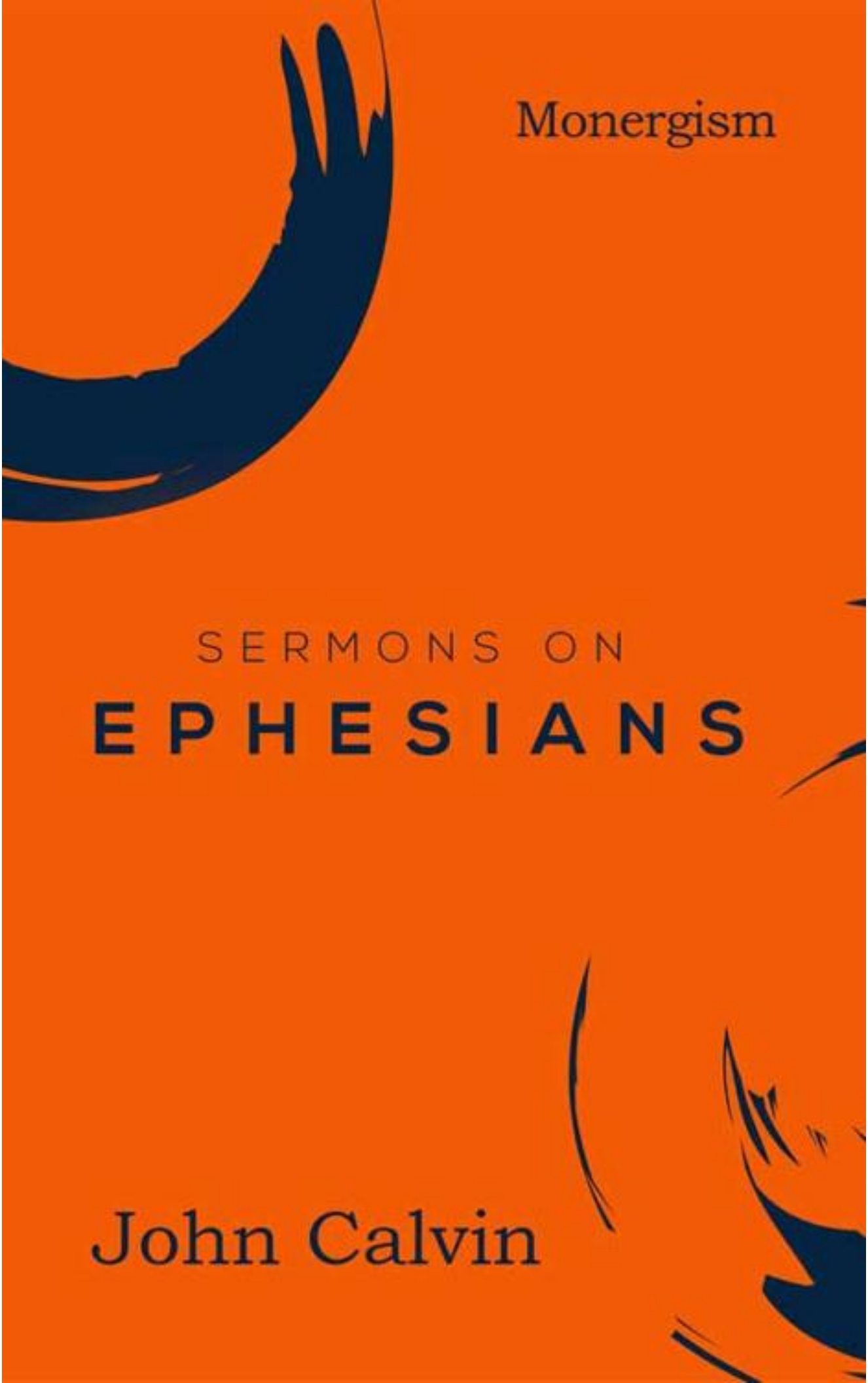
Monergism
SERMONS ON
EPHESIANS
John Calvin

Sermons on Ephesians

John Calvin

Greeting and Argument

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is a wonderful thing that we all take pride in our baptism, but many of us forget what it truly means. Baptism calls us to follow God sincerely. If we understood this, we would all agree to worship the one true God rightly and to trust in Jesus Christ alone as our Savior, Lord, and guide.

We would let God's Word alone direct our lives, instead of mixing it with human ideas and traditions. And in the life of the church, we would follow the pattern that Christ gave through His apostles. If this happened, many of the divisions in the church would disappear.

The problem is this: people do not fully listen to God or submit to His Word. Unless they repent, they will answer for this before Him. Yet we pray that God would give them grace to turn back.

Our goal is not to create something new or to win arguments. We simply want God's truth to overcome error, and for all of us to glorify Him. We must admit that both we and those before us have often wandered away from His Word.

When people hear Scripture clearly taught, God draws them back to Himself. Many have already begun to return, but more must awaken and truly listen. Baptism binds us to this calling—to live for God.

To help with this, we offer these sermons on Ephesians. They are meant to make God's Word clearer and help you grow.

So we urge you: listen to God. Do not hold back, no matter who you are. God has loved us so deeply that He gave His Son to save us from sin and empty traditions.

Let us then serve Him together, following His Word and not our own ideas. In doing this, we will truly live as Christians, honor our baptism, and show a good example even to those outside the faith.

May it be so.

The Argument of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

Ephesus was a well-known city where God raised up a church through Paul's preaching. Later, while Paul was imprisoned, he wrote this letter to strengthen the believers. He saw that they needed to be firmly grounded in the truth so that they would not be shaken.

