

## CHAPTER ONE

### Comfort in the Midst of Tribulation

**BACKGROUND:** Paul's epistles to the Corinthians served the early Church as a guide to the Christian life. They play the same role for contemporary readers. The first epistle covers basics such as the need for love, fellowship, and unity in Christ in the Church; God's plan for our salvation through the Cross; Christian morality; male and female roles; the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the importance of order in worship; the Mystery of the Eucharist and our participation in it; and the promised resurrection of the dead. This second epistle delves more deeply into spiritual matters such as growth in holiness, the role suffering plays in the Christian life, the need for almsgiving and prayer, the power of repentance and forgiveness, that which happens after death, the types of bodies the righteous and the unrighteous will have after the Resurrection, and the conditions of life in Heaven. In this letter, Paul also bares his heart and soul. He has experienced the extremes of emotion, from the deep despair of unrelenting persecution and isolation to the ecstasy of being in the presence of God. His long, personal association with the Christians of Corinth allows him to share his disappointments and fears as well as his joys.

**1:1. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:** Paul begins this epistle in a way which is common for him, by alluding to having literally been called by God to be an Apostle (Acts 9:1-22). This fact is especially important in this instance because there are those in Corinth who question his authority to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Timothy, his spiritual son and co-worker, had visited the Corinthians as promised to reinforce Paul's work with them (1 Cor 4:17) and is now back in Macedonia with Paul.

Achaia was a Roman province covering that part of ancient Greece south of Thessaly and Macedonia; Corinth was its capital. However, all of Greece was often designated broadly as Achaia. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians contained truths they specifically needed to be reminded of or to have clarified. In this Second Epistle, he addresses not only the Christians in Corinth but also those in all Achaia, because he felt that they too were in need of counsel. His reference to a broader audience than the direct recipients of this letter indicates his awareness that these writings would be shared.

**1:2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** To receive *grace* is to partake of the energies of God (a bit of the power of the Creator) for the purpose of sanctification. We were created for fellowship with God (Acts 17:26-28). God is Holy, so to fulfill our potential we must become holy. But we cannot do so solely by our own efforts, only with God's grace. *Peace from God* is the inner state of contentment experienced by those who address their "reason for being" by cooperating with grace to make growth in holiness, in Christ's image, the focal point of their lives. If there is no grace in our lives, there can be no peace.

Peace is serenity of mind, tranquility of soul, simplicity of heart, the bond of love, the fellowship of charity. It takes away enmities, restrains wars, holds back anger, treads down pride, loves the humble, calms those who quarrel, reconciles those who are enemies and is pleasing and acceptable to all. It seeks nothing that belongs to another; regards nothing as its own. It teaches a love that has never learned to hate. It knows not how to be lifted above itself. It knows not how to be puffed up.

He who acquires this peace should hold fast to it. He who has broken it should strive to

restore it. He who has lost it should seek earnestly to find it again. For whoever is found without this peace is rejected by the Father, disinherited by the Son and becomes a stranger to the Holy Spirit....He who is deliberately at enmity with another Christian cannot have the friendship of Christ.

AUGUSTINE<sup>1</sup>

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (a). To whom does God grant grace? Do we play a role in this matter, or are we subject to His whim as to whom He will give this gift and to whom He will not? (b). In the events of life, does God first give the grace that enables righteous action, or does He wait for righteous action first, then grant grace to strengthen our efforts?

**1:3-4. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*** Jesus Christ brought the world the good news of life after death in God's eternal Kingdom for those who love Him. He was persecuted, scourged, and then crucified because the world did not want to hear His message. Now, about a quarter of a century later, Paul is following a similar path. He expresses his adoration of God, Who comforts him during these times of tribulation. With the understanding that...*all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom 8:28)*, Paul affirms from experience that those who, during very difficult times, have felt the comfort that only God can provide, can in turn help bring that comfort to others.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (c). Why did the world not want to hear the message that Jesus brought? Why does the world still not want to listen? (d). Why does a loving God allow troubled times to enter the lives of His people?

**1:5. *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.*** Because Paul imitates Christ in his willingness to suffer in order that God's work may be done, he receives divine comfort. No amount of suffering is beyond the realm of this consolation. In the midst of agony, he who keeps his focus on God feels enveloped by His warm Presence. This gift cushions the harsh jolts of life and at the same time transforms the sufferer, rendering him able to endure the unendurable. With this gift, Stephen withstood, even joyfully, the blows of the stones cast at him by those who opposed the Gospel (Acts 7:55-60). Just as there would have been no Resurrection without the Cross, this type of comfort comes only as the companion of righteous suffering.

Nothing can be harder to bear than bodily pain; nevertheless, because of this joy in God, what even to hear of is intolerable becomes both tolerable and longed for; and if you take the martyr from the cross or the gridiron barely still breathing, you will find a treasure of joy within him that words cannot describe.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>2</sup>

**1:6. *Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*** The Gospel is especially powerful when its teachers are not only willing to endure the tribulation their work inevitably brings, which proves their faith in its message of salvation, but when they also seem to possess deep inner joy in spite of troubled times. Those witnessing this demonstrated faith, love and power are consoled, strengthened, and encouraged to believe and live by God's word—so the cycle continues.

The subject of suffering stirs deep emotions. No one relishes the agony of physical or emotional pain. It is natural, alas human, to want to avoid situations with that potential. It is supernatural—touching upon the divine—to willingly endure voluntary suffering like persecution or deprivation in order that God’s purposes be served, or to endure involuntary suffering like severe illness or loss without turning away from God. Dealing with the troubled times of life can leave us bitter or better—the choice is ours.

