

A COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

According to the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church

by
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Preface, Introduction, & Chapter One

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A Fond Remembrance

Having one's words in print can bring unique experiences. One of my most memorable has to do with two chance encounters with Bishop Gerasimos Papadopoulos of Abydos, which took place shortly after the first edition of this work was published.

Rev. William Chiganos, Chairman of the Religious Education Commission of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Chicago and Pastor of the Holy Apostles Church in Westchester, Illinois, introduced me to His Grace when he spoke at the Celebration of Books at Holy Apostles in 1990. At that time, Bishop Gerasimos graciously indicated that he had read my then new book on Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* and offered warm congratulations. Knowing that the province of Corinth was the place of his birth and that he was considered an authority on Paul's writings to that early church, I said that if he ever found the time to read my work completely, I would appreciate any constructive criticism he might offer. "I have read every word," he responded immediately, "it is perfect." Too much in awe to think of anything else to say, I thanked him and our conversation ended. Upon his departure that day, however, he said, "Carry on the work." "We will try to follow your lead, your grace," I responded. "My time on earth will soon be over," he replied, "you must carry on."

The following year, Bishop Gerasimos was the featured speaker at Sts. Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church in Glenview, Il. I was anxious to sit at his feet again, to try to absorb some of his wisdom. When Rev. George Scoulas escorted him into the room to take his place at the podium, they passed the chair on the aisle where I was seated. He offered no sign of recognition, but later Fr. George hurried over to tell me that His Grace had recognized me as the author of "the book on Corinthians" and had indicated his hearty approval of it.

Thus emboldened, I approached His Grace after his presentation. He immediately spoke of my text again, so I took the opportunity to ask if he would put his comments in writing, to be included if there were ever to be a second edition. "Take this down," he said:

I find this work well prepared and supported by the proper sources. It is a trustworthy guide to help everyone understand the life of the early Church and, thus, to help us know how to live our faith. Practical, yet based on solid Orthodox theology. The text is perfectly right!

+Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos

I wrote out his words and he signed the paper. To be sure I quoted him correctly, I typed the short paragraph and mailed it to him at his residence on the campus of Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, Ma. He added a few thoughts, signed the sheet, and returned it to me with his personal greetings.

Bishop Gerasimos fell asleep in the Lord on the Feast of the Holy Spirit, 1995. He has been called a scholar, a true spiritual father, and a leader of the Church. To me he is all that and more. When I get tired or discouraged, his is the loving face I see, and his the voice I hear: "Carry on the work." If loving-kindness, humility, commitment to Christ, and the ability to encourage emulation in others are attributes of holiness—I had the privilege of meeting a living Saint.

While I know that no book written by merely human hands is "perfect," and certainly not this one, Bishop Gerasimos' generous endorsement has encouraged me to offer this new edition.

Preface

Jesus Christ taught His Apostles orally. They passed His revelations on orally. Before He ascended into Heaven to take His place at the right-hand of God, He told them He would return one day. At first they thought this would take place in their lifetimes. As time went on, however, they began to realize that this was not to be, so some began to preserve, in writing, the great truths He had entrusted to them. Others, like Paul, obeyed His Commission to “...make disciples of all the nations” (Mt 28:20), establishing arms of the original, undivided Church wherever they went and following-up visits with letters when teachings had to be strengthened or clarified, or abuses corrected.

Thus the individual books of the New Testament were born, written approximately between the years 50 and 100 A.D. The early Christians who had access to these writings treasured them and shared what they had. By the end of the first century, they began to gather all that were in existence. Then began a sorting process: which writings, of all that had been gathered, were inspired by God? To be considered canonical, a document had to pass three tests: it had to have been written by an Apostle or an immediate disciple of an Apostle; it had to be recognized as authentic by at least one leading ecclesiastical community in the ancient Church; and it had to be consistent with Apostolic doctrine—faith preserved in the living tradition of the Church.

There was much contention. Some wanted to exclude books that were finally included: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Others that were finally excluded were considered canonical by some: Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, et al. By the fourth century, however, the Church had resolved the disputes with a list of books of the New Testament as we now know it, which was compiled by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria and revealed in his 39th Letter to the churches of his diocese, on the occasion of the Paschal Feast, 367 A.D. These twenty-seven books were decreed canonical by Canon XXIV at the Synod of Africa of A.D. 419.¹ Thus it is clear that the Bible came to be through the historical Church which, when acting as a whole, has the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning, heresies were a problem. It was easy to misconstrue scripture, therefore necessary that the full intent of Christ’s teachings be safeguarded...

Enter those whom we now call the Fathers of the Church—those who taught and wrote in the early years of its existence, shedding light on the issues of Scripture as Christ delivered it and as the early Christians lived and preserved it. This work is a study of Paul’s Epistles to the Christians at Corinth, based primarily on the Homilies of John Chrysostom (the golden-mouthed), who received his name because of his inspired oratorical and teaching skills. Excerpts from his writings and those of other Church Fathers, as follows, are sprinkled liberally throughout this study [with words in brackets added by the author], because they vividly convey Orthodox theology with ageless clarity and beauty. Readers will find their words just as beneficial today as when they were written. Where appropriate, excerpts from contemporary authorities have been included to develop a modern tool, useful for teaching in the Church of today the fullness of the truth of Scripture as lived and taught by the early Church...for God’s word is never out of date:

Andrew of Caesarea (c.600 A.D.).