God's Grace in Saving Us (Chapters 1–3)

Paul begins by lifting their eyes to God's grace. He teaches that their salvation did not begin with them, but with God's eternal choice. Before they were born, God had already purposed to bring them into His kingdom. This shows that salvation flows entirely from His mercy and love.

Because this truth is so deep, Paul prays that they would truly understand Christ, not just in their minds, but in their hearts.

He then reminds them of their former condition. Before Christ, they were spiritually dead, lost, and without hope. They were outsiders, separated from God and His promises. By setting their past beside their present, Paul helps them see how great God's mercy really is. We only grasp the beauty of grace when we remember how desperate we once were.

One People in Christ

Paul also explains that he was called especially to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Though this seemed new and surprising to many, it was part of God's plan all along—that those once far off would now be brought near.

So again, Paul prays for them. He wants them to know Christ so fully that they would not look elsewhere for truth or assurance. He also seeks to settle their hearts, because false teachers were troubling them. These teachers claimed that faith in Christ was not enough, and that believers must follow old ceremonies to truly belong to God.

But Paul makes it clear: their salvation was not accidental or incomplete. The gospel came to them because God had planned it from eternity. Their rescue from sin was entirely the work of His grace.

The Life That Follows (Chapter 4 and Beyond)

After showing what God has done, Paul turns to how believers should live. He teaches that Christ rules His church through the preaching of His Word. This is how the church is built up and kept strong.

From there, he describes the fruit of true faith. A life changed by grace will show itself in holiness, obedience, and love. Paul speaks both generally

about the Christian life and specifically about how each person should live in their own calling.

The First Sermon on the First Chapter

> Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." - Ephesians 1:1-3

When we read the sacred epistles inscribed by St. Paul to various corners of the world, it is paramount to recognize that their divine purpose transcends temporal boundaries and specific audiences. These epistles, forged by the hand of God's divine wisdom, resonate eternally, encompassing the entirety of Christ's church. Such is the profundity of His compassion, for He has omitted no detail that might contribute to our eternal salvation. The essence of the Epistle that I now embark upon elucidating revolves around St. Paul's reaffirmation of gospel teachings for those already initiated into its sacred truths. They must comprehend that this wisdom is supreme and comprehensive, permitting no augmentation.

Paul imparts to us that the blessings wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ through His gospel are of such magnificence that ingratitude would be a grievous misdeed should we wander aimlessly, forsaking rest and contentment. Furthermore, he unveils the riches we possess in Christ,

urging us to cleave to Him, shunning the presumption of seeking solace elsewhere, for He has supplied all that we require.

Conversely, he underscores Christ's bounteous provision for His church and emphasizes that, through judicious utilization of the gifts of divine grace, we shall attain ultimate felicity. Simultaneously, he admonishes those well-versed in the verities of the gospel to lead lives of sanctity, demonstrating the fruitful growth nurtured within God's educational purview.

These teachings are not bound by the confines of Ephesus, the precincts of a single nation, or the chronicles of a particular era. Continuous reinforcement becomes imperative, as the incessant machinations of the adversary endeavor to lead us astray. Even when the devil cannot wholly divert us from the doctrine of Jesus Christ, he strives to render it unpalatable, ensnaring us in novel curiosities. His stratagem seeks to destabilize our unwavering commitment to our received faith and introduce vacillation. When our minds fall into such restlessness, they unwittingly unlock the door to the erasure of former lessons and the embrace of imprudent and erroneous dogmas that mar and distort the purity of our faith.

Henceforth, the doctrine enshrined within this epistle is tailor-made for the present age. God, in His providential design, has orchestrated not only the foundation of the gospel for us to stand upon but also the means for our faith to burgeon and mature with each passing day, propelling us inexorably toward spiritual perfection.

Above all else, St. Paul firmly establishes the divine authority vested in him by God. This is not to draw attention to his own person but to guide people away from fixating on him as a mere mortal conveyer of words. The supreme instructor we must heed is our Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven itself attests to this truth: our ears are to be attuned solely to Him, and no other [Matthew 17:5]. Throughout history, God's intent has been to maintain unwavering control over His church, with His Word accepted without

dispute. This privilege has not been conferred upon any created being. When Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, assumes the position of His Father, it is because He embodies God Himself, the unwavering embodiment of truth, and the wisdom that predates all time [1 Timothy 3:16].

Furthermore, when individuals speak, they should not do so in their own name, offering their personal ideas and musings. Their task is to faithfully convey the commands and entrusted messages of God. Thus, St. Paul consistently underscores his role as an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. He firmly believes that any attempt to speak in one's own name is but recklessness, a usurpation of what is God's alone.

Once again, since our Lord Jesus Christ was intentionally dispatched as our ultimate teacher, imparting flawless and absolute wisdom, St. Paul identifies himself as an apostle sent by Him. This presumes two essential aspects: first, St. Paul was entrusted with this solemn duty, and second, he executed it with unwavering devotion in the role assigned to him. Even if someone possessed extraordinary gifts and excellence, impulsive self-assertion disrupts order. We know that God desires order, not chaos among us, as St. Paul elucidates in the fourteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Hence, the one who imparts knowledge, especially in the role of a teacher, must possess a divine calling, an appointment, and an entrusted charge. This safeguards against unwarranted presumption driven by misguided zeal, as mentioned earlier. Elaborating extensively on St. Paul's calling is unnecessary here, as we are well aware of how God bore witness to his anointment as an apostle [Acts 9:15]. He does not dwell on it in this instance because it is common knowledge within the Ephesian congregation. However, considering the circumstances of the Galatians, who were ensnared by deceivers that tarnished St. Paul's authority and even the name of God, we see how vigorously he defended his status. He

