

CHAPTER SIX

Through Whom God Works

BACKGROUND: As Chapter Five ended, Paul pleaded that his readers be reconciled to God by taking full advantage of the grace of Christ's saving work. He proceeds to warn about the perils of wasting grace.

6:1. *We then, as workers together with Him, also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.* The grace of which Paul writes is the opportunity for salvation through Christ. He begs his readers not to waste this gift, which is available to everyone. God has offered knowledge of this grace to mankind through those who have continued Christ's work through the ages. Inspired authors of Scripture, Fathers of the Church whose writings preserve its intended meaning, priests, monks, theologians, teachers, parents and all who have really believed the Gospel have passed on the same urgent message: use life for its ultimate purpose—to learn about God's plan for those who would like to live eternally with Him and try to live accordingly in order to demonstrate faith and be rendered righteous (Mt 13: 41-43).

So they won't think that *reconciliation* (5:18-19) comes from merely believing in Him. Who calls, he adds these words, requiring that earnestness which respects the life...For from *grace* we reap no benefit towards salvation if we live impurely; no, we are even harmed, having greater aggravation of our sins, if after such knowledge and such a gift we go back to our former vices.

CHRYSOSTOM¹

6:2. *For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* Quoting Isaiah 49:8, Paul relates that God helps us to fulfill life's potential of union with Him by reaching out to each of us in *an acceptable time*: our lifetime—the time allotted to ponder and pursue salvation. We never know when this life and, therefore, this opportunity will end through death or the Second Coming of Christ, so the present day is the only one of which we can be certain. It is therefore *the day of salvation*: our chance to consciously commit or recommit our lives to Christ—tomorrow may be too late.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). What regular reminders are Orthodox Christians given of the need to commit or recommit their lives to Christ continually?

6:3. *We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.* Paul does not allow himself any personal leeway. He strives to be a good example of the Christian life in all ways so those observing his way of life will have no cause to reject the Gospel on his account. This is a verse that anyone in the position of influencing others by his example would do well to memorize.

6:4-5. *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;* In carrying out the work God set before him, Paul not only patiently endures but triumphs over those external trials and tribulations his work and the enemies of the Gospel bring. Though often without adequate food and sleep, he also willingly participates in the discipline of fasting for the spiritual strength it affords, so he will be able to continue the struggle.

On a personal level regarding salvation, there is no exemption from spiritual growth and struggle

for those who are God's ministers. All Christians are required to try to live the life as well as teach it to others.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account (Heb 13:17).

...but neither he who pursues political rule nor he who pursues spiritual rule will be able to administer it unless he has first ruled himself as he ought.

CHRYSOSTOM²

6:6. by purity, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love ...These are fruits of the Holy Spirit, the gifts with which God meets man's efforts at spiritual growth (see Gal 5:22-24). The fact that Paul possesses these gifts shows that he is a true teacher of God's word.

Paul received grace, but he himself was the cause who by his good works and his toils attracted grace. And ...he also did not misuse the gifts of the Spirit.

CHRYSOSTOM³

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (b). How can the gifts of the Spirit be misused?

6:7. by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left; The power of God is available through the Sacraments of the Church, which are vehicles of grace. Paul's effectiveness in his ministry stems from acting according to God's will, by which he clothes himself in the armor of righteousness. This advantage is accessible to all who develop, teach and live by an understanding of the fullness of the truths preserved by the early Church (read Eph 6:11-18).

"But," you say, "virtue is burdensome and distasteful, while with vice, great pleasure is blended; and the one is wide and broad, but the other straight and narrow."...Suppose there were two roads, one leading to a furnace, and the other to a Paradise; and the one to the furnace was broad, while the other to Paradise, narrow. Which road would you take?

CHRYSOSTOM⁴

6:8-10. by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. Paul dealt with the extremes of life, as do all who sincerely try to live and teach the fullness of the Gospel. He was honored by some, dishonored by others.

...when the teachers are held in honor, many are inspired to godliness. And besides, this is a proof of good works, and glorifies God. CHRYSOSTOM⁵

To receive *honor* is very pleasant, but it presents a particular danger to the recipient. It is difficult to accept praise humbly, in a Christ-like manner, and sincerely give all glory to God. The sin of pride can easily rear its ugly head.