Aphrates of Alexandria (280-345).

Athanasius of Alexandria (c.298-373).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

Barnabas (some say the quoted Epistle of Barnabas was written by the Apostle, friend and companion to Paul, but modern scholars contend that the author is a layman of the early to middle second century).

Basil the Great, of Caesarea (330-379).

Cassian, John (360-435).

Chrysostom, John (347-407).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215).

Clement of Rome (c.30-101).

Climacus, John (570-649).

Cyprian of Carthage (200-258).

Cyril of Alexandria (373-444).

Cyril of Jerusalem (318-386).

Ephraem the Syrian (306-373).

Evagrius the Solitary (c.345).

Gregory the Great (of Rome) (540-603).

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390).

Gregory of Nyssa (332-394).

Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).

Ignatius of Antioch (c.69).

Irenaeus of Lyons (120-202).

Isaac the Syrian (c. late seventh century).

Isaiah of Sketis (d.489).

Justin the Martyr (100-165).

Leo the Great (of Rome) (440-461).

Makarios of Egypt (300-390).

Mathetes—the title (meaning disciple) used by the anonymous author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, who probably wrote toward the close of the apostolic age.²

Maximus the Confessor (580-662).

Peter of Damaskos (12th Century).

Philotheos of Sinai (9th to 10th Century).

Polycarp of Smyrna (a disciple of the Apostle John the Beloved (c.69-155)).

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022).

Tertullian (160-220).

It is hoped that this taste will inspire some to delve deeper into these spiritual treasures. Quotes are exact from the sources cited, except for minor updating of language form to make reading easier. Where appropriate, quotes from contemporary authors and theologians have been included, to develop a tool useful for teaching the fullness of the truth of scripture as taught by the early Church and as applicable to contemporary everyday Christian lives—for God's word is never out-of-date.

“Food for Thought” questions are included at appropriate points within each chapter, with corresponding comments at the end of each chapter, to encourage meditation and discussion. Scripture quoted is from the *New King James Version of the Holy Bible*.

¹ Henry R. Percival, ed. “The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. XIV, p.453-4.

² Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, “Introductory Note to the Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. I, p.23.

Introduction

Paul was born a Jew and a Roman citizen, in Tarsus, Cilicia (now in Turkey), about 3 A.D. and given the name "Saul." Educated as a Pharisee under the renowned rabbinical tutor, Gamaliel, in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3), he was very devout. Though Jesus' life, Crucifixion and Resurrection took place while Saul was pursuing his studies, there is no indication he ever saw Jesus. When the young Church began to grow, however, under the guidance of the Apostles and zealous teachers such as Stephen (Acts 6), Saul's opposition was aroused. He stood by and watched, giving tacit approval, while Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7). Determined to stamp out those who called Jesus the Son of God (Acts 8:3), he received authority from the high priest to travel to Damascus to arrest those who belonged to "the Way" (Acts 9:1-2). On the road to that city, however, he encountered the wonder and power of Christ (Acts 9:3-6). Thoroughly transformed by the events which took place during and after this meeting, he became the "Apostle to the Gentiles," completely devoted to proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah of prophecy. He ceased using the name Saul, taking instead its Greek (the common language of the day) equivalent: Paul.

Paul's turnabout angered the Jews he tried to enlighten. Forced to flee Damascus (Acts 9:23-25), he spent about three years alone in Arabia, where he sought direction from God. He then returned to Jerusalem to confer with Peter (Gal 1:16-18) and began a life of preaching and organizing the early Church, mainly through writings addressed to churches founded during his three great missionary journeys: from Antioch (now Antakya, Turkey) to Cyprus and several cities in Galatia (now also part of Turkey); from Jerusalem through cities in Syria and Asia Minor to Macedonia (now part of Greece), where he visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth; then to many of these cities again and to Ephesus, where he spent two years. Because of his persuasive and relentless style, Paul was constantly beleaguered by adversaries of the Gospel, and spent much time in bonds during these years. He was brought to trial in Rome and, because he was a Roman citizen, afforded the "privilege" of being beheaded rather than subjected to the more torturous crucifixion. Thus he became a martyr of the Church in about 67 A.D.

Ancient tradition describes Paul as "small in size, baldheaded, bow-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, and full of grace; for sometimes he seemed like a man and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel."¹ His detractors looked with contempt upon his appearance and his speech (2 Cor 10:10), but no one could deny the power of his written word. Paul reached Corinth in the autumn of 50 A.D. This seems to have been his second visit there (2 Cor 13:1). He stayed eighteen months, which was unusually long for him, but he ministered to this city under direct instruction from the Lord (Acts 18:1-11). Thus through Paul, less than twenty-five years after the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, His Gospel was being preached in the first and worst city in Greece.

Corinth, a city of ancient Greece near the southern extremity of the Isthmus of Corinth, was a very wealthy, worldly city because of its strategic location on the land-bridge linking northern Greece with Peloponnesus and with sea routes to the east and west. It boasted almost half-a-million people: Greeks, Romans, and Jews. Splendidly placed for commerce and communication, anything preached there would quickly be disseminated in all directions and among all sorts and conditions of people.