conveyed to them that the reverence due to an apostle of Jesus Christ could not be stripped away without disrupting the divine order [Galatians 1:13—16]. Therefore, it suffices for him to assert, in a single word, that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, let us delve into the second aspect I highlighted: it is insufficient merely to bear a divine calling; one must discharge their duties with unwavering rectitude and a clear conscience in their appointed role. This profound commitment was exemplified by St. Paul, who presented ample evidence of his fidelity. It is a lamentable reality that deceivers often lay claim to a divine calling, a sight not uncommon. Those who, in their opposition to God and His Word, sow seeds of discord and falsehood within His church, readily don the mantle of their calling and fervor, loudly professing themselves as Christians. Yet, St. Paul had sufficiently attested that he acted not of his own accord but labored tirelessly for the edification of the church. Given the familiarity of this truth within the Ephesian community (as gleaned from the account in the book of Acts [Acts 19]) and the manifold trials he had encountered, he deems it adequate to assert, in a single word, that he is an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this context, our foremost duty is to steadfastly adhere to the pure doctrine bequeathed to us by God. This unwavering commitment ensures that we remain on the path of righteousness. Given that in our Lord Jesus Christ, we possess all the essential elements for our instruction, there exists no cause for doubt regarding our allegiance to the gospel or any inclination to augment it. Let us contentedly embrace the Son of God as our Supreme Teacher, particularly since He willingly shoulders this responsibility and assures us that by diligently applying His teachings, we shall attain the ultimate purpose we should aspire to.

Consequently, the central message derived from this passage underscores the necessity of anchoring our faith in an unwavering and unshakable

foundation, which is the eternal truth of God encapsulated within the gospel. Having duly acknowledged St. Paul's authoritative standing, we ought not to question that God's Spirit continues to speak to us through him today. Thus, we must receive this doctrine with unwavering trust, refraining from scrutinizing it skeptically, unless we consciously oppose God and presumptuously elevate ourselves above His divine wisdom. This, indeed, stands as one of the paramount lessons imparted through this passage.

Furthermore, let us ensure that this sacred doctrine not only commands reverence within our hearts but also captivates our souls. It is imperative to bear in mind that St. Paul speaks in the hallowed name of Christ, the envoy sent by God the Father to herald the tidings of peace unto us. Additionally, consider how, in another passage, St. Paul affirms his divine commission to convey the message of reconciliation, beseeching, in God's name, that humanity reconcile itself to the Almighty [2 Corinthians 5:20]. These proclamations are orchestrated to render the teachings of the gospel alluring, igniting within us an ardent longing and complete devotion. When we realize that God addresses us, His word alone suffices to bestow authority upon every utterance. Nonetheless, some may quiver in His divine presence, perturbed by the awe-inspiring resonance of His voice, for many acknowledge God's sovereign right to obedience and the submission of all souls, yet they shy away, for His voice fills them with trepidation.

However, when Jesus Christ, our blessed Mediator between God and humanity, communicates with us, we may boldly draw near. As elucidated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are no longer akin to those who stood at Mount Sinai, where the law was revealed amidst flashing lightning, to the extent that even a beast approaching it would meet its demise. The voice of God during that time was profoundly daunting [Hebrews 12:18—20; Exodus 19:12]. Today, though, as He extends His gracious invitation through the gospel, urging us to embrace the offered grace and the obliteration of our transgressions, we must allow ourselves to be justified

by His boundless grace. We should find peace in this and yield ourselves obediently to Him. Let this impel us to approach Him as famished souls seek heavenly sustenance. Thus, we grasp the profound significance when St. Paul identifies himself as the apostle of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Paul asserts that his apostleship derives from the divine will of God. This declaration is intended to dispel any semblance of doubt and preempt accusations of presumption, as if he regarded himself more highly than others. He emphatically states that his apostleship is not a product of personal merit but rather a consequence of God's sovereign choice. This is no simulated humility, for in other passages, he openly acknowledges his unworthiness of such honor, deeming himself deserving of damnation. Consequently, he stands as a mirror reflecting God's boundless benevolence, for God exalted him, even though he had once perpetrated heinous acts against Christians, shedding the blood of martyrs, and blaspheming against God and His Word, as he himself acknowledges.

Henceforth, let there be no doubt in recognizing that St. Paul's proclamation of being divinely appointed is not a mere pretense but a profound truth. This assertion serves a pivotal purpose in reminding us not to assess the worth of God's Word based on the vessels chosen to convey it. A common ploy of the adversary is to erode reverence for God's Word by directing our focus towards the human messengers. Indeed, we are but frail vessels, akin to fragile earthenware, devoid of inherent grandeur. What, then, is the significance of those whom God has ordained as bearers of His Word? However, the treasure they bear possesses immeasurable worth eternally, regardless of the humbleness of the vessels chosen for this sacred task [2 Corinthians 4:7].

It is imperative to heed that when individuals testify to the forgiveness of our sins and the forthcoming salvation, our faith should ascend loftily, bereft of any scrutiny regarding the worthiness or character of the

messenger. Let us find contentment in the knowledge that God intends to draw us nearer to Himself through this means. This is the path we must steadfastly tread, for any deviation leads swiftly to perilous wandering and a course set towards destruction.

