological belief that a disciple receives from his teacher, or that one generation receives from the previous one. It involves the delivery of a living faith with all its aspects; besides the teachings, a disciple is to learn about the lives of the saints, the aspirations to which the Apostle has devoted his life. He has to observe the longsuffering, love, perseverance and other matters in which the Apostle was involved and his manner of coping with them.

What the bishop, St. Timothy, has received from the Apostle is actually “Life in Christ” with all its apparent and hidden particulars. As I have stressed before, in more than one context, and especially in the book entitled *“Tradition Orthodoxy,”* apostolic tradition is not concerned with extraneous matters or a set of beliefs and ecclesiastical rules that govern church rites, behavior of the congregation and membership. It deals with “life” essentially, with all its aspects, and how the Early Church practiced it and handed it down. It is relevant to add here the acceptance and tolerance of suffering is part and parcel of apostolic teaching. St. Timothy now receives the teachings from the suffering Apostle and here his teacher is reminding him to hold steadfastly onto what he has witnessed and touched in order to obtain fellowship with him in the Lord. He

⁵⁷ In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

has to be longsuffering and tolerate pain, have the same aspirations as the Apostle, as well as his intentions, perseverance, and love towards his persecutors. In other words, St. Timothy learns to tolerate pain, not only by seeing his teacher, St. Paul, suffering; but also through receiving his instructions and gaining insight into the inner depths of his teacher. Hence he understands the meanings, intentions, emotions and underlying feelings in the Lord Jesus Christ. That means the discovery of the mystery of inner power of the Apostle in spite of the actual sufferings and painful circumstances.

St John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Apostle as follows: [Be strong, for you have not only been present with me, but you have closely followed my teachings... St. Paul says, *“You have carefully followed my doctrine,”* to refer to discussions about the faith. When he refers to “manner of life,” he points to his behavior, and uses the expression “purpose” to indicate his jealous and steadfast state of mind. It is as though he wishes to say, “I do not pronounce these words without applying them. I am not a (wise) philosopher just saying words. By *“faith and longsuffering...,”* the Apostle intends to underline that none of these matters made him anxious. He speaks about *“love”* that is lacking in these (corrupt) people, as well as the absence of *“longsuffering.”* The Apostle has demonstrated longsuffering towards heretics and perseverance in the face of trying conditions⁵⁸.]

Reference to the persecutions that the Apostle endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra [11] are just an example of what the Apostle went through, and does not reflect all his hardships. His intention is to present examples only to his disciple. He has no desire to gain vainglory by an exhibit of his history. With respect to his experience of pain, the Apostle summarizes it as follows *“And out of them all the Lord delivered me.”* (v 11) That is the conclusion that the Apostle wishes to convey to his disciple.

The hardships that resulted from corrupt teachers, or rather that came from Satan himself, affected St. Paul as well as *“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus (and) will suffer persecution.”* (v 12)

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: [It is impossible for a person to live virtuously without being exposed to sadness or fatigue or temptation. How does a person avoid these if he wishes to walk in the narrow and hard way, and hears that in the world he would face hardship (John 16:33)? In his days, Job said that the life of man is a time of hard service (Job 7:1). How much more do people suffer in these present times?!⁵⁹]

On behalf of the Apostle, **St. John Chrysostom** goes on to say, [Do not worry if (corrupt teachers) live in luxury while you are enduring hardship, for this is natural. Looking at my experience, you learn that as man struggles with the wicked he will definitely be exposed to hardship. One cannot be engaged in a battle and lead a life of leisure, or be engaged in a fight and enjoy pleasures at the same time. May all (spiritual) fighters refrain from praying for an easy and joyful life! Our present life constitutes a state of struggle, war,

⁵⁸ In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

⁵⁹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

hardship and difficulties. It is a stage for (spiritual) struggle. The present is not a time for rest but it is rather a time of hardship and struggle⁶⁰.]

In a probing statement, **St. Augustine** says, [If you do not want to face difficulties then you have not yet started to be a Christian... If you are not facing persecution (or hardship) for the sake of Jesus Christ, then be aware that you have not yet started to lead a life of purity in the Lord⁶¹.]