The infant Corinthian Church was in a remarkably foul place, for Corinth had a notorious reputation for the love of pleasure and the lax morals of its people. The temple of Aphrodite, the pagan goddess of love, beauty and fruitfulness, Greek counterpart of the Roman Venus, perched 1875 feet up on the Corinthian acropolis, about 1500 feet above the town, provided an excuse for sexual license.

The devil, therefore, seeing that a great and populous city had laid hold of the truth, a city admired for wealth and wisdom and the head of Greece (for Athens and Lacedaemon were then and since in a miserable state, the dominion having long ago fallen away from them) and seeing that with great readiness they had received the word of God, what does he? He divides them. For he knew that even the strongest kingdom of all, divided against itself, shall not stand.
CHRYSTOM²

Aspects of St. Paul's relationship with the Christians of Corinth have become the subject of modern contention (the dates of his visits, the number of letters he wrote to them, and the order in which they received his various letters). This study presumes the following traditional viewpoint:

The date of Paul's initial visit to Corinth is unknown. He followed-up on that visit with a letter (referred to in 1 Cor 5:9) which has been lost. Returning around 50 A.D., he remained eighteen months to establish a church there. Then he went to Ephesus, where he was visited by a delegation from Corinth, sent to apprise him of the problems that had developed in the community after his departure (1 Cor 7:1, 16:17). His response was a letter to his errant charges that has become known as his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Soon after, he sent Timothy to give them additional guidance (1 Cor 4:17). Timothy returned to Paul (1 Cor 16:11) and informed him that the spiritual situation was still not good in Corinth. Paul gave the Corinthians more time, then sent Titus to see how they were doing. Titus met up with Paul again in Macedonia. He brought the good news that, although the Corinthians had at first resented the harsh words of his epistle, their hearts had softened as they realized his and Christ's love for them. They were now repentant and eager to see Paul again (2 Cor 7:6-9). Paul then wrote what we know as his *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (c. 56 A.D.) to tell them he had not yet returned as promised because he did not want to be among them until they corrected their ways (2 Cor 1:23). Now, however, he hoped to come soon. He sent Titus back to Corinth with his latest letter (2 Cor 8:16-24, 9:1-5) to guide them in the merits of almsgiving and to be sure their collection for the church in Jerusalem would be ready when he arrived—his third visit.

¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed. "Apocrypha of the New Testament, Part II – The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, Acts of Paul and Thecla," Vol. VIII, p.487.

² Philip Schaff, ed. "Argument," Vol. XII, Homilies on First and Second Corinthians, p.1. Note: Lacedaemon is now known as Sparta.

CHAPTER ONE

A Call to Unity in Jesus Christ

BACKGROUND: After bringing the Gospel to Corinth and establishing a church there, Paul went on to Ephesus. While there, a delegation from Corinth visited him (16:17), and others wrote (7:1), telling him of serious problems, divisions and disorders that had arisen in their community (1:11). Those who had become leaders of the Christian community in Corinth were focusing their efforts on maintaining their popularity rather than on directing and strengthening the Church. Sexual sins were taking place, pagan rites were being indulged in, Christ's teachings were being misconstrued and His work was not being done.

Paul considered the Christians of Corinth his spiritual children since he was the first to introduce them to the Gospel. He, therefore, loved them, prayed for their progress and perfection and tried diligently to help them. Upon hearing of the dissension in the church, he wrote this Epistle, around 55 A.D. It seems that he had written them an earlier letter (5:9), which has been lost.

1:1. Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother...

Paul establishes his credentials as an Apostle and speaks of himself as having been called—referring to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, where he intended to continue his persecution of Christians (Acts 6:8-15, 7:54-60, 8:1-3, 9:1-22). He refers to having been called, not out of pride but to remind the Corinthians that he had been headed in the wrong direction until God redirected his life. This is a significant point because the Corinthian Christians have gone astray, and Paul will now tell them how they must correct their ways.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). Why would God *call* Paul, who was a known persecutor of Christians, and who had watched while Stephen (one of the first seven deacons of the Church, and the first Christian martyr) was stoned to death? (b). What does this indicate with regard to our lives?

1:2. To the Church of God which is at Corinth... It was Paul's custom to begin his epistles in this manner, but this verse is also an effort to remind the Corinthians that they are a part of the Church as a whole and are to be united in thought and action, not divided by factions and heresies.

to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus... To sanctify is to make holy, to purify, to consecrate. Everyone who is Baptized becomes a part of the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), which is holy. The Sacraments are outer visible signs of inner spiritual grace. Through Baptism, we undergo an outer washing in water, symbolizing inner cleansing from sins (association with the original sin of Adam and Eve and our own personal sin). We retain, however, the consequences of Adam & Eve's disobedience: life in our world of many temptations, where it is easy to sin and difficult to pursue righteousness. Thus we must continually struggle against contamination of the holy state to which we are introduced at Baptism. We are offered assistance in that endeavor by the Sacrament of Eucharist, as part of a lifestyle committed to trying to live according to God's will. "Each one of us receives, through the Sacraments, a seed of sanctity, but it is up to us to help that seed bear fruit."

called to be saints... In this world, a saint is a person who is taking part in the struggle toward growth in holiness, while calling upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and power. Man can never totally succeed in this endeavor because of his tendency to sin, but a sincere attempt shows faith in and love for God—the basis for salvation (Jas 1:12).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (c). How does the Church help us to become saints?