**1:7. *And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.*** Paul hopes that all Christians will emulate his example and not shy away from the difficulties that living by and teaching the Gospel bring. His desire is not that we suffer but that we partake of the fruit that comes from willingness to endure suffering when necessary, in order that Christ’s work be done (see Rom 8:16-18 and Chapter 12 of this study).

For no one who is self-indulgent has fellowship with Christ...nor anyone lax, lazy, indifferent or loose in behavior and morals. He who is in affliction and temptation and who is journeying on the narrow way is near to Him ... so do not grieve when you are in affliction, considering with Whom you have fellowship, how you are purified by trials, and how great is your gain....Neither afflictions nor conspiracies, nor any other thing has power to grieve the right-minded soul. CHRYSOSTOM<sup>3</sup>

**1:8. *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*** In the course of his ministry in Ephesus, Paul faced many adversaries (1 Cor 16:8-9) and his life had been in great danger (Acts 19:21-30).

**1:9. *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God Who raises the dead*** ...God allowed Paul to face the ever-present danger of death so he would learn that some things were beyond his control. Only when we have exhausted all of the world’s means of dealing with a serious problem can we begin to understand that ultimately we can rely only on God for those things in life that really matter. When such events seem to be leading to a certain inevitable conclusion, then suddenly, after fervent prayer, they take a favorable turn against all odds—God’s existence and power are demonstrated.

When enemies devise mischief, God allows it to come even to the trial and then works miracles, as in the case of the furnace and the lions (Dan 3:25).

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>4</sup>

**1:10. *Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in Whom we trust that He will still deliver us...***In Ephesus, God shielded Paul from death by the hands of his enemies. He is confident that this deliverance will continue through future trials, so he can continue his work.

When facing adversity, we should first turn to God in prayer and in Scripture, seeking His guidance, assistance, and strength. If we then take the actions that seem best under the circumstances and trust God by leaving the rest to Him, that which will surface, endure, and triumph is our love for God and His for us (Mt 3:12)—no matter the outcome of the immediate situation.

God is in control. He has ultimate power over everything, including death. He created man to live

forever. Thus, a form of life—of the soul—continues beyond the death of the body. In accordance with His divine plan, at the Second Coming of Christ, all who died believing in Him as Messiah will rise from their graves, with new bodies, and will inherit an eternal life of blessedness (I Thess 4:13-18). God constantly reassures us of this truth with signs of resurrection all around us: the new life of spring which follows the deadness of winter in the cycle of the seasons, the daily routine of activity followed by sleep then reawakening, and the various crises of life.

When God lifts up again a man who is despaired of...He demonstrates a resurrection, snatching out of the very jaws of death him who had fallen into them: so in the case of those restored either out of grievous sickness or insupportable trials, it is natural to say, "We have seen a resurrection of the dead."

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>5</sup>

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (e). What tests of faith are we likely to face in the times in which we live?

**1:11. you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many ...** While clearly attributing his deliverance from danger to God's mercy (vs 10), Paul emphasizes that this mercy is granted in response to prayer, private and corporate.

We can pray in our own home; but it is not possible to pray there as in church, where the number is large and where prayer is offered up with one accord. When you pray alone your prayers are not heard in the same way as when you pray with your brethren. In the church there is something greater; the prayers are of one mind and one voice; there is the bond of charity and the prayer of the priests. It is for this reason the priests are there, so that joining their more efficacious prayers to those less strong of the people, they may ascend together with them to Heaven. For if the prayer of the Church helped Peter and delivered him from prison [Acts 12:5], how can you ignore its power.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>6</sup>

Jesus' actions often illustrated the fact that God responds to prayer. He mercifully healed the daughter of the woman of Canaan after *she came and worshiped Him*, saying, "*Lord, help me*" (Mt 15:21-28); and He responded to the centurion's plea to *speak the word only*, and his servant was healed from a distance (Mt 8:5-13).

Paul also reminds us to remember to thank God—even if His answer to our prayers differs from our desires. These occasions present opportunities to show our trust in Him.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (f). We know that God, in His omniscience, knows even the number of hairs on the heads of His people (Mt 10:30) and does not need us to keep Him informed of situations on earth. Why then is there such biblical emphasis on prayer for one another, which is echoed in the Divine Liturgy and in the life of the Church? Does God always answer prayer? Are our prayers for others always of assistance to them? (g). Do our prayers for those who are experiencing difficulties eliminate the need to offer practical physical or emotional assistance?

Chrysostom points out that if we expect God's mercy in our lives in answer to prayer, we must be "worthy." As an example, he cites the Ninevites, who were saved when *they turned from their*

*evil way* (Jonah 3:10). No one is ever worthy in the sense that they are deserving of God's mercy, for *all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23). Rather, worthiness is the state of grace of those who continually repent and acknowledge their dependence on Christ as Savior. Sincere repentance includes effort to change, so the worthy are those who try always to live in obedience to Christ, and who, when they inevitably fall short of this goal, rise to try again. Those who make this struggle a way of life demonstrate true faith in and love for God—the criteria for salvation.

For our prayers to be heard by God, they must first come from one who is worthy of receiving. Secondly, they should be made in accordance with the laws of God. Thirdly, they should be unceasing. Fourthly, it is required of us that we pray with earnestness and not in a worldly manner. Fifthly, that we join with Him in bringing them about by asking only for what is fitting and expedient for us.  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>7</sup>

As we mature spiritually, our prayers will change. The things of the world will seem less urgent. We will spend more time in praise, thanksgiving, and worship, and our petitions will reflect the desire that God's will be done.