The above is relevant to spiritual fighters who accept hardship - whatever its source - for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. As for wicked men, St. Paul says, ***“But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*** (v 13) The Apostle does not indicate whether they are living in hardship or in leisure, since even if they led a life of pleasure and luxury, they would be suffering constantly from inner trouble. Even if they are joyful, it is temporary since the world cannot appease their inner being. However, the Apostle found it necessary to reveal that their condition becomes worse. They lead others as well as themselves to loss and failure. Thus they move from one deception to another and from humiliation to the next, and progressively move closer to the abyss.

4- RELIANCE ON GOD’S WORD

The Apostle wishes to proclaim that the mystery behind man’s spiritual strength lies upon his reliance on the Word of God. That is what leads him on in spite of all the hardships he might have to face. Hence, the Holy Bible is the source of support for a minister as well as for those under his care. The Apostle explains how the Word gives assistance against the strikes of deceivers in the following verses: ***“But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*** (v 14-17)

St John Chrysostom has a beautiful commentary on the above passage. He says: [The Holy Bible has been delivered for this purpose, that the man of God might become perfect by It. Without the Word, man can never be complete. St. Paul is really saying this: You have the Holy Scriptures instead of me. If you wish to learn about something, go to them. The Apostle wrote this recommendation to St. Timothy who was filled with the Spirit, so how much more relevant is it for us?!⁶²]

St Timothy had received the faith from his grandmother and mother who breast-fed him and raised him, so to speak, on the Holy Bible. Now, as a bishop, he needed to hold on to what he has learned by

⁶⁰ In 2 Tim. Hom. 8.

⁶¹ On Ps, 66.

⁶² In 2 Tim. Hom. 9.

continuing to enjoy the Word of God. Thus he would be enabled to be steadfast in his faith, and progress in his spiritual knowledge as well as in his experience. Such a growth would enable him to learn and teach, for he will grow in the Lord and in his ability to support others develop in their spiritual lives... This is the hidden treasure that both the shepherd and the shepherded need to strive endlessly to possess within themselves. It is the pearl of great price for which we are ready to sell all in order to possess it.

It is a great peril to the Church if it has a minister who believes that he has learned enough. This leads him to stop feeding himself daily from the Word of God. According to **St. Cyprian**: [It is appropriate for the bishop not only to teach, but to learn as well. A person who grows constantly and progresses towards better things can certainly become a better teacher⁶³.]

St Clements of Alexandria speaks about the role of the Holy Bible as a source of teaching and training in a person's life, whether he is a pastor or a member of the Church. He explains: [These Books are truly holy as they sanctify and deify... No person is influenced in the same way that he is influenced by them if he only listens to the advice of any one of the saints. These are the words of God Himself, the Lover of mankind. They are the work of His hands, indeed, they are His only work, man's salvation. That is why He urges men to be redeemed, and rejoices saying, "The Kingdom of God is within you." Faith leads you, experience teaches you, and the Holy Bible trains you⁶⁴.]

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: [One single word from the divine Scriptures is more effective than fire! It softens the cruelty of the soul and prepares her for every good work⁶⁵.]

He adds: [Knowing the Holy Scriptures strengthens the spirit, cleans the conscience, uproots obsessive lusts, deepens virtue, uplifts the mind, enables confrontation of unexpected surprises, protects against the strikes of Satan, transports us to heaven itself, liberates man from the flesh, and grants him wings for flight⁶⁶.]

St Paul tells his disciple that the Word of God is good for teaching and for education too. It is good for edification as well as for punishment. Hence he should deliver the Word without embellishment or compliments. He should deliver it in the spirit of truth that can be gentle and reprimanding, patient yet firm... That is why **St. Augustine** warns us in one of his sermons lest a preacher of the Word transforms himself into a music player. As such, he would seek to entertain his listeners with his beautiful music when he should, at the right time, deliver bitter words directed for punishment. Eventually, these will be accepted as sweetness in their hearts.

⁶³Ep. 73:9.

⁶⁴Exhortation to the Heathens.

⁶⁵In 2 Tim. Hom. 9.

⁶⁶De Stud paes, PG 63: 485

CHAPTER 4

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Apostle concludes his Epistle with farewell recommendations:

- 1- Perseverance in Preaching the Word v 1-5.
- 2- The Apostle's Anticipation of his Death v 6-8.
- 3- Final Personal News v 9-21.
- 4- Farewell Recommendations v 22.