With all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. The Church throughout the world must be one, involved in the same struggle and bound together by a common faith in Christ. Each of us is a member of His Body. His eyes, ears, and heart are those who are aware of that which needs to be done; His hands, feet and mouth are those who follow through accordingly. He is the Head. Each member of His Body is called to try to do that which is necessary in the Church and in the world so that His work, the salvation of mankind, will be accomplished.

1:3. *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul's prayer is that the Corinthian Christians open themselves to grace and peace, gifts from God which have the power to resolve the differences between them.

Grace is a gift from God which enables man to take part in the struggle to grow in holiness, striving against his tendency to sin. The peace that Paul refers to is not the fragile peace of this world, where trying to live by Christian standards often brings turmoil (Mt 10:34-42) but the inner peace that comes from true communion with God (Jn 14:27, 16:33). In the Divine Liturgy we consistently pray for peace from above and are asked to pray in peace.

1:4. *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus...* Paul practices what he preaches (Eph 5:20; Phil 4:4-7)—thanking God in all situations. Almost all of his epistles begin in this manner.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (d). How is it possible to be thankful in all situations—times of tribulation, persecution, illness, death? (Read Rom 8:28-39.)

1:5-8. *that you were enriched in every thing by him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you came short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Armed with Christ's teachings and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Corinthians had all they needed to try to live Christ-like lives to demonstrate faith. Paul's hope is that on the Day of Judgment, at Christ's Second Coming, it will be revealed that they (and we) zealously persisted in this effort (Phil 3:12-14). A person who professes belief in Christ but does not try to grow in obedience to Him is not really a Christian.

1:9. *God is faithful, by whom you were called...*We are called by God to become a part of His eternal Kingdom through Christ (see Jn 15:16). Those who respond to this call will be beneficiaries of all of His promises.

God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably wicked—but not because God had created them so.

JUSTIN²

God calls those who seek Him, following the inner yearning He creates in man (Acts 17:26-27). Man perceives this inherent yearning as an emptiness—a need—and strives to fill it. Fortunate are those who fill it with love for God. Those who, instead, pursue false gods such as money, power, fame, pleasure, a person (whatever takes first place in our lives and distracts or diverts us from union with the Creator) never find true peace.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (e). Who does God want to be saved? (Read 2 Peter 3:9.) (f). Will there be universal salvation? (Read Mt 22:14, Rom 2:5-10.) (g). What is the criteria for salvation? (Read Mt 7:21-27.)

into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This fellowship is described by 2 Tim 2:11-13:

If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we have died with Christ symbolically through Baptism and lived a life of trying to do His will, not our own, we will live with Him in His Kingdom—forever.

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we continue, throughout our lives, to try to be Christ-like to show our love for and faith in Him in spite of difficulties, God will call each of us by name and give us the Crown of Life (Jas 1:12, Rev 3:5).

If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we spurn this fellowship, and deny through our words or actions that He is the Lord of our lives, He will deny (on Judgment Day) that we belong to Him (Mk 8:38).

If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He is always there for us. As long as we have life, it is never too late to turn to Him (Mt 20:1-16), but sooner is better (Mk 10:13-16).

1:10-13. Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Through Baptism we are united with Christ—not the person who introduced us to Him. Thus all Christians are connected through Him and should be of one mind on matters having to do with the Christian life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (h). What do verses 10-13 say about divisions in the Church (among all who call themselves Christians)? (i). There are hundreds of Christian denominations. Is this acceptable to God? (Read Eph 4:4-6.) (j). What is the criteria for unity? (See 2 Thess 2:15.)

1:14-16. I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. Paul's calling was to teach the Gospel—he usually left to others the easier task of administering the rite of Baptism. Note that Stephanas' entire family was Baptized at one time, which was the custom in the early Church, upon conversion of the parents to Christianity (see also Acts 16:15). This must, in many cases, have included infants and children, a practice which corresponds with the Orthodox tradition of Baptizing infants when they are brought to the Church by believing parents

and/or godparents. Being a part of the Church from a very young age, with continual access to the Sacraments, allows for early and continual spiritual nourishment. As we do not refrain from giving our children food until they understand the needs of their bodies for vitamins and minerals, neither do we refrain from providing spiritual nourishment to them until they understand Christian theology. This, of course, presupposes that parents and/or godparents will teach their children about God, His love, and His promises as they are able to absorb the knowledge. Infants and children learn in mysterious ways, using all of their senses. The faith is best taught through experience and by example, with explanations offered at appropriate times.

You have seen how numerous are the gifts of Baptism. Although many think that the only gift it confers is the remission of sins, we have counted its honors to the number of ten. It is on this account that we baptize even infants, although they are sinless, that they may be given the further gifts of sanctification, justice, filial adoption, and inheritance, that they may be brothers and members of Christ, and become dwelling places for the Spirit. CHRYSTOSTOM³

Besides the gifts of Baptism outlined above, Chrysostom elsewhere lists pardon from punishment, justification and redemption.