God is opposed to nothing so much as to pride. And because of this there is nothing He has not done, since the beginning, to overthrow this evil disposition. Because of it we are subject to death and live in grief and pain; because of it we labor in sweat, in toil and in afflictions without end.

Through pride, the first man sinned because he aspired to become equal to God and so did not even keep what he already had, but fell from everything. For it is the nature of pride that not only does it add nothing to our life, it also takes from us that which we have. Humility takes nothing from us but rather adds what we do not have.

CHRYSOSTOM⁶

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (c). What are the signs of pride?

The antidote to the spiritual danger posed by the poison of excessive honor and praise, especially to those who try to teach the Gospel, is to remember that no one can share credit for the only thing that has eternal value: God's divine plan for our salvation through Christ. It was instituted by God, executed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The greatest Apostles, preachers and teachers have felt awed, humbled and unspeakably grateful to be allowed a role in bringing knowledge and understanding of it to others. It was in this spirit that John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man to have lived, proclaimed that he was not even worthy to untie Christ's sandals (Mk 1:7).

The true Christian walks against the winds of the world most of the time, so struggle is part of the course. Along the way there are always those who do not want to hear God's truths because they do not want to have to change their lives accordingly. Their reaction may be to try to discredit the messenger so they can feel justified in ignoring the message. Paul often faced such *dishonor*. When he did, he tried to take that also in stride, following Christ's example. Accepting dishonor when it comes is the balance to accepting honor and staves off vainglory.

The first step in overcoming vainglory is to remain silent and to accept dishonor gladly. The middle stage is to check every act of vainglory while it is still in thought. The end—insofar as one may talk of an end to an abyss—is to be able to accept humiliation before others without actually feeling it.

CLIMACUS⁷

Some have *good* things to say about Paul, and some *evil*. Some say he *deceives* those to whom he preaches, and others say his teachings are *true* to the word of God. In facing both extremes, he endeavors to respond as Christ would. To some he is *unknown*, no one important; to others he is *well-known*, and has changed many lives. Some dismiss him and the power God wielded through him because they think he is *dying*. They know he is under the constant threat of death and feel he won't be around long, yet he continues to *live* and work and bring people to God, *as chastened and yet not killed*. He is often *sorrowful* because of the ungodly conditions of the world which imperil his ministry and his life, yet he is *always rejoicing* because he knows the certainty of eternal life with God in His Kingdom for those who endure to the end (Mt 10:22).

The Apostles were *poor* in worldly possessions yet rich spiritually and *made many rich* in that which really matters—knowledge of Christ. In addition, however, the riches of the world were available to them to partake of through those they taught. Because they were willing to trust God and spent their time and energy storing up spiritual rather than material treasures, they lived *as having nothing, yet possessing all things*. Paul experienced both extremes of human emotion: from enemies of the Gospel, hatred and abuse but from friends of the Gospel, great love and generosity; some of whom, he wrote, would gladly pluck out their own eyes to give to him (Gal 4:15).

He who gives temporal aid to those who have spiritual gifts to bestow is a

cooperator in spiritual giving. For since there are few who possess spiritual gifts and many who abound in temporal things, through this means they who have possessions partake in the virtues of those who are needy by relieving from their own abundance the wants of these sanctified poor.
GREGORY THE GREAT⁸

Some say that spiritual riches are spoken of here; but I would say that the carnal are too; for they were rich in these also, having, after a new kind of manner, the houses of all opened to them.
CHRYSOSTOM⁹

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (d). This brings to mind Jesus' words: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added to you* (Mt 6:33). How can this principle be applied to our modern lives?

6:11-12. O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. The Greek text means more literally "...our heart is enlarged." A heart that feels love seems to expand; it has room for more. The one who loves showers his beloved with tokens of affection. Because of the love Paul feels for the people of Corinth, his words are filled with great emotion. There is no limit to his love for them (2 Cor 12:15), therefore, no limit to the lengths he will go to make them understand the word of God. However, they are limited in their response to the Christian life by the depth of their love for him and for God. As a person's love grows, commitment to a Christ-like life to show this love will deepen.