Seek from God our King the things that are worthy of Him and ... do not cease praying till you receive them ... If a month goes by, or a year, or three years, or four, or many, do not give up praying till you receive what you ask for; but ask on in faith, and at the same time be steadfast in doing good. It often will happen that someone strives earnestly for chastity in his youth. Then pleasure begins to undermine his resolution, desires awaken his nature, he grows weak in prayer, wine overcomes his youth, modesty perishes, and he becomes another man. So we change because we have not stood firm against our passions with high courage of soul. It behooves us, therefore, to resist all things, yet we must also cry out to God, that He may bring us aid. BASIL<sup>8</sup>

If God does not seem to respond to our prayers, we should reflect upon our life, our spiritual condition, and those things we ask of Him. As we pray for guidance we may begin to understand that there is a reason He does not grant particular petitions. Paul prayed that he be freed from his *thorn in the flesh* only until he realized that this affliction made his ministry more effective (2 Cor 12:7-10).

***1:12. For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.*** Paul's life is dedicated to doing God's work. He finds comfort in the fact that the suffering he has been experiencing was not caused by any wrongdoing on his part. The consolation referred to in 2 Cor 1:3-7 is the divine comfort given to those whose lives demonstrate faith, whereas this verse points to the human comfort of a clear conscience. A wonderful sense of well being is enjoyed by those who can look back on life and see that God had been at work in their helplessness if they also know that they tried, aided by His grace, to follow His will.

Seeing that Paul had said *God comforted us*, and *God delivered us*, and had ascribed all to His mercies and their prayers, lest he should thus make the hearer negligent, presuming on God's mercy only and the prayers of others, he shows that he had contributed a great deal himself...from the purity of his life.  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>9</sup>

**1:13-14. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast, as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.** Paul teaches only the word of God as he received it. Those who accept his message of salvation through Christ—and try to live by it—will be part of God’s Kingdom because of their faith. The student is grateful to the teacher for introducing him to the Gospel. In turn, the teacher rejoices over those who, by responding favorably, became the fruit of his faith.

**1:15-17. And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?** Because of the spiritual bond between them, Paul was anxious to spend more time with the Corinthians. Thus he had intended to stop by on his way to Macedonia as well as after leaving Macedonia on his way to Judea (1 Cor 16:5). Due to changing conditions, however, he did not follow through with his original plan. Is he therefore fickle as his detractors claim? Does he say one thing but then do that which suits his fancy when the time comes to keep his word?

**1:18-20. But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.** Paul’s change of itinerary casts no reflection on God’s promises—which are steadfast. Man has limited knowledge; he must continually reassess situations in life in order to try to make the right decisions. God sees the whole picture; His word to us remains forever true and valid.

**1:21-22. Now He Who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit.** The Holy Trinity is at work in every true believer. According to God’s divine plan, His beloved “man” becomes a part of the Body of Christ (the Church) through Baptism and remains so through a life of faith. Thus all true Christians are united *in Christ*. Through the anointing of Chrismation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The consecrated myrrh used in this Sacrament indelibly inscribes the “seal,” the mark of authenticity borne by those who thus receive this indwelling Presence, which brings grace, peace (2 Cor 1:2), and guidance to those who submit themselves to God’s will. The Holy Spirit acts through both of these Sacraments, evoking confidence and joy in believers, thus providing a *deposit* (Gr: the arravon): a glimpse of that which awaits in the fullness of the Kingdom. Thus the joys of the Kingdom begin in this life, when we come to the realization of the existence and love of God, and grow to the degree that faith and love prevail within us.

Being the light of the divinity, grace cannot remain hidden or unnoticed; acting in man, changing his nature, entering into a more and more intimate union with him, the divine energies become increasingly perceptible, revealing to man the face of the living God, “the Kingdom of God present with power” (Mk 9:1). This divine experience, says Palamas, is given to each according to his measure and can be more or less profound, depending on the worthiness of those who experience it. The full vision of the divinity having become perceptible in the uncreated light, in its deifying grace, is “the mystery of the eighth day”; it belongs to the future age. However, those who are worthy of it attain the sight of “the Kingdom of God come with power” in this life, as the three Apostles saw it

on Mount Tabor.<sup>10</sup>

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (h). Ever since the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem, giving them power to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations (Acts 2), man has had access to His indwelling presence. But what was the role of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times? Did He offer any assistance to man during that age? (i). Why did Jesus say He had to leave so the Holy Spirit could come (Jn 16:7)? Were Jesus and the Comforter unable to be in the world at the same time?

**1:23. *Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.*** Those who cooperate with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit also grow in discernment. When Timothy returned to Paul after spending time with the Corinthians to help them understand what the Gospel required of them (1 Cor 4:17), he reported that there was still turmoil in the church there. At that point Paul had not yet returned to Corinth because of the delays and difficulties he had encountered in his ministry. After Timothy's report, however, Paul felt guided by the Holy Spirit to further delay his return until they had time to correct their ways, so he would not have to be harsh with them upon his arrival. He had given counsel. His next step was to draw back to allow the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts. In much the same way, after having giving guidance, a concerned parent or teacher might at times delay further confrontation with his charges to allow them, of their own free will, to live up to what is expected of them. There are times to be aggressive and times to stand back a little to allow slow but willing growth rather than demand begrudging compliance.

The mind is a wonderful thing, and therein we possess that which is in the image of the Creator.... But the mind has two faculties: the one evil, that of the demons which draws us on to their own apostasy; and the divine and the good, which brings us to the likeness of God. When, therefore, the mind remains alone and unaided, it contemplates small things, commensurate with itself. When it yields to those who deceive it, it nullifies its proper judgment and is concerned with monstrous fancies. Then it considers wood to be no longer wood, but a god; then it looks on gold no longer as money, but as an object of worship. If, on the other hand, it assents to its diviner part and accepts the boons of the Spirit, then, so far as its nature admits, it becomes perceptive of the divine ... the mind which is impregnated with the Godhead of the Spirit is capable of viewing great objects; it beholds the divine beauty, though only so far as grace imparts and its nature receives.... If the mind has been injured by devils it will be guilty of idolatry or will be perverted to some other form of impiety. But if it has yielded to the aid of the Spirit, it will have understanding of the truth and will know God. BASIL<sup>11</sup>

**1:24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*** Paul cannot force their compliance to his guidance. As a teacher of the Gospel, he can only try to make them aware of the wonders of God's Kingdom and to awaken their desire to partake of them. Salvation comes through faith in Christ, which no one can impose on another. With the gift of free will, each of us responds to that which we learn about God. That response forms a relationship between Him and us. At the Second Coming of Christ, that relationship will be the basis for the manner in which we will spend eternity.