1:17-19. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Under God's divine plan, sin had to be atoned for, but this required a perfect life. No mere man could accomplish this on his own—he needed a savior. Jesus lived a perfect life, then accepted death, the consequence of man's sin. Since then, under the final Blood Covenant between God and man, those who are a part of Christ through Baptism and a life of faith will share that which He earned, eternal life with God in His Kingdom, which begins in this life but will reach its fullness after Christ's Second Coming. This is the message of the Cross. This knowledge is power because it enables us to live joyously, with freedom from fear of death, and to pass this confidence on to others. No matter what happens to us or to those we love in this life, no one can rob us of this power. To those who do not believe this saving truth, however, or are indifferent to it, the message of the Cross is foolishness.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (k). To whom was "paid" the price of death for sin? ...to God? ...to Satan?

1:20-21. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Man, through his own efforts, can never fully comprehend God. Only He, Who accomplishes His purposes in wondrous ways, possesses perfect wisdom, of which we partake when we accept, by faith, the Gospel of salvation through His Son. Living a sacramental life is the natural and necessary outcome of true faith. Through the Sacraments which God offers His people through the Church, man is the recipient of divine grace, power and wisdom. These gifts enable him to try to live a Christ-like life, the indicator of true faith.

1:22-24. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Crucifixion was the Roman method of

executing slaves. It was an agonizing, degrading death, which usually took four to six days. (In Jesus' case it took only six hours because God shortened His agony (Mk 13:20).) To the Jews, a crucified Messiah was unthinkable, a curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). They felt that if Jesus was really the Son of God, He would not have allowed Himself to hang on the Cross (Mt 27:41-42). To the Greeks (pagans), who prized worldly "wisdom" and intellectual debate, and among whom the study of philosophy was popular, for God to take human form and then allow Himself to be put to death made no sense. The Apostles were ordinary men who relied not on dazzling others with philosophical thought but on the simple truth of salvation through Christ.

1:25. *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* God's all encompassing strength and wisdom make Him unafraid to appear weak and foolish to the unenlightened.

1:26-29. *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things that are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.* The Gospel was and is offered to all people, but most of the first Christians belonged to the common class of people, fishermen and manual laborers, for two reasons:

—because those who are wise, successful and influential in worldly matters are often too distracted by their pursuits to consider spiritual matters.

The unlearned were more open to conviction, for they were free from the extreme madness of accounting themselves wise... Nothing is so useless towards an accurate knowledge of God as arrogance and being nailed down to wealth; for these dispose a man to admire things present, and make no account of the future; and they stop up the ears through the multitude of cares.

CHRYSOSTOM⁴

—so that those who did God's work could boast, not of their own abilities, but only of the power of God.

And when they say that the Apostles were rude, let us say that they were also untaught, and unlettered, poor, vile, stupid, and obscure. It is not a slander on the Apostles to say so but even a glory that, being such, they should have outshone the whole world.

For those untrained, rude, illiterate men completely vanquished the wise, the powerful, the tyrants, and those who flourished in wealth and glory and all outward good things: which makes it abundantly clear that great is the power of the Cross and that these things were done by no human strength.

CHRYSOSTOM⁵

God used the inglorious elements of the Crucifixion of His Son on a cross to bring about the most glorious gift of salvation for mankind. He accomplished this through those who were considered insignificant in the eyes of the world.

1:30-31. *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that is, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."* The Son of God took on flesh and became man to bring man to God.

For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word. For what other person *knew the mind of the Lord*, or who else *has become His counselor*? (Rom 11:34). Again, we could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher and hearing His voice with our own ears, that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him. IRENAEUS⁶

Think what this means: God loved man so much that He sent His Son, Who willingly took on the condition of fallen humanity with its frustrations, pain, sorrow, loneliness, danger and death. Like a lifeguard who enters a turbulent ocean to lead a struggling swimmer to shore, Jesus Christ entered the world to help those who, recognizing that He can save them, reach out for His helping hand (Jn 1:1-14). Through the Holy Spirit, they gradually take on His qualities to prepare for life in His Kingdom. Those who understand this realize that everything they have that is worthwhile comes from God—therefore all glory belongs to Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). Why would God *call* Paul, who was a known persecutor of Christians, and who had watched while Stephen (one of the first seven deacons of the Church, and the first Christian martyr) was stoned to death? God called Paul because while his actions were wrong, his motives were pure. He loved God and thought he was doing His work—routing those who were, in his opinion, blaspheming by calling Jesus the Son of God.

(b). What does this indicate with regard to our lives? If we act out of sincere belief, while asking for and being open to guidance from God, He will direct or redirect our paths as necessary. Working with God is always synergistic—His will and our cooperation with it are required.

(c). How does the Church help us to become saints? The Church offers Sacraments, guidance and prayer. It has also preserved the stories of the lives of many who have struggled throughout their days on earth to become holy in imitation of Christ and who have been recognized as having endured to the end, thus showing themselves, after death, to be members of the Church Triumphant, the Kingdom of Heaven (Jn 12:26 & Phil 3:17). The stories of their lives can inspire us to dedicate our lives to Christ in like manner, which is the reason we find icons of these Saints in every Orthodox Church. There are also countless numbers of unknown Saints in Heaven and on earth—known only to God and perhaps those around them in their quiet, dedicated lives.

It's a wonderful thought that at this moment friends of ours, people we have known and loved, are at the side of the Lord in Heaven, sharing His joy as once they shared his pains. Their hearts were never wedded to this world and its values, but were focused on Him who died for us, and was raised from the dead for us by God.