1- PERSEVERANCE IN PREACHING THE WORD

When the Apostle finishes his message to his special son, he offers him farewell recommendations that focus specifically on preaching the Word of God. He tells him: ***"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word!"*** (v 1, 2). He advises him to preach the Word in the presence of the Father and the Son Who will judge both the living and the dead. These are his last days and St. Paul is expecting to die as a martyr at any moment. He envisions the Lord Jesus Christ as the Judge Who will compensate the living - that is the righteous - with fellowship in His eternal glory; while He will condemn the dead - that is the wicked who insist on not repenting and reject living with Him. Probably St. Paul has always been preoccupied with the Lord's coming, throughout his life as well as in his last days. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would come to meet the living and those who had rested before His coming. He would meet with all for Judgment. This vision is the real motive for preaching the divine Word. This is the goal of the servant of the Word: to rescue souls from a state of inner death and bring them to the life of joy in the Lord so that they might rejoice at the Lord's coming and share in His glory.

St Paul prays his disciple, in the name of the great Judge, to preach unceasingly. He tells him: ***"Preach the Word! In season and out of season."*** (v 2) It is therefore appropriate to speak in the name of Jesus Christ without any break for the time may come when there will not be a second chance for that soul that he has met, and therefore that soul would have be lost forever. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [What does he mean by ***"in season and out of season"***? It means that there is no specific time, but make any time your time and preach: in times of peace and security, when you are in Church, when you are in danger, or in prison, or in chains, and even on your way to your death⁶⁷.]

St Paul goes on to say, ***"Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."*** (v 2) **St. John Chrysostom** comments on this verse as follows: [Your reprimand should be most appropriate to be effective, and after investigating the truth. The Apostle recommends him to ***"rebuke,"*** meaning that he needs to be like a doctor who dresses and heals a wound when he sees it. If any part of this care is neglected, then

⁶⁷ In 2 Tim. Hom. 9.

your work is useless. If you reprimand without convincing a person, you will be like an impulsive person and no one will accept your behavior. Moreover, if you use conviction but reprimand severely and without kind words, your effort will also be in vain⁶⁸.]

It is clear that the Apostle asks a pastor to convince and display patience at the same time that he engages in reproach or rebuke. In this manner, his action will bring about the required fruit. Thus a pastor is like a doctor who underlines the reality of the disease to his patient and reveals its dangers if surgery is not done. By convincing him, the patient accepts the surgery at the hands of the doctor who will cut him yet will soothe and heal him.

St Ambrose comments as follows: [It is inappropriate for a pastor to be cruel, violent, or too lax. If he is cruel or violent, he would be like a tyrant; and if he is too lax, he would be regarded as a negligent and careless worker not worthy of the job entrusted to him⁶⁹.]

St John Climacus comments as follows: [A person who looks after the flock can neither be a lion nor a goat⁷⁰.] And **St. John Chrysostom** comments on the words of the Apostle “*with all longsuffering and teaching*” as follows: [Because a person who reproaches must be patient and should not quickly believe every word reported to him. Moreover, with reproach there should be some comforting words that would make them acceptable. Why has he added to “*teaching*” the words “*all longsuffering*”? Because he should not reproach as if he were angry or hostile, or as one cursing or clutching an enemy. Such attitudes should be far removed from you. You need to show love, sympathy, and share in a person’s suffering and hardship⁷¹.]

St Paul then says, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*” (v 3, 4) He is really underlining the need to preach powerfully at all times, in season and out of season, with firmness coupled with patience and gentleness, why? Because a time will come when hearts will be hardened and necks will be stiff with pride and obstinacy. Therefore, people will not tolerate to listen to the upright teachings. It is as though the Apostle is urging his disciple to hasten in carrying out his spiritual task since any delay implies that more people would become more hardened than ever before. It means that time is not on our side if we neglect the ministry! The heart that is ready for the Word now might reject it tomorrow if it is not served today! Today, people might accept the true teachers, yet if these teachers neglect their ministry, then people might submit to many lusts and consequently seek the teachers that appeal to their desires. They will seek and find plenty of false teachers who have deviated from the truth and who are full of corruption, thereby bringing comfort to their hearts.

⁶⁸ In 2 Tim. Hom. 9.

⁶⁹ The Author: Pastoral Love, p. 607 (in Arabic).

⁷⁰ The Author: Pastoral Love, p. 607 (in Arabic).

⁷¹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 9.