Furthermore, we must grasp that we are duty-bound to submit to God's will and ordination, receiving with open hearts the teachings conveyed by mortal individuals. We should not presume to be wiser than those who question whether God could employ heavenly angels to impart His wisdom through divine revelations. Nor should we emulate those who boastfully claim the Holy Spirit at their beck and call, thereby disdainfully rejecting the divine gifts bestowed by God. To evade the snares laid by Satan in such folly, it is crucial to recognize that God's will is for the gospel to be disseminated through human mouths, acting as witnesses to His truth. Anyone who disengages from this divine order is akin to pushing back God's hand when He offers irrefutable testimony of our salvation. This is the wisdom we should glean from this passage.

Furthermore, those summoned to proclaim God's Word should humbly emulate St. Paul's example. When we compare ourselves to him, what are we but insignificant? He vividly illustrates that his selection was not contingent upon inherent competence or prowess but rather a manifestation of God's sovereign will. Therefore, we must steadfastly believe that all that we receive is bestowed by God's grace alone, and we cannot ascribe anything to ourselves without attempting to rob Him of His rightful glory. Such ingratitude should never find a foothold in our hearts.

Moving forward, the apostle addresses his epistle to "all the holy ones that are in Ephesus and to the faithful in Jesus Christ." While the city of Ephesus is explicitly mentioned, as previously noted, the teachings herein are universally applicable. God has bestowed them for our present benefit, and we should receive them as if St. Paul were yet alive and in our midst.

Furthermore, our focus should not solely rest on him but extend to the One who commissioned him. Though St. Paul's earthly journey concluded after fulfilling his divine mission, the Spirit of God is eternal. In any case, let us keep in mind the message St. Paul conveys when addressing the sanctified and the steadfast in Jesus Christ.

Despite our detachment from that era, that geographical locale, or the Asian populace, since God has woven us into the same spiritual fabric as those to whom St. Paul wrote in his time, it becomes evident that we need fortification in the faith bequeathed to us through the gospel. The Holy Spirit's intent and purpose are to infuse unwavering endurance in all those who possess the foundational truths of the gospel and yet remain fragile, in need of robust affirmation.

Let us give diligent heed to these words, particularly where it speaks of "the saints and faithful ones in Jesus Christ." St. Paul underscores that human sanctity amounts to naught but pretense until God draws individuals into His divine service and consecrates them through faith. By our very nature, we are besmirched, and only depravity flows forth from us. While people may adopt an admirable external veneer and project righteousness that garners praise, we must bear in mind what is articulated in the fifteenth chapter of Acts: God purifies hearts through faith [Acts 15:9]. There exists sound rationale for this, as prophet Jeremiah proclaims, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" [Jeremiah 17:9]. Though we may fail to discern it, God possesses a far clearer perspective than we do. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we firmly believe that any semblance of holiness individuals may perceive in themselves is tainted and loathsome in the sight of God until it is harmonized with faith in the gospel. Consequently, let us accept as an undeniable truth that no form of sanctity garners recognition or acceptance from God except the sanctity born of belief. Until we embrace Christianity,

our vision remains obscured, rendering us incapable of rendering unto God His rightful due.

Wouldn't this alone suffice to mar all the virtues we might lay claim to? Moreover, since the essence of perfection, the spirit of godly reverence, the spirit of righteousness, and the spirit of purity dwell and find their abode in Jesus Christ, it is undeniable that all who stand apart from Him are tainted by vice and every manner of impurity, regardless of any worldly accolades they may receive.

On the flip side, it's crucial to recognize that those who boast of their faith in the gospel yet remain untouched by the sanctifying hand of God are, in essence, revealing their own hypocrisy and falsehood. Their actions contradict their declarations, irrespective of their vocal professions. We can readily observe, in our times, many who defile and desecrate the sacred name of faith, which ought to be held in the highest regard. Everyone claims to possess faith, and those with the least substance in their faith often proclaim themselves as its foremost champions. If only this were true to some extent! However, even among those who bear the Christian name, we find lives marked by disorder and licentiousness to such an extent that they openly ridicule God and discard all sense of piety. Yet, they harbor the belief that they are unjustly portrayed if not considered devout and upright Christians.

Nevertheless, we discern how St. Paul tightly binds these two facets together in an unbreakable bond. He underscores that if we lay claim to the faith of the gospel, then it is incumbent upon us to wholeheartedly dedicate ourselves to our God and sever our ties with the corruptions of the world. Just as he articulated in the Epistle to the Galatians [Galatians 1:4; 4:5—7], the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world transpires for the purpose of our sanctification through His redeeming blood, so that we may henceforth live in obedience to God, our heavenly Father, in purity. As he

also expounds elsewhere [1 Thessalonians 4:7], we are not summoned to impurity but to righteousness, for the exaltation and sanctification of God's name.

Therefore, you can discern what we ought to bear in our hearts from this opening discourse. This shall better prepare us to absorb the teachings encapsulated within this Epistle, bestowing upon it the reverence and honor it rightfully warrants. In this way, we shall grasp the unique privilege of learning from the apostle Paul. He bears witness to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and guides us toward reconciliation with God, even though, by nature, we are the children of wrath. Furthermore, he elucidates the path by which we can stand in God's favor, allowing us to boldly address Him as our Father, with the assurance that He regards us as His beloved children.