So copy them, as they copied Christ. Hold the faith firmly, join together to defend the truth, and love one another as brothers. Indeed, make a habit of giving way to one another, not regarding anyone as inferior or beneath your attention. In that way you will have the spirit of Christ, who never treated any person with anything less than courtesy and love, however poor, or sinful, or outcast they were.

POLYCARP⁷

(d). How is it possible to be thankful in all situations—times of tribulation, persecution, illness, death? (Read Rom 8:28-39.) Nothing can happen without God's knowledge to those who belong to Him—

He knows even the exact number of hairs each of us has on our head (Lk 12:7). He is in control but sometimes allows (does not cause) difficulties to enter our lives for good reason (1 Pet 1:6-7): to *test* us, for a person's true faith and character (or lack of) are revealed under stress; to *purify* us, as gold is refined by fire; to *strengthen* us, because each hurdle we overcome makes us better able to confront the next obstacle in our lives; to *awaken* us to those things that are of eternal value; to *call us to repentance*, and/or to *remind us of our need for Him*. God also sometimes allows the righteous to suffer to *serve as examples of faith* to others. (See this study and "Food for Thought Comment" for 2 Cor 12:7-10.)

God never promised that the Christian life would be free from pain. Suffering is a part of being human and living in this imperfect world, where evil exists. It would be the cruelest of hoaxes for God to step in to right every wrong, for then each of us would waste our lives without realizing that the barrier of sin between God and man has been removed only by Jesus Christ, to Whom those who desire union with God must attach themselves.

How could the Lord Jesus bring himself to suffer at the hands of men? After all, He is the Lord of all the earth, the one through whom men themselves were made in God's image. Even if He was willing to suffer as a mark of His love for us, how could it happen? Would this not detract from his power and dignity?

The answer, as one would expect, is to be found in the Scriptures. The prophets, inspired by the Lord Himself, foretold His coming as a man, since if He were to destroy death and bring in eternal life it was essential that He should take upon Himself human flesh. And to take on human flesh involves suffering: the two are virtually indistinguishable. Has there ever been a human being who went through life without suffering?
BARNABAS⁸

What God *has* promised is that He will help us through every difficulty we encounter in life (Mt. 28:20) if we ask for His help—because doing so shows faith in His existence, His omnipotence and His Love (Mt. 7:7). Whatever enters into our lives becomes a part of the total picture of who we are and what we are becoming. If we invite Him to direct our lives according to His will and accept the outcome, whatever it might be, we will continue to grow in His image. In this regard it can be said that *all things work together for good for those who love God* (Rom 8:28).

It is impossible to escape tribulation in this world, but the man who is given over to the will of God bears tribulation easily, seeing it but putting his trust in the Lord, and so his tribulations pass!⁹

These are the basic truths to remember when trouble strikes. They enable us to be thankful in every situation: that God is in control and that everything fits somehow into His divine plan.

Always to give thanks, this is a mark of a philosophic soul. Have you suffered any evil? But if you will, it is no evil. Give thanks to God, and the evil is changed into good. Say as Job said, *Blessed be the name of the Lord forever* (Job 1:21). For tell me, what such great thing have you suffered? Has disease befallen you? Yet it is nothing strange. For our body is mortal, and liable to suffer. Has a want of possessions overtaken you? But these also are things to be acquired, and again to be lost, and that abide here. But is it plots and false accusations of enemies? But it is not we that are injured by these, but they who are the authors of them. *For the soul, he says, that sins, itself shall also die* (Ezek 18:4). And he has not sinned who suffers the evil, but he who has done the evil.
CHRYSOSTOM¹⁰

(e). Who does God want to be saved? (Read 2 Peter 3:9.) God loves all His creations and wants everyone to be saved from damnation (eternity separated from Him and His goodness), and gives everyone this opportunity.

As you may learn by examining our writings, the chief of the wicked demons we call the serpent, Satan, the Devil, and Christ foretold that he with his army of demons, and the men who follow him, will be cast into the fire [of Hell: the burning agony of having denied oneself eternal blessedness] to be punished for endless ages. The cause of God's delay in doing this is His regard for mankind, for in His foreknowledge He sees that some will be saved by repentance, some who are, perhaps, not yet in existence. JUSTIN¹¹

(f). Will there be universal salvation? (Read Mt 22:14, Rom 2:5-10.) There will not be universal salvation. God offers salvation to everyone, through His Son, but not all avail themselves of it.

Indeed, in the beginning when He created man, He endowed him with the power of understanding, of choosing the truth, and of doing right; consequently, before God no man has an excuse if he does evil, for all men have been created with the power to reason and to reflect. If anyone does not believe that God takes an interest in these things, he will by some artifice imply either that God does not exist, or that though He does exist, He takes delight in evil, or that He is (as unmoved) as stone, and that neither virtue nor vice is a reality, but that things are considered good or bad only in the opinion of men: this indeed would be the height of blasphemy and injustice. JUSTIN¹²

(g). What is the criteria for salvation? (Read Mt 7:21-27.) Only those whose lives demonstrate faith (that God exists and that His Son Jesus Christ is the Messiah of prophecy) will be a part of God's eternal Kingdom (Jn 14:6).