The Apostle does not seek to discourage his disciple or make him despair. He wants to encourage him to undertake his spiritual task quickly and to offer the word of truth so that souls would not perish. That is why he tells him: ***“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*** (v 5)

He asks him to be awake and alert so that wolves would not enter among the sheep and devour them. It is true that by being vigilant a shepherd will bear many difficulties, yet all that would be nothing in order to ensure the salvation of the good sheep. It is the task of the preacher to carry the Cross with his Crucified Savior in order to bring every soul into the sheepfold of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way he achieves his service and completes his mission.

St Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the hardships that St. Paul went through to complete his mission, and says the following: [In order to understand this, we will leave St. Paul tell us about it himself. I am not speaking of his pains, vigils, hunger, thirst, of the cold and nakedness, or enemies from within and without (2 Cor 11: 23 etc.). I wish to speak about the oppression he has been exposed to: the councils held against him; the prisons, chains, and tyrants; the trials, his death every day and every hour; his escape in a basket over a wall; his stoning and beatings; his travels and the dangers he met on land and in the sea; confronting thieves and rulers as well as treacherous brothers; gaining a livelihood by working with his own hands; and ministering without any finances (1 Cor 4:12; 9:8); and how he become a spectacle both to angels and to men (1 Cor 4:9); his brave struggle to bring people - by the grace of God - into fellowship with God so that they might become His own special people (Titus 2:14),... who can mention all these matters in detail?! The daily hardships and interest in each individual, the concern for every Church, collective friendship and brotherly love?! Does someone fall and Paul does not feel his weakness? Or someone complain and Paul does not burn as he feels for him?... He has fought for every one, prayed for all, sympathized with all for those with no Law as well as those under the Law... He was ready as he followed in the Lord’s footsteps to bear all things in order to bring about the salvation of the wicked⁷².]

2- THE APOSTLE’S ANTICIPATION OF HIS OWN DEATH

St. Paul cites his own life as an example of someone who has struggled to the last breath. He does so to encourage his disciple, St. Timothy, to struggle, armed by the power of the Spirit, in order to preach the Truth. Note his amazing words: ***“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”*** (v 6) The Apostle is aware that his life on earth is being sacrificed to the last minute through his acceptance to die as a martyr, as he says, ***“I am already being poured out.”***

It is as though St. Paul goes back in memory to Jacob, the father of all the tribes. He had “set up a pillar, and poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it.” (Gen 35:14) Most probably, the drink offering poured on the pillar was to inaugurate the first house built for God in the history of the Redemption.

⁷² *Pastoral Love*, p. 674- 676.

It was an indication to the joyful Gift of the Spirit that fills the House of God or His people. In the midst of his suffering within his prison, and on the path towards the arena of his death, the Apostle seems to perceive that the divine joy fills the life of the Church as a consequence of his afflictions. The Church can have no joy without suffering, and no glory without difficulties.

St. Peter saw how believers endured hardship and accepted mocking for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how the Spirit of God Himself and His glory descended upon them. In this manner, God accepted the pain they went through as an offering of love from them and granted them inner joy and divine glory. He says, “Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”(1 Peter 4:13,14) Thus he considered that by succumbing to affliction, believers were partaking in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ... and the amazing thing is that St. Peter recommends them to “rejoice” as this is a warranty for receiving eternal joy when the Lord’s glory will be proclaimed.

What the Apostle recommends is not really advice as much as reminder of the gift. He entreats them so that they might attain the gift, understand it, and practice it. The problem with the gift, however, is that *“the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”* God rejoices on account of the love that believers express in their way of life and through their acceptance of affliction and difficulties endured for His sake. Consequently, He reveals Himself and becomes the mysterious Source of their inexplicable glory and joy.

When the Apostle speaks of himself as being poured as a drink offering, he is probably thinking of the Law that stipulates the daily offering of two lambs: one in the morning and one in the evening. During the offering, a drink is poured over it, (Exodus 29:40,41). The Sacrifice on the Cross is associated with the joy of the Holy Spirit that is poured on the Church through the slaughtered Divine Lamb. This is what we experience constantly in the liturgy of the Eucharist. The Church offers to the Father, and through the Holy Spirit, the sacrifice of His Only-Begotten Son, His sacrificial Body. The Father pours on It and in It His divine joy as the supreme Holy Spirit descends upon It! This is what inspires the Church to sing the Liturgy of the Eucharist as a hymn of praise and great joy. It is really the work of the Holy Spirit Who grants true Joy!