He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, for the latter is proof of the former.
CLIMACUS¹⁰

If you love God, you will be an imitator of His kindness.
MATHETES¹¹

It is for love's sake that he who is in a state of obedience obeys what is commanded. Good works are done out of love for one's neighbor; while vigils, psalmody, and the like are done out of love for God.

PETER OF DAMASKOS¹²

6:13. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. He asks for their love in return—that their hearts expand to include love for him and that which he is trying to teach. Since he was the first to bring the Gospel to the Corinthians, he speaks as a spiritual father to his children, who should respond to his sacrificial love for them.

6:14-15. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? To "yoke" is to join together. Paul does not say that we should not associate with unbelievers (1 Cor 10:27), for then no outreach would be possible. Rather, he writes that believers should not be joined together or closely united with unbelievers, as the Mosaic Law stated that an ox should not be yoked with a donkey in plowing (Deut 22:10) because they cannot work well together to accomplish the task at hand. In Paul's time, Christianity was new and all were converts to it, so many of the early Christians had spouses and/or other family members outside the faith. Christians were not to leave their non-Christian spouses (1 Cor 7:12), but an unmarried Christian was expected to

refrain from marrying an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:39) because to do so might create conflict and cause a diminishment of the believer's commitment to a Christ-like life.

The story told in Acts 16:16-18 suggests also that a Christian should not be yoked with an unbeliever in doing any form of God's work. When the evil spirit in the slave girl began to join in Paul's work by testifying as to the truth of who he was, Paul would not allow that cooperation, to prevent the evil spirit from using the association to gain people's confidence and then lead them away from God. Not all voices speaking about God are godly. Some may try to use God's word for their own purposes (2 Cor 11:13-15).

Just as *righteousness* and *lawlessness*, *light* and *darkness* and *Christ* and *Belial* (Hebrew for Satan) are the complete opposite of each other, a *believer* is the complete opposite of an *unbeliever* in attitudes toward life and its purpose, so the two cannot be joined with good result. This is the basis for the Church's teaching that a Christian cannot be united in matrimony with a non-Christian and that, ideally, individuals contemplating marriage should be united, not divided, in faith so as to begin their lives together on a solid foundation—suitable for creating a family and guiding all members towards God.

6:16. And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The Spirit of God dwells in those who are Baptized and Chrismated and follow a lifestyle that demonstrates faith that Christ is Lord and Savior. They become God's temple—in which holiness pervades to the degree they allow. No one can be dedicated to both God and idols (false gods). God is "jealous" (Ex 20:5) in that He demands our total allegiance for our own good—our salvation.

At the time Paul wrote this epistle, Corinth was a pagan city. The lives of the Corinthians revolved around idol worship. Those who became Christians were expected to make an absolute break with that type of life because worship belongs only to the Creator.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (e). Does this verse apply in any way to the Christian life in our times? Are there pagans (idol worshippers) in our midst?

6:17-18. Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Paul quotes the Old Testament (Isa 52:11), God's word to the Hebrews to be His people, different than non-Jews who were considered unclean according to the Law. He tells the early Christians that they too must be set apart from prevalent pagan influence and activity. They are to become imitators of God, just as young children imitate their parents and thereby learn and grow.

And do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God...He who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbor; he who, in whatever way he may be superior, is ready to help another who is deficient; he who, by distributing to the needy from what he has received from God, becomes a god to those who receive these benefits: he is an imitator of God. MATHETES¹³

God expects us to do no less. We must separate ourselves from the unclean, the ungodly in our society, as far as our thoughts and conduct. Yet at the same time we are called upon to love even our enemies, to be good examples to all, and to welcome any sincere seeker to the love of the

Gospel. This delicate balance is difficult, but *with God all things are possible* (Mt 19:26). Above all, we must allow nothing in our lives which has the possibility of coming between us and God and drawing us away from Him. If we put Him first in all we do, He will claim us as His children, entitled to dwell with Him forever.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). What regular reminders are Orthodox Christians given of the need to commit and recommit their lives to Christ? During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy we are prompted often to "...commend ourselves and one another and our whole lives to Christ our God." These are valuable reminders of the purpose for life. They also continually offer occasions to pray for those who may need a nudge in the right direction.

