

CHAPTER FOUR

A Purifying, Deifying Process

BACKGROUND: In Chapter Three, Paul expounded upon the glory of the new Blood Covenant between God and His people. He now writes that it is the light of this glory which sustains and energizes him during the dark moments of his ministry.

4:1. *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.* The fact that God mercifully redirected Paul when he was following the wrong path is always in his thoughts. The wonder of it sustains him in his difficult ministry.

4:2. *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Contrary to the accusations of his detractors, Paul does not twist the Gospel to achieve his own ends. He strives to be a living example of the type of life it commands, publicly and privately, no matter what the consequences might be.

It would seem that anyone who were to ponder the wonders of life with an open mind would eventually concede that all signs point to the existence of a divine Being—the Creator of all—Who would naturally have a comprehensive plan for man, His most magnificent creation. The next logical step for the sincere seeker of truth would be to search out and try to understand all aspects of that plan and to make the decisions of life accordingly, so he would be sure to be included under its umbrella. When we contemplate God and His word, we cannot keep what we like and toss out what we do not, nor can we slant interpretations according to our own desires. To do so would indicate that we believe we can create our own truth and reveal a lack of real faith in the existence of God. This is the delusion of those who proclaim love for God yet insist they have the right to live in any manner they choose—while still fully expecting to go automatically to a mythical paradise of their dreams when they die.

A young Abbot was counseled thus, in our own day, by a Holy man: “Today many people, wishing for an excuse not to do what God asks of them, find fault with the teaching of the Holy Church and reject correct Christian belief. Instead, they choose to believe what they wish. This is akin to a man not wishing to believe that he will die, simply because the notion does not comfort him. Not only will he fail to prepare for death, as one ought to do, but he will inevitably find himself in the snare of death. Correct belief is not based on what we wish were true but on Truth itself.”¹

4:3-4. *But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine on them.* Paul has no secret agenda. He teaches the truth for all to hear. Some understand and accept it. Others reject it because the *god of this age*, Satan, has blinded them to the truth. They have allowed themselves to be fooled by him and grasp at any excuse to believe there is no God, rather than give up the worldly distractions that cloud their vision. Each moment lived in rejection of or indifference to Christ is one moment closer to an eternal existence devoid of God's blessings.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). Why is Satan called the “god” of this age (Jn 12:31, Eph 2:2)? (b). What are the enticements of the world that can lead us away from God? (c). What assistance does the Church offer to help us stay on

the road to the Kingdom?

4:5. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. Paul does not teach his own philosophy, nor does he slant God's word toward that which would be convenient or comfortable for him. As expected of an Apostle, he has become a servant to those he teaches in order to pass on the truths entrusted to him (Mt 20:26). A servant caters to the needs of those he serves. That which each person needs most, whether he realizes it or not, is salvation. Every Christian is obliged to try to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the unenlightened around him. We serve best if we try to determine each person's level of understanding of God and work individually from that point.

4:6-7. For it is the God Who commanded light to shine out of darkness Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. The Creator of all, Who caused light to be from nothing (Gen 1), commissioned Paul to bring knowledge of Him, through the life of His Son, to those who have receptive hearts.

Most people are like men walking at night wholly without light and not enjoying the slightest illumination in their souls from the divine Logos, so that they scarcely differ from the blind. They are totally caught up in material entanglements and the chains of temporal life, neither restrained by divine awe nor performing any virtuous acts. On the other hand, those who live in the world and are illumined by the holy commandments as by the stars, and who do cleave to God with faith and awe, are not utterly shrouded in darkness and for this reason can hope to attain salvation.

MAKARIOS OF EGYPT²

The first man was created from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7). Thus Paul refers to those who teach the Gospel as earthen vessels. The vessel is ordinary and weak because it easily breaks down from injury, illness, pain, fear and sin; but that which it carries is mighty, everlasting and priceless. This paradox illustrates the fact that the power of the Gospel comes not from that which carries it but from God. An understanding of this truth eliminates pride in those who do God's work.

Those who teach the Gospel of Christ do so by choice and must work very hard to achieve results, but without God's help their efforts would be in vain. God has deigned to work in partnership with man (1 Cor 3:9). Man is the tool—God provides the power.

4:8-10. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. These are words to write in our hearts. At Paul's conversion the Lord had said, *I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name's sake* (Acts 9:16). Now Paul reflects that even though every aspect of his life and ministry have been fraught with great difficulty, he is able to continue by remembering always that Christ lived and died to give man a way back to God. Those who really understand this truth carry on His work, in spite of the tribulation it may bring.