Briefly, St. Paul wishes to depict a wonderful picture of his pending martyrdom in order to support and encourage his disciple to persevere to the end in his struggle to preach the Truth. Although they are suffering under the injustices of Nero, he proclaims that his whole life is an offering of love to God and through Jesus Christ. It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself living within him, Who will descend in His glory upon him in his last moments, receive his pain, and grant him the Spirit of glory, power, and joy.

Indeed, we may say that on account of his suffering, the whole Church is granted inner joy and comfort. Thus the Apostle himself becomes as a joyous drink poured over the rest of the suffering body of

the Church! These are wonderful moments, when the Lord accepts the pains of a pastor as His own, and grants his spiritual children glorious comfort and joy! Such a concept has led to the celebration of the martyrdom of the Fathers... They have become feasts when the Church rejoices and offers praise.

We may briefly state that suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ is an unending source of joy to the Church. The soul, and all those around her, receives comfort and blessings in moments of suffering that can never be attained through long years of fasting, prayer, prostration, or worship. St. Paul says, ***“For I am being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”*** (v 6) He is like a bird in a cage, even if it were made of gold - he wishes to take flight!

The source of his joy is his knowledge that God has granted him success in his mission, and has accepted his good and lawful struggle. He expresses that in the following verses: ***“I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*** (v 7,8)

St John Chrysostom comments on these verses as follows:

[Often, when I hold the Apostle’s message between my hands, and meditate on these verses, I feel I am incapable of understanding... What is the Apostle’s aim when he speaks in this way? He is anxious to comfort his disciple and relieve him of despair. He advises him to rejoice for he is going to a place where he will get his crown as he has completed his task and earned a glorious end. He tells him: “It is appropriate that you rejoice rather than grieve. Why? Because ***“I have fought the good fight.”***”

St. Paul is like a father who wishes to console his son as he grieves due to his pending orphaned condition. He tells him: “Do not weep, for we live a good life, become old, and now I am ready to leave you. Our life here has been spotless, and now we are leaving in glory. It is better to admire our deeds which are a credit to us.”

Or he could be telling him: “We have hoisted the ensigns of victory, and have conquered our enemies!” He does not say this to boast but rather to raise his disciple’s depressed spirit. He encourages him to endure the events (of his teacher’s death) with strength, prompting him to keep the good hope by rejecting the thought that death is a sad matter. Separation in itself is a sad matter that is truly painful. St. Paul expresses this in the following words: “having being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart.”(1 Thess 2:17) If this is how St. Paul felt when he was separated from his disciple, how much harder will it be for St. Timothy himself? Even though he is still alive, St. Paul tells us that St. Timothy weeps due to his separation from the Apostle: ***“being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy.”*** (2 Tim 1:4) So how will things be after his death? Consequently, the Apostle writes this to comfort him... he says, ***“I have fought the good fight.”***

Is this a good fight that brings him to prison and the chains of death? Yes, for it is a struggle for the sake of Christ, and through Him we are blessed with glorious crowns! No struggle can be more sublime!

Crowns without end! The crowns are not made of olive leaves, nor issued by human judgment. The spectators are not human either, for they are angels who will crowd the theater to witness the spectacle! There are cycles in the wrestling rings, and people struggle for many days, and endure affliction until the hour comes for them to receive their crowns... and then the joy is over.

Here, the circumstances are totally different: the crown is an eternal one that retains radiance, glory, and honor. That is why we should rejoice. Here I am about to enter into my rest and leaving the race. You have heard me say before “to depart and be with Christ is far better for me,” and that “I have finished the race.” It is appropriate for us to struggle and run, to strive and endure the pain steadfastly. We do not run towards that which is corrupt but towards good ends. Truly, it is a good fight that brings joy to the spectator and benefits him as well. For the race does not simply end and dissolve at the finishing line. It is not a spectacle undertaken to underline power or competence... It is an aspiration to rise up to the heavens!

How do I achieve my goal?... The Apostle has crossed the earth as a bird, indeed even faster. For a bird would have just hovered over it, whereas St. Paul had the wings of the Spirit. As such, he found a path through countless obstacles, dangers, deaths, and catastrophes. He was quicker than a bird, otherwise he would have fallen. However, the Spirit carried him and he soared over all the traps like a bird endowed with fiery wings!

He says, “***I have kept the faith,***” because he had faced many matters that could have stripped him of his faith: threats, deaths, and other countless dangers. Yet, he withstood all these steadfastly. How? By being vigilant... that is enough to comfort his disciple, yet St. Paul goes on to enumerate the rewards. What are they? “***Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.***” Once more, the Apostle uses “virtue” in the general sense to mean “righteousness.”