For faith and godliness are allied to each other ... he who believes in Him is godly, and he who is godly, believes more. ATHANASIUS<sup>12</sup>

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

**(a). To whom does God grant grace? Do we play a role in this matter, or are we subject to His whim as to whom He will give this gift and to whom He will not?** God desires that everyone be saved. Thus His grace is available to all. But He insists upon honoring our free will, the gift which enables growth in holiness in His image (which includes freedom of will), so does not force His will or His grace on us.

God placed Adam in Paradise ... endowing him with free will, that good might be his of his own free choice, as it is His Who sowed the seeds of it. Adam was to tend the immortal trees; the divine purposes, the lesser ones as well as the greater ones; naked and unashamed, living a life of perfect simplicity, without clothing and without shelter; for it was fitting that the one who was first made should be like this. And He laid on him a law; as material on which to exercise his free will. This law was a commandment, decreeing the trees he might make use of, and the one he might not. And this was the tree of knowledge; not because it was from the beginning evil, or that it was forbidden out of envy ... but good if partaken of in due time. To me this tree was contemplation, as I understand contemplation, safe only for those to attempt who have arrived at a more perfect manner of life, not good for the more simple souls, not for those yet strong in earthly appetites; just as solid food is not suited to those of tender age, who have need rather of milk.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS<sup>13</sup>

Salvation is a synergistic process involving God and man. God offers grace toward salvation. Those who are receptive to this gift avail themselves of its power to the extent that they open themselves to it and use it (to try to live a life of obedience as proof or demonstration of faith and love).

Jesus, the Sun of Justice, has arisen. The rays of this spiritual Sun spread out in all directions; and one indeed receives less grace, and another more; not that grace so gives itself, it is our own disposition that supplies the measure. For as the sun is one which gives light to the whole universe, and its ray is one, and its splendor, yet it does not shine with equal light upon all the world. Here is wondrous and abundant sunshine, here there is less. This house has little sunlight, this has it more abundantly; not because the sun gives more to this house and less to that but according to the windows which were opened to it by those who build the houses it has more room to enter and pours in accordingly. And since our thoughts and purposes are the windows of our soul, when you open wide your heart you receive a larger more generous, divine favor; when you narrow your soul, you can but receive a less abundant grace. Open wide and lay bare your heart and soul to God, that His splendor may enter into you.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>14</sup>

We need God's help, however, in all good things—even to begin to open ourselves to His grace. He is able to give this assistance without interfering with our free will because He has foreknowledge. He guides toward salvation (thus it can be said, "predestines," in a cooperative not an arbitrary sense) those whom He foreknows will love Him (Rom 8:29). In a similar manner, a parent will often know how each of his children will react in a given situation, though he does



not cause or dictate their response. The parent's knowledge of his children is imperfect and incomplete, but still it can enable him to guide each child in the way most likely to bear fruit. God's foreknowledge of each of us is perfect and complete. It allows Him to assist us in ways that are powerful but that do not intrude upon our freedom. If, for instance, God foreknows that someone's heart will be softened toward Him if given a chance (Jer 1:5), He may place determining influences in that person's path at the crucial moment. This explains why often, in the midst of situations seemingly devoid of the presence of God, there may arise a person with an ardent love for Him.

When a miracle occurs, may it cause you joy.... God has put His finger there, sometimes to reward, sometimes to punish, sometimes to encourage His faithful people and sometimes to lead sinners into the way of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

There are those, however, who believe that God grants saving grace to and consequently saves only those whom He preselects arbitrarily, with no personal input from man. The Orthodox Church considers this a heresy. According to this theory of arbitrary predestination, all mankind is rightfully damned because of the sin of Adam and Eve, but God redeems and grants grace and salvation to whom He wills, the "elect," and man can do nothing toward his election. If this were so, it would mean that God also wills that some are predestined to sin and damnation. Would a merciful, just, and loving God condemn all mankind except those whom He chooses arbitrarily, with no consideration of the mind, heart and actions of each person? If Jesus is the Savior of all mankind (1 Jn 4:14), how can anyone be automatically excluded from God's mercy through no personal fault of his own? If God predestines some to Heaven and the rest to Hell, why did Paul write that we must *all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (2 Cor 5:10)?

God made man a free agent from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will towards us is present with Him continually. Therefore, He gives good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He placed the power of choice, so that those who yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, receive punishment: for God kindly bestowed on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and spewing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God ...

If some had been made bad by nature, and others good, the latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, nor would the former be reprehensible.... But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in Whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which is done by obedience to God.