The one who loves Christ thoroughly imitates him as much as he can. Christ did not cease to do good to men. Treated ungratefully and blasphemed, he was patient; beaten and put to death by them, He endured, not thinking ill of anyone at all. These three are the works of love of neighbor, in the absence of which a person who says he loves Christ

or possesses His Kingdom deceives himself. For He says, *Not the one who says to me "Lord, Lord," will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father.*

MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR³

Paul persevered by remaining focused on the goal (Phil 3:14). When the travails and uncertainties of life threaten to make us veer off course, this is the only solution. With our spiritual eyes set on the glory of the Kingdom to come and with the grace of God strengthening us, we carry on. This focus may not solve all our problems, but it will prevent them from defeating us.

When, by counsel of the serpent, Adam and Eve departed from the contemplation of God...and from desire of Him, they grew in diverse lusts and in those of the bodily senses. Next, as is apt to happen, having formed these desires, they became habituated to them, so that they were afraid to leave them. Then the soul became subject to cowardice and fear and pleasures and thoughts of mortality. For not being willing to leave her lusts, she fears death and separation from the body.

ATHANASIUS⁴

4:11-12. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. The daily struggles Paul experienced in disciplining his will to conform to God's will allowed the divine presence and power to be demonstrated as it could in no other way. He willingly died to the ways of this world so his spiritual life through Christ would be visible to those who understood. As the book of Acts records, there had been continual plots to kill him. He had been beaten, stoned, put in stocks and driven out of cities. No one would willingly suffer as he had without having beheld the wonder of God. Again and again God allowed Paul to be thrust into circumstances in which he was beyond human help. At the same time, He showered him with grace to endure and overcome so those looking on would believe. Paul's willingness to put his fate in God's hands, even if it should lead to death, was a powerful witness which brought many to salvation through the Gospel.

4:13-14. But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He Who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. Quoting the Psalmist (Ps 116:10), Paul expresses his compulsion to teach the Gospel in spite of danger. The truth and power of the saving message of Jesus Christ cannot be restrained. To believe requires action based on that belief. It is incongruous, impossible, to really believe that through Christ we have eternal salvation and not to speak out about it and have that fact affect our life, our decisions.

Would you think it right if the perishable glory of worldly things were gained only after great toil and sweat by those who seek them, while to reign endlessly with Christ and to enjoy inexpressible blessings was something to be gained cheaply and easily, and could be attained without labor and effort by anyone who wished?

MAKARIOS OF EGYPT⁵

Paul knows that death can come at any time. He does not seek it but does not let fear of it guide his actions. He carries on, doing whatever is necessary to propagate the Gospel. If death should come in the course of this life of obedience, he will face it willingly. His complete faith in the Resurrection of Christ assures him that there will be a universal Resurrection, after which all true

Christians will be together *with Jesus*. This was the overriding thought always present in the minds of the early Christians.

Do you not see them exposed to wild beasts, that they may be persuaded to deny the Lord, and yet not overcome? Do you not see that the more of them are punished, the greater becomes the number of the rest? This does not seem to be the work of man: this is the power of God; these are the evidences of His manifestation.

MATHETES⁶

If we keep this same thought in our hearts and minds always, it will comfort and strengthen us and urge us to continue the life in Christ, however different that may make us from those around us. Guided by this truth, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:37-39).

Grant us, O Lord, to imitate the watchfulness of those who waited for Your Resurrection, so that day and night our souls may be turned towards you.

EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN⁷

4:15. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Everything Paul does to teach the Gospel has as its goal the hope that as many as possible will come to know and to love Christ. Those who are thus awakened attract divine grace from God to direct them in Christ-like lives. Transformed by this process, they are exceedingly grateful to have been directed toward this glorious pursuit—the purpose for life—and give rightful glory to God for His great mercy.

4:16. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. Suffering for the sake of the Gospel is taking its toll on Paul's body, the *outward man*, but he presses on because this same suffering is causing his soul, the *inward man*, to be purified, strengthened and molded in the image of Christ. The inward man—that which endures forever—is thus renewed.

...by faith, by hope, by a forward will; finally, by braving hardships. For in proportion to the sufferings of the body, the soul has higher hopes and becomes brighter, like gold refined in the fire more and more.

CHRYSOSTOM⁸

This verse can also be applied to the earthly process of aging. Growing old, for many, is very difficult. To see their hair turn white, wrinkles appear and vigor diminish is traumatic because these things are reminders of the inevitability of death. A true Christian, however, knows that for the one who loves God, the most important aspect of life on earth is that it offers the way to the eternal Kingdom. Therefore, when the outward man shows signs of aging, he who is confident of spiritual growth of the inward man in the image of Christ does not despair; he takes comfort and joy in knowing that he walks not toward death but beyond death toward God. S/he actually improves with age: the inner person grows in holiness as the outer person declines.