Moving forward, Paul employs a heartfelt expression of gratitude, an act intended to uplift the spirits of all, as he recognizes their profound indebtedness to God, particularly considering His boundless generosity in providing for them in myriad ways. He declares, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has graced us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms through Christ.' Understanding that the primary offering God requires of us is the acknowledgment of His benevolence and the expression of heartfelt gratitude for His manifold blessings, St. Paul contemplates how these divine favors ought to motivate us to fulfill our sacred duty. It is often astonishing how neglectful we can be in this regard. We must acknowledge that our foremost purpose and endeavor should center around leading an orderly existence, one characterized by the praise of God. If one were to inquire why we inhabit this world, why God bestows His care upon us, why His goodness sustains us, and why He lavishes us with countless blessings, the response would be to render Him acknowledgment. As the psalmist articulates, we cannot render any service to God, nor does He desire anything more from us than gratitude, as evidenced in Psalm 116: 'What shall I render to the Lord for all

the benefits which I have received from Him, except to take the cup of salvation from His hand and call upon His name?'

Therefore, the entirety of our offering to God boils down to the acknowledgment of our indebtedness for all things. However, regrettably, none among us fulfills this duty, not even to a fraction of its magnitude. From the greatest to the least, we fall short in presenting the praise that should perpetually grace our lips. For this reason, our Lord reproves us for our apathy. When Holy Scripture repeatedly implores us to praise God through numerous words, we should not dismiss them as superfluous but rather perceive them as earnest admonitions, highlighting our failures in a matter so fundamental that it might be deemed the very essence of life.

The Holy Spirit often offers various reasons for us to extol God's name, such as the order inherent in nature, the bounty of the earth's harvest, the divine assistance that sustains us, and other such blessings. These are indeed valid grounds for offering praise to God. However, St. Paul elevates our perspective here, urging us to exalt God above all else. He contends that it is insufficient to merely acknowledge that God has placed us in this world, nurtures us throughout our transient earthly journey, and furnishes all the necessities for our fleeting existence. St. Paul emphatically states that God has selected us to be heirs of His heavenly kingdom and eternal life.

Therefore, our obligation to God is twofold, surpassing that of the ignorant and unbelieving souls. While they indeed bear a pre-existing debt, the benevolence that the gracious God has showered upon us through Jesus Christ far surpasses measure. He has embraced us as His own children. Although, by our human nature, we are reckoned among His creatures, formed in His image, this image within us is tainted by the sin and corruption inherited from Adam's disobedience. So, what rightful inheritance do we merit, if not the righteous wrath of God and the specter of eternal death?

In summary, if we were to remain ensnared by our natural state, we wouldn't even merit a place among the beasts of the field. However, in His infinite grace, God adopts us as members of His only Son, elevates us to the ranks of the angels, and prepares us to partake in His very nature and glory (as St. Peter attests in his first Epistle, 1:12). Shouldn't we then perceive this as an exalted and noble grace that utterly captivates our hearts?

Thus, as you discern, St. Paul's initial message in this passage is a fervent exhortation to wholeheartedly immerse ourselves in the act of praising God. For, by our natural disposition, we tend to be lukewarm and indifferent in this regard unless we are spurred and compelled. Furthermore, St. Paul had another aim in mind, which is to satiate our desires with the grace bestowed upon us through the gospel, thereby dissuading us from our habitual covetousness. By our very nature, we are prone to fickleness, and when God graciously extends His Word to us, we frequently insist on pursuing other cravings alongside it, finding ourselves perennially unsatisfied. Why does this transpire? It arises from our obtuseness, for we have never fully comprehended or grasped the profound revelations that God imparts to us through His Word (Eph. 3:18). In due course, we shall discover that those who fathom the love that God manifests through our Lord Jesus Christ possess every desire they could ever harbor, whether loftier or more mundane, closer or more distant. St. Paul implores us to extol God with the intent of anchoring us to the doctrine that encompasses the fullness of all happiness, provided we know how to harness it for our well-being.

Moreover, it is essential to discern the significance of St. Paul's reference to "spiritual blessings." While we acknowledge God as our true Father even when partaking of a morsel of bread or a sip of water, these material provisions for our transient earthly existence pale in comparison to those that contribute to the eternal well-being of our souls. St. Paul's exhortation to extol God for His heavenly blessings implies that we must also cultivate patience during times of bodily suffering, unfulfilled desires, and when it

appears that God withholds His blessings. Two critical lessons emerge here. First, we must recognize where our authentic and flawless happiness resides — in the future life we anticipate, which remains veiled from our sight—so that we do not become overly attached to the fleeting allure of this world. This is a pivotal point to grasp. Second, in the face of rejection and contempt from the world, enduring ridicule, and even when those who deride God parade in ostentatious grandeur, making us seem wretched in comparison, with some among us experiencing hunger, thirst, and others grappling with unjust tribulations, we must maintain unwavering patience. Why, you may ask? It's because we should find contentment in the heavenly blessings bestowed upon us. This vast, exalted, and incalculably precious blessedness should empower us to transcend any conceivable hardships when God tests and refines us in this world through a multitude of afflictions, along with experiences of deprivation and scarcity. These are the vital lessons to glean from this passage.

Before we proceed further, let us underscore that the term "blessing" carries distinct meanings when applied to God and ourselves by St. Paul. We, as mortal beings, bless God. But how do we bless Him? Our blessings do not mirror His blessings upon us. As previously elucidated using Psalm 16, all our services and offerings do not enhance or benefit God in any way. Similarly, as expounded in Psalm 116, all we can proffer to God is the acknowledgment of our indebtedness for the manifold goodness we have received from Him. Our blessing, fundamentally, is the act of offering the sacrifice of praise to God. This stands as one pivotal point to remember.