IRENAEUS<sup>16</sup>

False teachings on this subject emerged in various forms throughout the history of Christianity but are found most pervasively in the Protestant Reformation teachings of John Calvin's "salvation by *grace alone*." This heresy is said to have its roots in the debate between Augustine, of the fifth century, and his contemporary, the British monk Pelagius.<sup>17</sup> Pelagius taught that the human will takes the determining initiative in the matter of salvation: that man is self-sufficient, with ability to use his free will (unassisted) to choose not to sin. Augustine protested that this concept grossly understated God's role. In refuting it, however, he went to the other extreme, overstating the role God chooses to play. Though Augustine affirmed that God gave man free

will, he did not believe that God's grace, when directed upon man, could be resisted. So, he surmised, God must not desire that all be saved; if He did, according to Augustine, certainly they would be. Thus, in his zeal to insure proper appreciation of the divine role in the salvation of man, Augustine diminished the place of man's free will. Also, his stance did not take into account the awesome mystery that God, the Omnipotent, is willing to share power with mere man, and that He never overrides man's will. Augustine apparently thought this would assign weakness to God. It actually shows His strength. God remains in control, even though, for His own purposes, He allows limited power to man (and even to the Devil). As Paul wrote, *the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1 Cor 1:25).

Personal beings constitute the peak of creation, since they can become God by free choice and grace. With them, the divine omnipotence raises up a radical "intervention," an integral newness: God creates beings who like Him can—let us recall the Divine Council of Genesis—decide and choose. But these beings can decide against God: is this not for Him the risk of destroying His creation? This risk, it is necessary to reply, must, paradoxically, register its presence at the very height of omnipotence. Creation, truly to "innovate," creates "the other," that is to say, a personal being capable of refusing Him Who created him. The peak of all-powerfulness is thus received as a powerlessness of God, as a divine risk. The person is the highest creation of God only because God gives it the possibility of love, therefore of refusal. God risks the eternal ruin of His highest creation precisely that it may be the highest. The paradox is irreducible: in his very greatness, which is to be able to become God, man is fallible; but without fallibility there would be no greatness. That is why, confirm the Fathers, man must undergo a test ... so as to gain awareness of his freedom, of the free love that God awaits from him.<sup>18</sup>

God allowed theological contention such as this question of predestination in the early Church so His truths would surface from the ensuing debate (1 Cor 11:19). Pelagianism was condemned in 431 by the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus.<sup>19</sup> Augustine's teachings were tempered with the balance which has always been taught in the Orthodox Church—a wondrous cooperation of divine grace and human freedom.

Those referred to as God's "elect" or "chosen" are those who use their free will first to come to an understanding and acknowledgement that a divine Creator exists and then to fulfill the purpose for which they were given life: union with Him. Along every step of the way, however, man can do nothing without God's grace. God elects to grant grace to, and thus to save, those who seek and open their hearts to Him (Acts 17:27). He compels no one.

**(b). In the events of life, does God first grant grace, which enables righteous action and spiritual growth, or does He wait for righteous action first, then grant grace to strengthen our efforts?** Being omniscient, God knows not only the actions but also the mind and heart of man. He reaches out to us in many ways, as through the wonders of creation, and in every instance foreknows who will opt to follow the divine will rather than his own. He does not force His will upon us, however, because He wants us to choose freely to follow Him. At the very moment we lean toward God, even in thought, we open ourselves to divine grace, which strengthens us to the degree we allow. This divine power enables right action.

The grace of God is not able to visit those who flee salvation. Nor is human virtue of such power as to be adequate of itself to raise up to authentic life those souls who are untouched by grace.... But when righteousness of works and the grace of the Spirit come together at the same time in the same soul, together they are able to fill it with blessed life. GREGORY OF NYSSA<sup>20</sup>

Thus for short-term actions it is often harder to make a decision to act in accordance with God's will than it is to follow through with the subsequent action required. As the choice to act rightly is made (not before and not after), suddenly, through the grace of God, our vision is clearer, the burden seems lighter, and though the task may not be easy, God helps us keep our resolve. For long term actions the follow-through can be more difficult than the decision, but grace remains as strength and support as long as we choose to follow God's lead.

The Lord's help is always there. Lest our free will should bring us to utter ruin, He is there, a hand stretched out to rescue and strengthen us when He sees us stumbling.

CASSIAN<sup>21</sup>

**(c). Why did the world not want to hear the message that Jesus brought? Why does it still not want to listen?** The Gospel requires that we live according to God's will rather than our own. When Christ came to bring the good news of the Way to the Kingdom of Heaven, most Jews rejected Him because (being under Roman rule) they were looking for a Messiah who would free them from subjugation to others and create for them a kingdom on earth. Most pagans rejected Him because they did not want to exchange their many indulgent "gods" for a God Who demanded major changes in their lifestyles. In the modern world, many do not want to hear the Gospel for similar reasons: society continues to lean toward self-will and instant gratification of desires. This accounts for the fact that *many are called, but few chosen* (Mt 20:16).

The body has eyes to see creation ... and recognize the Creator; ears to listen to the divine oracles and the laws of God; and hands both to perform works of necessity and to raise to God in prayer; yet the soul, departing from contemplation of what is good...wanders away and moves toward evil.... Instead of beholding creation, she turns the eye to lusts, showing that she has this power too; and thinking that by the mere fact of moving she is maintaining her own dignity and is committing no sin in doing as she pleases. She does not know that she is made not merely to move, but to move in the right direction.

ATHANASIUS<sup>22</sup>

**(d). Why does a loving God allow troubled times to enter the lives of His people?** God allows (does not cause) His people to pass through the difficult times that life in our fallen world entails to test and strengthen their faith and love and to keep them on the right path. Many important lessons can be learned through adversity. He who turns to God in times of tribulation learns to persevere. Perseverance produces character; and character, hope (Rom 5:3-4), which comes ultimately only from the truth of Resurrection.