Do not grieve because of my death, for I will be honored by the crown that the Lord Jesus Christ will place on my head. If I had to stay here, then you would be mourning rightly. You would fear and grieve if I were to stumble and perish. St. Paul says, “***which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.***” (v 8) Through such words, St. Paul elevates his thoughts as he tells him that if God grants crowns to all, then He will give first preference to St. Timothy ⁷³.]

The expectation of St. Paul to die and see the coming of the Lord - in other words, meeting with Him - are not mere inner desires, or just words. That is the desire of a life lived in faith and filled with struggle and pain endured joyfully. **St. John Chrysostom** explains as follows: [May there be none who do not deserve His coming; for at that time, He will make His abode within us⁷⁴.] This means that His coming is realized by preparing our inner selves through the action of the Holy Spirit. Then, we will truly become the bride fit for her eternal Groom, or the children who are in the image of their Father. They see Him and get attracted to Him; He lives with and in them forever.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The words of St. Paul, in his last days, were intended to provide comfort to St. Timothy as well as to the whole Church. All needed to be comforted as they struggled spiritually through hard times - of martyrdom - as well as in times of peace. **St. Cyprian** says, [May they receive crowns: either white ones on account of their struggle, or crimson ones on account of their pain. For in the heavenly camp there are specific flowers associated with peace and others with struggle and which are used as crowns of glory for the soldiers of the Lord ⁷⁵.]

St Ambrose wrote about the duties of clergymen, and noted that St. Paul speaks about the time when crowns will be awarded on *“that Day”* and not when he is here on earth. [Here, he has fought in pain and through dangers and shipwreck. As a wrestler, he struggled while knowing that we will have to go through many afflictions in order to enter the Heavenly Kingdom⁷⁶.]

The Pelagians have used the words of St. Paul to confirm their teachings that the reward is the fruit of one’s own struggle. They ignored the rich and divine gift of grace.

St. Augustine refutes their ideas and says,

[Let us contemplate the very merits of St. Paul who declares that the righteous Judge will reward him with the crown of righteousness. Let us find out if his merits truly spring from his own being - I mean to find out if he has obtained them through his own effort - or are they the result of divine blessings! St. Paul says, *“I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”* (2 Tim 4:7)

First: These good actions count for nothing if they are not preceded by good thoughts. Note what does he say about these thoughts? “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” (2 Cor 3:5).

Second: Let us study every merit separately:

A- *I have fought – struggled - the good fight:* I would like to know with what power did he fight? Was it his own strength, or was it granted to him from above? It is impossible for us to think that a great teacher like St. Paul did not know the Law of God that declares in the Book of Deuteronomy: “then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.” (Deut 8:17). And what is the benefit of a good fight if it is not followed by victory? And who is the one who grants victory other than the One about whom the Apostle himself says these words: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”(1 Cor 15:57)?! In another passage that the Apostle borrows from the Psalms, St. Paul says, “Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.” (Ps 44:22) Then he finishes by saying, “But in all these our victory is great through Him who loves us.” In other words, we do not achieve victory by ourselves but through Him Who has loved us.

B- *I have finished the race:* How does he say so, when he proclaims in another passage “it is not of

⁷⁵Ep. 8.

⁷⁶Duties of the Clergy 1:15.

him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16)? We cannot replace this saying and state that it is not of God who shows mercy but of man who demonstrates the will and the strife. Anyone who would dare to interpret the passage in this way would clearly be contradicting the Apostle.

C- ***I have kept the faith:*** The person who says this is the same one who proclaims in another passage the following: “I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.” (1 Cor 7:25) He does not say, “as someone to whom God showed mercy because I was faithful,” but rather: ***“the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.”*** Thus he stresses that even faith itself is unattainable without God’s mercy for it is a gift from Him! That is what he wishes to affirm when he says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” (Eph 2:8) You might say, “We have accepted the blessing because we had faith;” but you are assuming faith to yourself inheritor and the blessing to God. That is why the Apostle, after saying “For by faith you have been saved through faith,” he adds “and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Moreover, to prevent anyone from saying that they have deserved these great blessings because of their own work, he promptly adds: “not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship.” (Eph 2:9) This does not mean that he belittles good deeds or devalues them, for he explains that God rewards each according to his deeds (Rom 2:6). Yet, because deeds are the fruits of faith, and not the other way around, therefore God inspires the acts of righteousness that we do and through Him we achieve faith itself. This is what has been referred to in the saying, “Through faith, the righteous lives”⁷⁷.]