Conversely, when God bestows blessings upon us, it transcends mere words. It encompasses filling us and furnishing all that we require, to the extent of our genuine needs. Why, then, is the term "blessing" ascribed to Him? It's because He does not labor or exert great effort to assist His servants and provide what He knows to be beneficial for them. If He simply utters a word, if He declares His divine will, it is accomplished.

Considering that God, through the sheer power of His spoken word, brought the entire world into existence, and is similarly capable of bestowing goodness upon us merely by His command, we can comprehend that we become truly enriched solely through His benevolent blessings. In essence, His blessings serve as a manifestation of His love and favor directed towards us. Now, let us reflect upon whether we can offer any excuse for withholding from God what is rightfully His—our acknowledgment of indebtedness—after having received an abundance of blessings from His gracious hand. Imagine placing all the blessings bestowed upon humanity by all the individuals in the world on one side of the scale, and on the other side, the blessing with which God enriches them. Then, consider: which holds greater value? All they can provide is an admission that they lack the capacity to utter or perform anything truly significant, while God unequivocally demonstrates that He possesses everything essential for our well-being. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable for St. Paul to assert here that the faithful must wholeheartedly dedicate themselves to bless God's name; anything less would amount to ingratitude and discourtesy. Thus, he conveys two essential aspects: "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ."

When he utters, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," it should be comprehended in this manner: the God who displays a benevolent disposition towards us is the Father of our Lord Christ. This nuance merits our attention. St. Paul distinctly emphasizes that God's blessings, particularly those related to heavenly life and the eternal salvation of our souls, cannot reach us except through the agency of Jesus Christ, through whom we partake in them for His name's sake. Thus, we must grasp that we are excluded from all of God's blessings and every element of our soul's salvation unless Jesus Christ becomes the conduit through which we attain them.

Indeed, it is true that unbelievers partake in eating, drinking, and self-indulgence, and they bask under the sun's rays. Yet, to articulate it accurately, they do not genuinely experience the fullness of the gifts provided by God because they appropriate them without a legitimate claim. The world, in its entirety, was fashioned for God's children, particularly in relation to their Head, who is our Lord Jesus Christ. In summary, it is not without profound significance that St. Paul, while elucidating how God has bestowed Himself upon us, emphasizes that this is a consequence of His role as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, as previously underscored, this extends beyond mere physical sustenance; it pertains to something far more profound and invaluable: God's adoption of us as His children. These are the profound insights we should assimilate from this passage.

To glean deeper insights from this passage, it is imperative that we remind ourselves not to stray into various speculations when invoking the name of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why is this caution necessary? It is because the papists frequently employ the terms "God" and "Jesus Christ," yet they have distorted the true nature of Jesus Christ and gravely misrepresented the doctrine of His gospel, in which His true essence should be revealed. Consequently, they possess a concept of God, albeit one based on muddled notions, and yet they do not genuinely know Him. In reality, they are no more capable of elucidating the God they serve and worship than the Turks are. We must bear in mind that our Lord Jesus Christ, as documented in the fourth chapter of St. John, asserts that those who lack the guiding doctrine remain in ignorance about what they worship, continually fashioning idols for themselves. Consequently, there exists only one sure path to acquire a genuine and infallible understanding of God, and that is by beholding Him through His living image because His majesty transcends our ability to fully grasp. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ has graciously revealed Himself to us, accommodating our frailty, and has imparted all the knowledge required to approach God, His Father.

Hence, it becomes evident that we must recognize our Lord Jesus Christ as the conduit to prevent us from going astray. Given that God is the Father of our Head and of Him who is inseparably united with us, we can appreciate how we may confidently draw near to Him. Bereft of this mediator, we would find ourselves entirely severed from God, overwhelmed by the awe-inspiring grandeur of His majesty. However, when we contemplate that He is acknowledged as the Father of the One who serves as our Head, we should be assured that He is bound to recognize us as His own children, having redeemed us.

Moreover, while St. Paul succinctly encapsulates our spiritual blessings in a single word here, he intimates that God has lavished His generosity upon us in multifarious ways. He will proceed to elaborate on this later, enumerating the benefits we receive through the gospel, for this entire chapter is replete with them. Nevertheless, the essence of his message is that God bestows His gracious gifts upon us in a diverse and profuse manner, offering us every conceivable reason to extol Him from every conceivable vantage point. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to comprehend that, since Jesus Christ is so freely given to us, we attain everything requisite for our salvation and happiness in Him, just as St. Paul expounds upon in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. For if the only begotten Son is bestowed upon us, how can we not also partake in all the blessings He possesses, alongside Him and through Him?

However, let us cultivate an appreciation for God's spiritual gifts in such a way that all our mental faculties are wholly dedicated to magnifying them. To attain this, we must exercise caution in our attachment to worldly matters. The very distractions that hinder us, preventing us from comprehending even a fraction of the goodness that God has lavished upon us and from employing His blessings to our advantage, stem from our own vanity. Each one of us deceives ourselves with our foolish and extravagant desires. Therefore, we must learn to cast off these impediments that obstruct

our approach to our Lord Jesus Christ. Although our sinful nature compels us to chase after the fleeting treasures of this world, we ought to exert ourselves to detach from them. By doing so, we can wholeheartedly dedicate ourselves to God, earnestly seek to obey Him, and surrender ourselves entirely to His divine will, for this is His desire for us.