...the cold, ice, snow, frost, and violent winds ... which plants withstand during the winter and summer, being exposed to the chill and heat ... are the miseries without which nothing on earth can ever grow, being unable to reach fruition.... These are the various difficulties which befall us, which every person who meditates on bearing the future fruit to be brought to the Spiritual Vinedresser must necessarily undergo with thanksgiving. For example, if one has mercy and protects the developing vegetation from miseries by building a wall around them and covering them with a roof so that they might withstand all the terrible seasonal weather conditions against them—and even takes special care of them by trimming and cleaning them—they will not bear fruit. Instead one must allow the plants to undergo all of this. For after the winter's unpleasantness, when springtime comes and blossoms, and leaf-bearing appears, together with that beautiful renewal of budding, the unripe fruit which then grows according to its little contact with the jutting rays of the sun ripens, produces and gives back pleasant food ready for harvesting. In the

same way, a human being who does not endure courageously the unpleasant burdens of life will never produce fruit worthy of the divine wine-press and eternal harvest, not even if he possesses all other virtues.  
GREGORY PALAMAS<sup>23</sup>

Also, if life contained no hardships to endure or obstacles to overcome—if everything we dealt with day-to-day was without care—we would forget the purpose for life.

We are afflicted in this life by the supremely good purpose of God, so that we may not love the way more than the end of our journey. For this present life is but a way by which we travel towards our heavenly home. And because of this we are, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, wearied by frequent disquiet, so that we may not come to love the way more than our home. For there are travelers who, when on their way, see some smiling field, and while they delight in its beauty, they slow their steps and turn aside from the straight path they had begun. The Lord therefore has made the way of this world hard for His Elect in their journey to Him, so that none of them may take his rest in this life, enjoying the beauty of the way, but may speedily hasten towards Him rather than linger by the way; or lest, delighting in the way, they come to forget they once longed for their heavenly home.

GREGORY THE GREAT<sup>24</sup>

Yes, we should take time to “stop and smell the roses” when the opportunity presents itself. Brief respites refresh us physically and spiritually and give us strength to continue. Jesus often withdrew from the crowds for precisely these reasons (Lk 6:12; 8:22) but then got right back to the work He had been given to do.

*Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me when I was in distress; Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer* (Ps 4:1). Notice that the psalmist did not say “you have prevented me from falling into distress.” God is certainly able to make our path through life free of care. He does not choose to do so, however, because that would not be to our best advantage. He does promise that we can count on Him to hear our prayers and to help us carry the particular cross life brings to us (Mt 10:38). (For more on this topic, see 2 Cor 12:7-10.)

It is not the hanging on a cross only that makes a Martyr, for were this so, then Job was excluded from this crown. He neither stood at bar, nor heard Judge’s voice, nor looked on executioner, nor while hanging on tree aloft had his sides mangled; yet he suffered worse than many martyrs. More sharply than any stroke did the tale of those successive messengers strike and goad him on every side; and keener the gnawings of the worms which devoured him in every part than a thousand executioners.

Against what martyr may he not worthily be compared? Surely against ten thousand. For in every kind of suffering he both wrestled and was crowned; in goods, and children, and person, and wife, and friends, and enemies and servants (for these too spit in his face), in hunger and visions and pains and noisomeness. And if any ask, “how can we bear these sufferings nobly?”...by one word of thanksgiving you shall gain more than all you have lost. For if at the tidings of our loss we be not troubled, but say, “Blessed be God,” we have found far more abundant riches.  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>25</sup>

The purpose for life is to choose whether we want to spend eternity with God in His Kingdom or away from Him, aware of but unable to benefit from His blessings. We cannot avoid making this decision. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we make our choice and spend our lives

demonstrating it, walking, day by day, toward our eternal condition. If we choose to be with God, we must actively live that choice through a concerted attempt at obedience to the way of life He asks of His people, despite any adversity life may bring—the true test. The person who lives in this manner is guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit to the degree he allows, thereby producing, accordingly, the fruit of holiness, a state-of-being necessary for life in the Kingdom, where all is holy. Since nothing in life remains static, those who make the opposite choice or who neglect to make a choice—which amounts to the same thing (Mt 12:30)—continue to grow away from God. They set the eternal stage for themselves.

According to St. Maximus, freedom of choice is already a flaw, a limitation of true freedom: perfect nature has no need of choice, for it knows what is good in a natural way. Its freedom is based on this knowledge. Our freedom of will reveals the imperfection of fallen human nature, the loss of God's likeness. Since this nature is obscured by sin, it does not know its true good and is directed constantly to what is "anti-nature." Thus the human person is always confronted by the necessity of choice. It gropes its way forward. This vacillation in the ascent to what is good is known as "freedom of will." The person, called to union with God, to perfect assimilation through grace of his nature with divine nature, is bound to a mutilated nature, crippled by sin, ravaged by contradictory desires. Knowing and willing according to this imperfect nature, the person is, in practice, blind and weak. It no longer knows how to choose and too often yields to the impulses of a nature which has become the slave of sin. In this way, what was made in us in God's image is drawn down into the abyss, although it still retains its freedom of choice and its ability to return to God.<sup>26</sup>

**(e). What tests of faith are we likely to face in the times in which we live?**

A Christian faces many tests of faith during his lifetime. Decisions must continually be made on such issues as friends, career, spouse, moral and ethical questions and the like. Our ultimate decisions will indicate whether we are guided by faith in and love for God and His Son or by other factors. Whatever comes first in our hearts is "god" to us. The telling factor is whether we recognize the Creator as our Master and put obedience to Him first in our lives, or whether something else, such as money, fame, power, position, pleasure or acquisitions dominate and, therefore, take His rightful place. Nothing—not even family—should take precedence over God. If we put Him first and act accordingly, everything else will be in proper perspective (Mt 6:33). To attend to the reasonable needs of our family is to do God's work. If we have concern for our own soul and the souls of others but fail to try to nurture spiritually those who are closest to us, we are *worse than unbelievers* (1 Tim 5:8). But when our primary allegiance is to God, His grace makes us capable of ever more meaningful relationships with our loved ones. There will always be many demands upon the limited time, talent and resources we have at our disposal. Discernment must be used to establish priorities. The effort we expend to learn and to live by the precepts of God's divine plan, rather than fall to the temptation to make our own rules with regard to contemporary issues, sexual conduct, achieving success, etc., will bear much fruit in our lives.