Perhaps each of you will say to himself: "I have believed, I shall be saved." He speaks what is true if to faith he joins good works. That is indeed true faith which does not deny in work what it professes in word. For this Paul says of certain false faithful: *They profess that they know God; but in their works they deny Him* (Tit 1:16). For this John also says: *He who says that he knows God, and keeps not His Commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 Jn 2:4). GREGORY THE GREAT¹³

(h). What do verses 10-13 say about divisions in the Church (among all who call themselves Christians)? Since there is only one Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, all Christians should be living and teaching the same truths, for *God is not the author of confusion* (1 Cor 14:33).

The emphatic force of the word "schisms," [shown in Scripture text as "divisions"] was a sufficient accusation. For it was not that they had become many parts, each entire within itself, but rather the One (Body which originally existed) had perished. For had they been entire churches, there might be many of them; but if they were divisions, then that first One was gone. For that which is entire within itself not only does not become many by division into many parts, but even the original one is lost. Such is the nature of divisions. CHRYSOSTOM¹⁴

The beliefs and practices that were contrary to the teachings of the Gospel would destroy the church of Corinth if they were not corrected, because they would cause permanent divisions. Some believed one thing, some another. Some followed one leader, some another. The unity that comes from a common faith in one Lord would no longer be the binding element it is intended to be. Thus there would be no continuity of the Church that Christ had founded through Paul in existence in Corinth—each group would

be only somewhat like the original. The same would hold true in our day. There can be many “entire churches,” each containing the fullness of the truth about Jesus Christ, but there should not be divisions, with each containing only parts of the truth.

Although the Church of Jesus Christ is found in many different places, she is one Church, not many. After all, there are many rays of sunlight, but only one sun. A tree has many boughs, each slightly different from the others, but all drawing their strength from one source. Many streams may flow down a hillside, but they all originate from the same spring. In exactly the same way, each local congregation belongs to the one Church.

If you put a solid object across a ray of the sun it disappears, cut off from its source of light. If you break a branch off a tree, it dies and can never bud again. And if you dam up a stream, the course will soon dry up.

The Church offers the light of Christ to the world, flooding out from him who is the source of all light. Cut off that light, and the darkness is total. To cut oneself off from the Body of Christ, where the light shines, is to choose darkness.

The Church stretches out her branches all over the earth, offering shelter and refreshment to the weary. And she also pours out the living water, which we can drink and never thirst again.

At all costs, let's make sure that we are not guilty, by our divisions, of cutting off from men and women that light, that shelter and that water of life.

CYPRIAN¹⁵

(i). There are hundreds of Christian denominations. Is this acceptable to God? (Read Eph 4:4-6.)

Jesus said, *If a Kingdom is divided against itself: that Kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself: that house cannot stand* (Mk 3:24-25). The many Christian denominations in existence serve to weaken the Church, robbing her of the power she would have if all were united in *one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism* (Eph 4:5).

All who profess to be followers of Christ should be united in the fullness of the truth of His Gospel. Divisions do harm to the entire Body. All Christians have an obligation to seek the fullness of the truth and to share it. It is logical to seek this truth in the life and teachings of the early Church, as contained in writings which have been preserved from those times: Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, who sought to safeguard the true meanings of God's word, and in the Holy Tradition of the Church, which at first was not written but taught by one Christian to another.

Concerning the teachings of the Church, whether publicly proclaimed (kerygma) or reserved to members of the household of faith (dogmata), we have received some from written sources, while others have been given to us secretly, through apostolic tradition. Both sources have equal force in true religion. No one would deny either source—no one, at any rate, who is even slightly familiar with the ordinances of the Church. If we attacked unwritten customs, claiming them to be of little importance, we would fatally mutilate the Gospel, no matter what our intentions—or rather, we would reduce the Gospel teachings to bare words. For instance...which book teaches us to pray facing the East? Have any saints left for us in writing the words to be used in the invocation over the Eucharistic bread and the cup of blessing? As everyone knows, we are not content in the liturgy simply to recite the words recorded by St. Paul or the Gospels, but we add other words both before and after, words of great importance for this mystery. We have received these words from unwritten teaching. We bless Baptismal water and the oil for Chrismation as well as the candidate approaching the font. By what written authority do we do this, if not from secret and mystical tradition? Even

beyond blessing the oil, what written command do we have to anoint with it? What about Baptizing a man with three immersions, or other Baptismal rites, such as the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Are not all these things found in unpublished and unwritten teachings, which our fathers guarded in silence, safe from meddling and petty curiosity? They had learned their lesson well; reverence for the mysteries is best encouraged by silence. The uninitiated were not even allowed to be present at the mysteries; how would you expect these teachings to be paraded about in public documents?...

Dogma is one thing, kerygma another; the first is observed in silence, while the latter is proclaimed to the world. One form of silence is the obscurity found in certain passages of Scripture, which makes the meaning of some dogmas difficult to perceive for the reader's own advantage. For instance, we all pray facing East, but few realize that we do this because we are seeking Paradise, our old fatherland, which God planted in the East in Eden. We all stand for prayer on Sunday, but not everyone knows why. We stand for prayer on the day of the Resurrection to remind ourselves of the graces we have been given: not only because we have been raised with Christ and are obliged to seek the things that are above, but also because Sunday seems to be an image of the age to come...This day [which is called, theologically, the first and the eighth day] foreshadows the state which is to follow the present age: a day without sunset, nightfall, or successor, an age which does not grow old or come to an end. It is therefore necessary for the Church to teach her newborn children to stand for prayer on this day, so that they will always be reminded of eternal life, and not neglect preparations for their journey.