This is the profound lesson we must glean from St. Paul's words when, having expounded on the spiritual blessings, he promptly adds, "in heavenly places (or things)." By this addition, he signifies that we cannot fully apprehend the gracious gifts bestowed upon us through our Lord Jesus Christ, gifts that God intends for us to possess, until we recognize that there is nothing in this earthly realm that should ensnare us. Thus, when we acknowledge that our existence in this world is transient, and that we are destined to be pilgrims in it with our ultimate inheritance and rest awaiting us in the heavenly abode, let us chart our course accordingly and advance resolutely toward it. Despite our inherent frailty, we should not despair but instead take heart and beseech God for the strength to persevere. Furthermore, it becomes evident that St. Paul employs the term "blessings" to underscore that, while the devil lays numerous snares to corrupt us and lead us astray, God has made ample provision to thwart any threat to our salvation, given His abundant store of blessings.

Now, let us prostrate ourselves before the majesty of our benevolent God, humbly confessing our transgressions and praying for a deeper understanding of them that may lead us to genuine repentance. Let us condemn our own shortcomings and seek to find all that we require in our Lord Jesus Christ, not merely for a passing moment but continuously and steadfastly until the culmination of our earthly journey. Regardless of the trials we encounter, let us constantly remind ourselves that we possess abundant reason to extol our God. Even if we find ourselves in poverty and misery in this temporal realm, the joy of heaven is sufficient to console us, to alleviate all our afflictions and sorrows, and to fill us with such profound

contentment that we can, with open hearts, offer our blessings to God for His boundless kindness in adopting us as His children. He has revealed to us that the inheritance acquired for us through the precious blood of His only Son is prepared and assured for us. With unwavering faith, we march steadfastly toward it. May God extend this grace not only to us but to all of humanity.

The Second Sermon on the First Chapter

> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." - Ephesians 1:3-4

We have previously discussed how St. Paul exhorts us to extol and magnify God for His blessings, which are not of an earthly nature but are imbued with spiritual significance. We should discover our contentment in God's revelation of His paternal benevolence and affection toward us, a revelation that unfolds the gates of the heavenly kingdom through hope. Despite the manifold tribulations we encounter in this temporal realm, there is substantial cause for us to be content with God's choice of us and His summons to unite with Him. This truth resonates within the gospel, which proclaims Him as our Father [Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2], having united us with our Lord Jesus Christ as the members are united to their Head.

Now, St. Paul guides us to the origin, the fount, or more accurately, the primary impetus that compelled God to extend His favor toward us. It is not enough that God has unveiled the treasures of His benevolence and mercy to beckon us towards the hope of celestial life through the gospel, though

this is profoundly significant. Absent the forthcoming revelation by St. Paul, one might entertain the notion that God's grace is a universal bestowal upon all, that it is extended to every soul without distinction, and that each possesses the free will to accept or reject it, implying an element of merit on our part. Were there no differentiation among individuals beyond some embracing God's grace while others spurn it, one could suppose that God has displayed generosity to all of humanity. However, those who partake in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ do so through faith. It is in this context that the true essence of grace comes to light. To obliterate all semblance of human merit and accentuate that everything emanates from God's pure benevolence and grace, St. Paul asserts that we have been blessed in accordance with His antecedent election. In other words, to exalt God's grace as it deserves, we must acknowledge the diversity that exists among individuals. The gospel is proclaimed to some, while others remain unacquainted with it, akin to God sending rain upon one region while leaving another utterly parched.

When we inquire as to why God takes pity on certain souls while seemingly forsaking or disregarding others, the answer is unequivocally that it is His sovereign pleasure to do so. When the gospel is proclaimed in one locale, some are profoundly moved and embrace it with unwavering faith, whereas others remain impervious or harden their hearts against God, manifesting the obstinacy that already resides within them. What distinguishes these two groups? It is the hand of God leading the former through His Holy Spirit while permitting the latter to persist in their innate corruption.

Hence, the most remarkable facet of God's benevolence toward us manifests through the proclamation of the gospel, where He extends His compassion, love, and a summons to draw us nearer to Him. Nevertheless, when the doctrine conveyed to us is embraced with an open heart and genuine affection, it becomes an even more distinctive sign that God intends to be our Father and has adopted us as His beloved offspring. In this light, St.

Paul aptly articulates in this passage that we are blessed by God in accordance with His prior election. We have not actively sought Him out, nor have we initiated the quest. Instead, we find ourselves irresistibly drawn to Him through His gracious revelation, as if God declares, "Here I am, here I am. Even though you have turned away from Me, I am willing to approach you because your salvation concerns Me deeply." Thus, we discern the profound purpose underlying St. Paul's message in this passage.

To sum it up, we must come to realize that we will never fully fathom the wellspring of our salvation until we elevate our contemplation to God's timeless design, in which He chose whomever He willed and allowed others to follow their own paths, leading to confusion and ruin. It is understandable that some individuals find this doctrine perplexing and foreign, for it runs counter to human logic. If you were to consult with philosophers, they would often contend that God favors those who merit His love, selecting as His people those naturally inclined to virtue. From our limited human perspective, it might seem that God discriminates among individuals based on their worthiness and merit. However, we must bear in mind that our own comprehension is inherently flawed, and it is not within our purview to pass judgment on God through the lens of our limited understanding. The audacity of superimposing our human standards upon God, insisting that His actions must conform to our notions of justice, reflects an unwarranted presumption. Thus, the crux of the matter revolves around reverencing the unfathomable mysteries of God, for failure to do so will impede our grasp of the tenets of faith. The foundation of our wisdom must eternally reside in humility, recognizing that we should not appraise God's judgments by our own criteria or appoint ourselves as assessors and arbiters of His deeds. We must exercise restraint in light of the constraints of our intellect and, acknowledging our own feebleness and inadequacy, extol the greatness of God. As holy Scripture instructs us [Psalm 36:6], "Lord, your plans are as unfathomable as the great deep, and no one can fully comprehend them."