Such is the beauty of the soul; even in old age it has many enamored of it, and it never fades but blooms forever. In order then that we also may gain this beauty, let us go in quest of those that have it and be enamored of them. For so shall we too be able, when we have attained this beauty, to obtain the good things eternal.

CHRYSOSTOM⁹

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (d). What qualities in those involved in the difficulties of life cause renewed faith in those around them? What qualities create doubt and fear in others?

4:17. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...Life on earth, however long it may be, is very short—but a moment—as compared to eternity. The difficulties we encounter while trying to live according to our faith in Christ are necessary to prove that we do indeed believe in Him and to mold us in His image. They are *light*, easy to bear, when compared to the glory of being with God eternally (Romans 8:18).

In this life there is an equal portion of toils and reward; and often, on the contrary, the toil is endless while the fruit is little, or not even a little; but in the case of the Kingdom, the labor is little while the pleasure is great and boundless.

CHRYSOSTOM¹⁰

4:18. while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. The visible elements of this world, as beautiful as they may be or as ugly as they have become, are temporary. Their overriding value is what they tell us of what is unseen. The sun rising and setting without fail to sustain life on earth reminds us that we have a Heavenly Father Who created everything visible and invisible and Who cares about His creation, providing man with everything he needs to fulfill the purpose for life. The continual corruption of that which was created “good” (Gen 1:31) reminds us that we have choices to make in this life. These choices have consequences, temporal and eternal.

Evil consists essentially in the choice of what is lower in preference to what is higher...adultery instead of lawful procreation; slander, insult and perjury instead of right speaking; murder, stealing, striking fellowmen, drunkenness and insatiable gluttony instead of righteousness. All of these are sins of the soul, and there is no cause of them, they are only the rejection of better things.

ATHANASIUS¹¹

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). Why is Satan called the “god” of this age (Jn 12:31, Eph 2:2)? Angels were created before man. One of the angels—Lucifer—was more glorious than all. He was close to God in Heaven and had much power and glory. He and all the angels also had the gift of free will. But pride and greed grew in Lucifer; he coveted God’s supremacy and took issue with His divine plan for man. Gathering together other rebellious spirits, he tried to unseat God from His throne (Isa 14:12-17), forgetting that no one can win a battle against God. Lucifer and his cohorts (one-third of the celestial beings/Rev 12:4) were evicted from Heaven forever and relegated to earth, where God allows them a certain amount of power in order to test, strengthen and teach those who call themselves His people.

Lucifer became known as Satan: “the Adversary.” God allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve as a test of their love. He allows everyone given the gift of life to be similarly tested. Dealing with temptation teaches dependence on God. Through trial and tribulation we learn that only by turning to Him in obedience do we receive grace in the form of strength to resist and endure. As with physical exercise, persistence in this struggle provides strength to prepare us for whatever life brings.

The Devil is indeed angered when cast forth from a human body; but much more so if he sees a soul freed from sin. For this is his greatest power, the spreading of sin. Because of this Christ died, that He might break this power...If you destroy sin you have broken the nerves of the Devil, you have bruised his head, you have destroyed his power, you have defeated his army, you have wrought a sign greater than all miracles. CHRYSOSTOM¹²

The power that Satan has during this “age” of testing, though formidable, is vastly inferior to God’s power. As the book of Job reveals dramatically, in His strength as Creator and Ruler of the universe, God allows Satan only that power which ultimately results in good: the separating of the obedient from the disobedient, the true believer from the unbeliever (Mt 3:12).

(b). What are the enticements of the world that can lead us away from God? The very temptations the Devil set before Christ (Mt 4:1-11) are those he uses to entice us. When Satan tempted Jesus to use His power as the Son of God to turn stones into bread, he was pointing to our tendency to put satisfaction of bodily appetites first in life, whether food, possessions, or pleasure. The lure to jump off the highest point of the temple to see if God would send angels to rescue Him points to pride, our inclination to have such exalted opinions of ourselves that we make demands upon God, as the Hebrew people did in their wanderings through the desert (Ex 17:1-7). The temptation in which Satan tried to interest Jesus in the kingdoms of the world points to our propensity to set up our own kingdoms, governed by our own rules. This is what caused Adam and Eve to take the path away from God.

The ancient enemy tempted the first man by gluttony, when he persuaded him to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree; by vainglory when he said, *you shall be as gods* (Gen 3:5); by avarice, when he said: *knowing good and evil*. For avarice is not solely the desire of money but also of pride of place, when dignity is sought without measure. By these means [Satan] laid low the first man; by the same means he was defeated by the Second Man [Jesus].