We ask not to have sound judgment and virtuous deportment for one day only, or for two or three, but through the whole tenor and period of our life; and as the foundation of all good things, to seek not our own, but *the things which are of Christ Jesus* (Phil 2:21). How might this be? (For besides prayer, it is necessary that we contribute also our own endeavors.) We must be occupied in His law *day and night*...[Josh 1:8, Ps 1:1-2, Acts 26:7, Rev 7:15].

I blush for those who are scarcely seen in Church once a year. For what excuse can they have who are bidden not simply *day and night* to commune with the law, but “to be occupied in it,” that is, to be forever holding converse with it, and yet scarcely do so for the smallest fraction of their life?

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>27</sup>

Serious illness and death are always tests of faith. When faced with them, those who want to be in God’s Kingdom must resist the human tendency to become bitter and turn away from Him. Rather, it is important that during those times we pray for strength and guidance. When facing illness, we should pray for healing and for direction in seeking proper medical care; but if healing does not come, we should ultimately accept His will not to intervene as we ask and pray for strength to deal with the difficulties confronting us. In this instance, the fruit of prayer is acceptance and trust. We do not have to like a situation to accept it—and to accept a situation we do not like or understand is trust. If we do this, we are never alone in our difficulties—God is with us.

It will happen even to steadfast courageous minds to be shaken by the fear of death. It is for this reason that some came to Christ praying: *Lord, increase our faith* (Lk 17:5). He who continues to offend through weakness of faith falls short of the fullness of faith. For as gold is tested in fire, so is faith by temptation. But the mind of man is weak and needs help from above so that he may with courage face the dangers of the way. And this our Savior teaches when He says: *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5). And the most wise Paul confesses: *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me* (Phil 4:13).

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA<sup>28</sup>

**(f). We know that God, in His omniscience, knows even the number of hairs on the heads of His people (Mt 10:30) and does not need us to keep Him informed of situations on earth. Why then is there such Biblical emphasis on prayer for one another, which is echoed in the Divine Liturgy and in the life of the Church? Does God always answer prayer? Are our prayers for others always of assistance to them?** The emphasis on praying for one another in Scripture and in the Church is not to keep God informed but to remind us to talk to Him regularly and to encourage us to be concerned about and to love one another (Jn 13:35, Jas 5:16). It is only by growing in this love and fellowship that we can begin to understand God’s love for us and can grow in love for Him.

Prayer is an important and powerful way to help in any situation. When someone is experiencing any difficulty, we can offer the comfort of a promise to pray for them—but then we must be sure to do so.

The laws of the Church command prayer be made, not only for those in the Church but also those still outside...For when the Deacon says, “Let us pray earnestly for the catechumens,” he encourages the faithful to pray for them; although they are not yet of the Body of Christ, they have not yet partaken of the Mysteries and are still divided from the spiritual flock. CHRYSOSTOM<sup>29</sup>

We do it also because we desire to remain longer in His presence, attentively addressing yet more words to Him, giving thanks to Him, acknowledging the many blessings we have received from Him, for as long as we can.

PETER OF DAMASKOS<sup>30</sup>

God always hears the sincere and fervent prayers of the righteous (Jas 5:16), and He always responds to them--though not always in the way expected or desired. His ultimate concern is for

our spiritual welfare and salvation, whereas, too often our primary concerns are ease and pleasure in the world. Consequently, His guidance may not correspond with the direction in which our will leads.

Prayer draws the energies of God to the one who prays as well as to the one for whom prayer is offered. But because God does not force His will on anyone, for the most part our prayers for others will bear fruit only if they are not blocking God out of their lives.

What does this mean? Does prayer not help? It helps, and exceedingly, but only when we cooperate with it.

But someone will say, "What need have I of the prayers of others, since I please God?" What are you saying? Paul did not say, "What need have I of prayers?" Peter did not say, "Why do I need prayers?" though those who prayed for him were not worthy of him, certainly they were not his equals. Yet you say: "What need have I of prayers?" You need them for this reason: because you think that you have no need of them. CHRYSOSTOM<sup>31</sup>

Prayer is not made perfect by uttering syllables...but in the purpose of the soul and in the just actions of a lifetime. BASIL<sup>32</sup>

**(g). Do our prayers for those who are experiencing difficulties in their lives eliminate the need to offer physical or emotional assistance?** Prayer should be our immediate and continual response to the difficult circumstances of life for those around us. In addition to our private and corporate prayers as part of the Church, however, God also expects us to be His co-workers in helping to meet the practical physical and emotional needs of those who are under duress. We can accomplish this by literally being the hands, feet, mouth and heart of Christ in doing what we can to help (1 Cor 3:9; 12:12,27-28). When there is a need, we can hold a frightened hand, shovel a driveway, drop-off groceries, scrub a floor, contribute financially, or do whatever is helpful. By doing so, we are being the Body of Christ. In trying to be of assistance, it is important to remember that each situation is different, so we must pray for and use discernment. Sometimes it is best just to be around to show love and support and, when the opportunity presents itself, to bolster confidence in God's assurances that He loves us all and will come to the aid of those who turn to Him in distress. At other times it may be best to stand back and wait for signs of when or how we may be helpful.