3- FINAL PERSONAL NEWS

St Paul gives his dear disciple his latest news:

A- **He asks Timothy to come to him:** St. Paul realizes that his final hour is drawing near and therefore writes and asks him to come. He says, ***“Be diligent to come to me quickly.”*** (v 9) Sadly, the disciple was unable to arrive before St. Paul’s martyrdom. However, the Apostle was wise and gentle in his request, as he did not say, “so that I might see you before my departure.” He did not wish his disciple to grieve or be depressed if he could not make it. He just wished to express his need for him when many others had forsaken him.

B- **Abandonment by Some:** ***“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...”*** (v 10) Because Demas had abandoned him, he asks Timothy to serve him and so replace Demas. But why did Demas forsake him?

St. John Chrysostom answers on St. Paul’s behalf and says; [He loved the easy and safe path, far removed from dangers. It is true that he chose to live leisurely at home rather than suffer tribulation with me. St. Paul blames him not for the sake of throwing blame but in order to make us steadfast. He wishes us to avoid leisurely paths that lead us away from affliction and dangers, for this would demonstrate love for the present world. Moreover, he wished to draw his disciple to himself⁷⁸.]

⁷⁷ *Grace and Free Will, 1969, p. 16,17, (translated by Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty).*

⁷⁸ *In 2 Tim. Hom. 10.*

St Paul reports to Timothy that “*Crescens (departed) for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.*” (v 10, 11) These two left him due to the needs of the ministry, and not on account of love for the world.

C- St. Paul’s need for St. Mark, the Apostle: “*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.*” (v 11) In his second missionary journey, St. Paul had refused to take St. Mark with him because he had previously separated from him at Pamphelia on his first journey. This could have been due to a fever, which he caught there. On account of St. Paul’s rejection to take St. Mark, Barnabas separated from him too, and joined St. Mark to serve on another path. They went to the Island of Crete and St. Barnabas died there. St. Mark went on to preach in Africa, and Alexandria was the center of his ministry. That explains why St. Paul says that he is useful to him for ministry. **St. John Chrysostom** comments on these words and says, [He did not ask for him for his own personal comfort but for the sake of the ministry. Even though St. Paul is in prison, yet he does not stop preaching the Word. For that same reason, he asks for Timothy: not for his own needs but to preach the Bible. He did not want his death to disturb believers, therefore the presence of some of his disciples would end their affliction⁷⁹.]

D- The request for the robe: “*Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come - and the books, especially the parchments.*”(v 13) **St. John Chrysostom** comments as follows; [The word translated here as “*cloak*” might mean robe, or as some interpret it to mean a bag containing books⁸⁰.] He requested a cloak so that he would not need to borrow one probably. He did not wish to importune anyone. As for the books he requested, they could have been intended for distribution to believers in Rome. Since they were going to witness his martyrdom, the books could bring comfort to them, even in his last moments, St. Paul is truly concerned about the well being of others rather than of his own.

E- The evil of Alexander, the coppersmith: “*Alexander, the coppersmith, did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.*” (v 14, 15) St. Paul writes about Alexander the coppersmith not in order to judge and blame him, but to prepare his disciple to keep struggling to the end, and to face affliction steadfastly. Alexander had harmed the Apostle in many ways, and therefore St. Paul worries about his disciple due to his wickedness. When St. Paul says, “*May the Lord repay him according to his works,*” he is not conveying a desire for personal revenge in spite of his knowledge that he will soon leave this world. He is actually preparing his disciple psychologically as he will be exposed to many afflictions from Alexander and his likes. He does not wish him to be disturbed, but to trust God who does not leave the wicked go without punishment or correction.

St Paul’s kindness is apparent even towards his evil persecutor. He does not ask his disciple, St.

⁷⁹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 10.

⁸⁰ In 2 Tim. Hom. 10.

Timothy, to take revenge or punish or dismiss him. His only aim is to warn him in order to ensure that Alexander, who is an opponent of the holy Word, does not harm his ministry.