(b). How can the gifts of the Spirit be misused? Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for the purpose of bringing a person, and through him, others, to union with God. Their proper use promotes unity within the Church. Those who use these gifts to bring glory or worldly gain to themselves misuse them and cause divisions. This was the case with the Corinthian Christians in their use of the gift of tongues (see text and this study of 1 Cor 12).

(c). What are the signs of pride? A prideful person has distinguishing characteristics.

First, there is loudness in the proud man's talk, bitterness in his silent moods; when he is pleased, his laughter is loud and profuse; when he is serious, he is gloomy beyond reason. There is rancor in his replies to questions, glibness in his speech; his words break out unrestrained by any seriousness of heart. Of patience he knows nothing; charity is a stranger to him; he is bold in insulting others, cowardly in bearing their insults. He does not easily render obedience except where what is commanded fits with his own wishes. He is not to be appeased when one admonishes him; he is weak in curtailing his own wishes, very stubborn when asked to yield to those of others. He is always doing his best to establish his own opinions, but never ready to bow to those of anyone else. Finally, though he is quite incapable of giving good counsel, he is always more ready to trust his own judgment than that of the elders.

CASSIAN¹⁴

(d). How does the principle behind Jesus' words: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added to you* (Mt 6:33) apply to our modern lives? If we have truly committed our lives to Christ and believe that through Him we can live eternally with God, we will be guided in all that we do by Christ's teachings and His example. Every decision we make will be shaped not by what would be best in terms of success or gain in the world but rather by what He would expect of us. When this principle becomes ingrained in us, our life will have a healthy balance. It will not be easy, but the truly good things will be ours, in this life and the next.

When you suffer anything for Christ's sake, do not merely bear it nobly, but also rejoice. When you fast, leap for joy as if enjoying luxury; if you are insulted, react as if praised; if you spend, feel as if gaining; if you bestow on the poor, count yourselves to receive: for he that does not give in this manner will not give readily...In every virtue, compute not only the severity of the toils but also the sweetness of the prize...and you will readily enter into the contest and will live the whole time in pleasure. For nothing is as apt to cause pleasure as a good conscience.

CHRYSOSTOM¹⁵

(e). Does verse 6:16 apply in any way to the Christian life in our times? Are there pagans (idol worshippers) in our midst? The setting is different in our day, but Paul's advice still applies. We are given life to have the opportunity to find God and grow in union with Him. Thus we were created with a space in our hearts that aches until it is filled by His presence (Acts 17:26-27). If something other than God becomes the most important element in our lives, be it career, money, power, fame, a person, or even sports or other forms of recreation, it takes God's rightful place. It becomes to us a false god—an idol—and we become idol worshippers. Idol worshippers have nothing in common with those who worship God, nor do they ever find true peace, because they misuse the gift of life. It is crucial that we place God on His throne in our hearts and lives so all other elements will take their proper place.

¹ Schaff, "Homily XII on Second Corinthians," Vol XII, p.336.

² *ibid*, "Homily XV," p.353.

³ *ibid*, "Homily XII," p.338.

⁴ *ibid*, "Homily XIV on First Corinthians," p.80.

⁵ *ibid*, "Homily XII on Second Corinthians," p.338.

⁶ Toal, "On Jesus Ascending to Jerusalem," Vol. One, p.414.

⁷ Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, "Step 22," (On Vainglory), *John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p.205.

⁸ Toal, "On the Mystical Church," Vol. One, p.94.

⁹ Schaff, "Homily XII," p.339.

¹⁰ Luibheid and Russell, "Step 30," (On Faith, Hope, and Love), *Ladder*, p.288.

¹¹ Roberts and Donaldson, "Epistle to Diognetus," Vol. I, p.29.

¹² Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, "Love," Vol. Three, p.254.

¹³ Roberts and Donaldson, "Epistle to Diognetus," Vol. I, p.29.

¹⁴ John Cassian, "Institutes," Book XII, Chap. XXIX, *Teachings on the Spiritual Life, Selected from the Writings of St. John Cassian the Roman*, p.99.

¹⁵ Schaff, "Homily XII," p.340.