BASIL¹⁶

(j). What is the criteria for unity? (See 2 Thess 2:15.) Truth cannot be compromised. Orthodoxy holds that true unity (inter-communion) among Christians can come only from full agreement in matters of faith: the fullness of the teachings that Jesus handed down to the Apostles, which the Orthodox Church considers itself to have "been enabled to preserve." For a full discussion of this topic read "The Orthodox Church and the Reunion of Christians," *The Orthodox Church*, Chapter 16, by Bishop Kallistos Ware.

(k). To whom was "paid" the price of death for sin? ...to God? ...to Satan? Jesus' death for sin is not to be understood in the literal sense as being exacted "by" and paid "to" someone, but more in the sense of a substitute accepting the painful consequences for the wrongful actions of others.

To whom was that Blood offered which was shed for us, and for what purpose was it shed; this great and precious Blood of our God Who was both Priest and Victim? For we were held in bondage by the Wicked One, sold under the dominion of sin, receiving instead the pleasure of wickedness. But if the price of redemption is paid to the one who holds the bond, to whom, I ask, was it offered here, and why? If to the Wicked One: then alas for the loss of it! If the thief receives, not alone from God, but also God Himself as ransom, it would have been more equitable to have saved the payment of so great a price in exchange for his tyranny. But if it was paid to the Father first, how was this done? For we were not held in bondage by Him. And again, why should the Blood of His only-Begotten Son be acceptable to the Father, Who would not accept Isaac when he was offered by his father, but instead changed the sacrifice, substituting a ram in place of the rational victim? (Gen 22:11.)

Is it not plain that the Father accepted It, but that He neither demanded It, nor had need of It; but because of the plan of the redemption, and because it was required that man be restored to sanctity by means of the humanity assumed by God, so that, tyranny being overcome by a man's strength, He might deliver us, and bring us back to Himself by means of His Son, Who did all this for the honor of the Father Whom in all things He obeys?

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS¹⁷

In the beginning, after God created the heavens and the earth and everything visible and invisible, He looked at what He had created and saw that it was good (Gen 1). Then, out of love, in order to share His

handiwork, God fashioned man: His masterpiece. He put man in a perfect place, where there was no sickness, no sorrow, no death. In return for eternal blessedness, growing in union with Him, God asked only that man return this love and that he demonstrate it by obeying one commandment. The condition of love was also necessary if man were to live in Eden: where anything less than love is allowed, perfection ceases to exist.

Disobedience would bring eviction from paradise to a place where there would be danger, suffering and death: a steep price, but one commensurate with the potential good. Because love must include choice, man was given the gift of free will. Because of this gift, God *allowed* Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, and He *allowed* Adam and Eve to disobey, as a means of testing their love for Him. Thus through Satan's influence, suffering and death came to mankind. God did not assign this role to Satan, he chose it for himself.

Jesus' perfect life satisfied God's condition of obedience. Yet because Satan's chief concern is to make war with those *who keep the commandments of God* (Rev 12:17), he conspired to bring about Jesus' death (Jn 13:26-27), which was unwarranted, illegal. He had been completely obedient, yet He suffered the consequences of disobedience. Thus Satan's hold over man was broken.

Irenaeus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa all show how Satan, wishing to take into his power the only being over whom he had none, is justly dispossessed. Certain Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa, propose the symbol of a divine ruse: on the hook of His divinity, the humanity of Christ is the bait; the devil throws himself on the prey, but the hook pierces Him—he cannot swallow God, and dies.¹⁸

God accepted the sacrifice of His Son, by *economia*, on behalf of those who are united with Him through Baptism and a life of faith. As part of Him (His Body, the Church) they share His inheritance: the fullness of the Kingdom.

¹ John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, p.175.

² Roberts and Donaldson, "Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew," Vol. I, p.270.

³ Paul W. Harkins, trans, "The Third Instruction," *Ancient Christian Writers: St. John Chrysostom*, Baptismal Instructions, p.57.

⁴ Schaff, "Homily V on First Corinthians," Vol. XII, p.23.

⁵ *ibid.*, "Homily III," p.14.

⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," Book V, Vol. I, p.526.

⁷ David Winter, *Faith Under Fire*: (Day 42).

⁸ *ibid.*, Day 64.

⁹ Archimandrite Sophrony, *Wisdom from Mount Athos: The Writings of Staretz Silouan*, p.72.

¹⁰ Schaff, "Homily X on First Thessalonians," Vol. XIII, p.367.

¹¹ Thomas B. Falls, trans., *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 6, p.64-5.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ M.F. Toal, trans. & ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, Vol. Two, p.427.

¹⁴ Schaff, "Homily III," Vol. XII, p.10.

¹⁵ Winter (Day 49).

¹⁶ David Anderson, trans. *Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, p.98.

¹⁷ Toal, "On the Holy Pasch," Vol. Two, p.257.

¹⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: an Introduction*, p.114.