GREGORY THE GREAT¹³

Jesus’ responses did not question Satan’s right to tempt Him. Rather, they illustrate the fact that God expects His people to try to resist all worldly distractions that would take their eyes from the Kingdom as their goal. Jesus was tempted by Satan as were Adam and Eve were and as are we, but He remained without sin (Heb 4:15). He overcame all temptation so He could be the example and the strength of those who turn to Him when their eyes, ears and hearts are drawn away from God (Heb 2:18).

God so deals with us that while making progress towards Him we shall not forget our weakness; and that tempted we recall it, so that in our progress we may understand what we are from divine favor, and in our temptation what we are of our own strength. And such temptation would indeed lead us wholly astray were we not protected from above. Yet it assails us, though it does not break us; it incites us, though it does not move us; it shakes us, but does not make us fall: that we may see that it is because of our own weakness we are shaken, because of divine grace we stand firm.

GREGORY THE GREAT¹⁴

(c). What assistance does the Church offer to help us stay on the road to the Kingdom? The Church is the Body of Christ, left on earth to continue His work of salvation. To help us win the battle against Satan, the Church offers grace through the Sacraments, the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer and fasting, and the fellowship of others involved in the same struggle. Christ’s

personal involvement in the Mysteries of the Church and with the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting leave a powerful legacy.

Christ fasted that we may learn how great a good it is and how effective a shield against the Devil...He fasted not because He needed to, but to teach us...And that He might lay down the length of our Lenten fast, He fasted for forty days and forty nights...He did not prolong His fast beyond that of Moses and Elijah, lest His taking on of our flesh might seem a thing not to be believed.
CHRYSOSTOM¹⁵

(d). What qualities in those involved in the difficulties of life cause renewed faith in those around them? What qualities create doubt and fear in others? When those who suffer through no fault of their own turn to God for strength and courage and show their dependence upon Him without bitterness, they help others around them realize that there is indeed a powerful God Who loves and helps His people. Such was the effect caused by believers in the early Church who accepted torture and often painful death rather than deny Christ. On the other hand, when those who call themselves Christians mumble and complain when things do not go their way, when they quickly allow the pressures of the world to water down their obedience to the word of God, and when they turn away from Him in anger when faced with the very difficult times of life, they convey the message that being a Christian has no special meaning—makes no real difference.

When God first created the rose, it was without thorns. Since then the thorn has been added to its beauty to help us know that sorrow is very near to pleasure and to remind us of our sin, which condemned the earth to produce thorns.
BASIL¹⁶

God has not promised His people a life free of care. He has promised to help us through troubled times if we turn to Him and trust Him (Isa 51:12, Mt 28:20, 2 Cor 1:3-4). His ultimate promise is eternal life with Him in His Kingdom, if judgment shows evidence of true faith through all that life brings.

In that hour when we shall be separated from men and from the traffic of men, be to us, O Lord, a Giver of good things, bringing joy to our sadness. When we have gone forth from this world, may we behold, O Lord, clearly and in deed the power of Your aid. Pour Your peace into our hearts, and give Your rest to all our striving, that the darkness of that night may be to us as day.
EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN¹⁷

¹ Chrysostomos, *The Ancient Fathers of the Desert*, p.66.

² Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, "The Freedom of the Intellect," (143), Vol. Three, p.350.

³ Berthold, "Four Hundred Chapters on Love" (55), p.81.

⁴ Schaff and Wace, "Against the Heathen," Vol. IV, p.5.

⁵ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, "The Freedom of the Intellect," (149), Vol. Three, p.353.

⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Epistle to Diognetus," Vol. I, p.27-8.

⁷ Toal, "Prayer for the Future Life," Vol. Four, p.347.

⁸ Schaff, "Homily IX on Second Corinthians," Vol. XII, p.322.

⁹ *ibid*, "Homily VII," p.317.

¹⁰ *ibid*, "Homily IX," p.325.

¹¹ Schaff and Wace, "Against the Heathen," Vol. IV, p.6.

¹² Toal, "The Leaven of Holiness," Vol. One, p.355.

¹³ *ibid*, "The First Sunday of Lent," Vol. Two, p.6.

¹⁴ *ibid*, "Man is Delivered by Trials: Mystical Joy," Vol. Four, p.198.

¹⁵ *ibid*, "First Sunday of Lent," Vol. Two, p.4.

¹⁶ Schaff and Wace, "The Hexaemeron," Vol. VIII, p.78.

¹⁷ Toal, "Prayer for the Future Life," Vol. Four, p.347.