**(h). Ever since the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem, giving them power to preach the Gospel to all nations (Acts 2), man has had access to His indwelling presence. But what was the role of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times? Did He offer any assistance to man during that age?** The Holy Spirit did not dwell within man until the day of Pentecost, after Jesus Christ ascended to His Father. The man of God of the Old Testament was not, however, completely denied the powerful presence of the Comforter. Since the time of Pentecost, God works within willing man; before then, He worked on man from the outside.

The Old Testament did not know the intimate sanctification by grace, yet it knew saintliness, for grace, from outside, aroused it in the soul as an effect. The man who submitted to God in faith and lived in all righteousness could become the instrument of His will. As is proved by the vocation of prophets, it is not a question of agreement between two wills but of lordly utilization of the human will by that of God: the Spirit of God swoops upon the seer; God takes possession of man by imposing Himself from

outside on his person. God, invisible, speaks: His servant listens.<sup>33</sup>

**(i). Why did Jesus say He had to leave so the Holy Spirit could come? Were Jesus and the Comforter unable to be in the world at the same time?**

Jesus and the Holy Spirit can indeed be present in the world at the same time. In fact, the three persons of the Holy Trinity are never totally separated.

God ... the Cause, the Maker, the Perfecter, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...are not so separate from each other that they are divided in nature; and neither are they so confined in their nature as to be restricted to one Person.  
GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS<sup>34</sup>

Referring to the Holy Trinity, Jesus said: *If anyone loves me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and **We** will come to him and make **Our** home with him* (Jn 14:23). Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said: *you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you* (Jn 14:17).

From this we understand that God the Trinity dwells all together in the sanctified as in a temple.  
AUGUSTINE<sup>35</sup>

In every operation the Spirit is closely joined with, and inseparable from, the Father and the Son. God works the differences of operations and the Lord the diversities of administrations, but all the while the Holy Spirit is present too of His own will, dispensing distribution of the gifts according to each recipient's worth.  
BASIL<sup>36</sup>

These truths are evident in the life of the Church (Orthopraxia). We wish each other God's presence when we say, "God be with you." We partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, and thus become one with Jesus continually, through Eucharist. We receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Chrismation and continual prayer. Why then did Christ say that He had to depart so the Holy Spirit could come to be with man (Jn 16:7)?

It appears to me that the disciples were taken up with the human figure of the Lord Christ, and, as men, were held by their human love for Him as a man. He began now to wish them to have rather a divine love and so change them from unspiritual men to spiritual: which a man does not become without the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this is what He says: I shall send you a gift whereby you will become spiritual men; namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit. But you cannot become spiritual men unless you cease to be unspiritual. You will cease to be unspiritual if this human form is taken from before your eyes.  
AUGUSTINE<sup>37</sup>

Jesus Christ promised to be with His people always (Jn 6:56, Mt 28:20) and is, via the Church through Eucharist. He left them bodily, however, to turn their attention to the Holy Spirit so they could begin to understand spiritual growth in holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Toal, "What is Peace," Vol. Three, p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, "Homily I on Second Corinthians," Vol. XII, p.275.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.274.



- <sup>4</sup> ibid, "Homily III," p.292.
- <sup>5</sup> ibid, "Homily II," p.279.
- <sup>6</sup> Toal, "On Prayer," Vol. Two, p.396.
- <sup>7</sup> ibid, p.389.
- <sup>8</sup> ibid, "That Prayer is to be Placed before all Things," p.380.
- <sup>9</sup> Schaff, "Homily III," Vol. XII, p.286.
- <sup>10</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p.59.
- <sup>11</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, "Letter CCXXXIII," *NPNF*, Second Series, Vol. VIII, *St. Basil: Letters and Select Works*, p.273.
- <sup>12</sup> ibid, "Letter XI. Easter, 339," Vol. IV, *Select Works and Letters* p.536.
- <sup>13</sup> Toal, "On the Holy Pasch II," Vol. Two, p.249.
- <sup>14</sup> ibid, "On the Gospel," Vol. One, p.417.
- <sup>15</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid, Lives of the Saints and Homilies for Every Day in the Year*, Part One, p.332.
- <sup>16</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, "Against Heresies," Vol. I, p.518.
- <sup>17</sup> Seraphim Rose, *The Place of the Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, p.9-20.
- <sup>18</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *Theology*, p.72-73.
- <sup>19</sup> Vergilius Ferm, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, p.570.
- <sup>20</sup> Stavropoulos, p.34.
- <sup>21</sup> Luibheid, "Conference Three," *Conferences*, p.93.
- <sup>22</sup> Schaff and Wace, "Against the Heathen," Vol. IV, p.6.
- <sup>23</sup> Daniel M. Rogich, *St. Gregory Palamas, Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, p.73-74.
- <sup>24</sup> Toal, "Man is Delivered by Trials: Mystical Joy," Vol. Four, p.197.
- <sup>25</sup> Schaff, "Homily I," Vol. XII, p.275.
- <sup>26</sup> Lossky, *Theology*, p.129.
- <sup>27</sup> Schaff, "Homily II," Vol. XII, p.283
- <sup>28</sup> Toal, "On the Gospel," Vol. One, p.325.
- <sup>29</sup> Schaff, "Homily II on Second Corinthians," Vol. XII, p.281.
- <sup>30</sup> Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, "Spurious Knowledge," Vol. Three, p.202.
- <sup>31</sup> Toal, "On Prayer," Vol. Two, p.397.
- <sup>32</sup> ibid, p.383.
- <sup>33</sup> Lossky, *Theology*, p.85.
- <sup>34</sup> Toal, "The Holy Trinity," Vol. Three, p.66.
- <sup>35</sup> ibid, "Exposition of the Gospel," p.23.
- <sup>36</sup> Schaff and Wace, "On the Spirit," Vol. VIII, p.23.
- <sup>37</sup> Toal, "The Meaning of Pentecost," Vol. Three, p.32.