F- Everyone abandons him during his first trial: “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (v 16-18)

When St. Paul stood before Nero in his first trial, no one stood by him, not even his friends, and that is so painful psychologically. However, the Apostle prays the Lord to forgive them for such negligence during a most trying time. The amazing thing is that all human attempts failed, and while there was no support or help in sight, the Lord revealed Himself in these moments. He says **“the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.”** When all human support vanishes and a believer is in distress, the strong arm of the Lord remains outstretched and able to rescue him from the lion’s mouth. Thus he is able to accomplish his mission of witnessing for the Lord.

St John Chrysostom comments on the Apostle’s words as follows:

[If people have abandoned him, yet God has not allowed him to suffer on that account. Indeed, He strengthened him and granted him the courage to speak, never allowing him to drown.

Notice the extent of his humility! He does not say that God strengthened him because he deserves that gift, but on account of the ministry that was entrusted to him and that had to be accomplished.

Notice how close he came to death! He fell into the very mouth of the lion, for Nero was known as a lion due to his fierce and violent rule.

St Paul says, **“I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.”** He does not say that the Lord will deliver him out of the lion’s mouth only, but out of every evil. Since God has delivered him from the danger of Nero, He will deliver him from sin, and will not allow him to die as one to be condemned⁸¹.]

It is clear that God saved St. Paul from Nero to allow him to complete his mission of preaching the Word and of witnessing for Him. After his mission is accomplished, St. Paul does not pray to be delivered out of Nero’s hands; but rather to be saved from the power of sin through taking flight out of this world and being delivered from condemnation. He has been delivered from Nero’s temporary condemnation, but the great ideal is that God would deliver him from the terrible condemnation when He leads him into the fellowship of His eternal glory, and as St. Paul says, **“And the Lord will deliver... and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.”**

G- Sending greetings to his loved ones: “Greet Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, and the household of

⁸¹ In 2 Tim. Hom. 10.

Onesiphorus.” (v 19) We have previously spoken about Onesiphorus who comforted the Apostle often during his imprisonment. As for Prisca and her husband Aquila, strong ties of love bonded them with the Apostle as he had delivered the faith to them. Besides, they were tent-makers and so spent some time together with him making tents. They also participated in the ministry with him, as St. Paul says, “**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.**” (Rom 16:3, 4) It is worthy to note that the Apostle mentions the name of the wife before the husband in both Epistles - here and in the one to the Romans. It was a time when women- according to Roman law- had no rights. However, St. Paul mentions her first to underline that in the domain of faith there is no bias for one sex above the other. Such distinctions would be made based on the extent that a person demonstrated a living and active faith. The Apostle finds that Priscilla is more zealous and profound in the faith than her husband.

H- “**Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.**” (v 20) Through these words, the Apostle clarifies his need for his disciple. Erastus had stayed in Corinth, while St. Paul had to leave Trophimus in Miletus as he had fallen ill.

St. John Chrysostom wonders: [Why did St. Paul not heal Trophimus? Although the Apostle had received the gift of healing, yet God wanted the Apostle to recognize his own weakness when he cannot heal a loved one whom He has allowed to get sick. Should the Apostle be visited by thoughts of vanity on account of his healing power and the miracles he performed, he would be faced by his incapacity to offer any help to his own loved ones suffering from certain ailments. Besides, it is vital that the goal of believers promoting the Word is not diverted to material matters. The fact that certain faithful ministers remain sick indicates that the first goal of the ministry is to preach the eternal salvation of man and the enjoyment of the heavenly kingdom. Other matters are either granted or denied to man according to what God decides is beneficial for him.

What we have said above applies to Epaphroditus who had worked with the Apostle and had enlisted with him in the ministry (Phil 2:25). He was very sick and had come close to death... We also say the same thing about the Apostle himself who cried to the Lord to heal him but the Lord announced to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

I- **The Apostle repeats the call: “Do your utmost to come before the winter.”** (v 21) He is gentle and avoids saying “Come before I die.” Rather, he says: “**before the winter,**” to avoid arousing sad feelings should he arrive and find that his teacher has already departed.

J- **He sends the greetings of his loved ones in Rome: “Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren.”** (v 21) Among the above are Linus who was ordained Bishop over Rome, and Claudia who was zealously witnessing to God.

4-THE APOSTOLIC FAREWELL

“The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.” This is truly a final blessing that is in agreement with the contents of the Epistle. Having spoken about the Spirit of Power, he confirms that it arises from being with God. Although the Apostle wishes to support and comfort his disciple, yet there is no comforter other than the grace that Jesus Christ grants and that accompanies and supports man!

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