It becomes evident that the reason some individuals struggle with this doctrine lies in their unwavering attachment to their own convictions, rendering them unable to humbly yield to God's wisdom and receive His teachings with sobriety and modesty. We should heed St. Paul's admonition: the natural disposition of humans fails to grasp God's hidden truths and dismisses them as utter folly [1 Cor. 2:14]. Why does this happen? Because we do not serve as His advisors; we rely upon His Holy Spirit to unveil His secrets to us, as otherwise, we would remain incapable of comprehending them. Moreover, we must accept these revelations in the measure and manner He chooses to bestow them upon us.

St. Paul addresses matters that we can only grasp through experience: our identity as God's children, His guidance through the Holy Spirit, the solace He provides in our tribulations, and the fortitude He instills within us. None of these revelations can be comprehended without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Given this, let us cultivate a disposition to set aside our preconceptions and remain receptive to whatever God imparts to us. We should relinquish our own judgments, firmly acknowledging that our contribution amounts to sheer ignorance. This is the perspective we must maintain.

Indeed, we can discern how St. Paul encourages us to reach this perspective. "Who are you, O mortal?" he inquires, "to dispute with your God?" [Rom. 9:20]. After enumerating the myriad arguments we often muster, he employs the term "mortal" to highlight our inherent fragility, likening us to lowly earthworms destined for decay [Psalm 103:14]. Therefore, it is audacious for us to engage in disputes with God. Is it not a reversal of the natural order? Do we possess the capacity to pluck the sun from the sky or cradle the moon between our teeth, as the saying goes? Even more unthinkable is our attempt to challenge God's judgments, which lie beyond our comprehension.

There are those who may reluctantly acknowledge the validity of this doctrine of predestination, as expounded by St. Paul here, out of deference to the Holy Spirit. However, they secretly wish it were never mentioned. Yet, in their efforts to suppress the Holy Spirit's proclamation of this truth through prophets, apostles, and even God's only Son, they reveal their folly. When our Lord seeks to assure us of our salvation, He directs our attention to this eternal election, underscoring it in the tenth and sixth chapters of John. Therefore, those who endeavor to stifle God's message and expunge what is presented in Holy Scripture are too late. The entirety of Scripture is valuable [2 Tim. 3:16], as St. Paul declared concerning the Law and the Prophets. Consequently, we can conclude that nothing in the gospel is redundant or inconsequential, for it serves to edify us in matters of faith and the reverence of God.

This doctrine is undeniably enshrined within the gospel, and the Holy Spirit proclaims it resoundingly. Those who seek to bury or silence it do so foolishly, attempting to sever what should remain inseparably united, displaying a devilish obstinacy against God. When God presents us with the boundless treasure of His mercies, it is far more fitting for these mercies to be proclaimed rather than discarded.

Two additional reasons underscore the vital importance of preaching this doctrine and the immense benefits it imparts. It would be preferable for us never to have been born than to remain ignorant of what St. Paul unfolds here. Two overarching objectives must guide our every endeavor and study, encompassing the entirety of God's teachings through Holy Scripture. Firstly, we must exalt God in a manner befitting His glory, and secondly, we must possess unwavering assurance of our salvation, granting us the liberty to address Him as our Father without reservation [Rom. 8:15]. Lacking these two foundations, true faith and genuine religion cannot take root within us, rendering our words about God mere falsehood.

Regarding the first point, as previously elucidated, the true nature of God's grace is only discerned when we contemplate His election. Were God to draw all individuals with perfect equality, and were salvation contingent upon each person's autonomous will, then it would be logical to conclude that we merit acceptance before God based on our own deserving. However, the magnificence of God's benevolence shines forth in a different manner: He precedes us with pure bounty, loving us unconditionally, absent any cause to love us in ourselves or in our deeds. To facilitate this, election is indisputably necessary: God selects some according to His sovereign pleasure while passing over others. Hence, God's glory remains incomplete until we acknowledge that He bestows His benevolence and love as He pleases.

As previously mentioned, the preaching of His Word constitutes an extraordinary blessing for us. This is why it is frequently underscored in the Law and the Prophets that God treated the descendants of Abraham distinctly by choosing and adopting them, as is attested by the law. The children of Israel were urged to extol God because He imparted His law to them [Deuteronomy 4:7], whereas the Gentiles were left as a people whose relationship with Him differed. Nevertheless, an even more extraordinary and unique privilege emerges when He permits us to benefit from His Word. Our ears may encounter these teachings daily, yet we would remain bereft unless God communicates with us through His Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

In this realm, God manifests a twofold grace. The first instance occurs when He appoints individuals to proclaim the gospel to us, for none are competent to do so in their own right. It is essential for God to dispatch those who beckon us toward Him, extending to us the promise of salvation. However, it is crucial to grasp that belief is unattainable unless God unveils Himself to us through His Holy Spirit and speaks directly to our hearts, in addition to addressing our ears through human voices. This is why the

prophet Isaiah inquires, "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" [Isaiah 53:1], underscoring that faith cannot exist unless God operates within the thoughts and sentiments of individuals by the power of His Holy Spirit. Likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ asserts that no one comes to Him unless drawn by the Father, and those who have been taught by the Father willingly submit to Him [John 6:44]. In summary, it becomes manifestly evident that God extends His mercy to us by illumining our understanding through His Holy Spirit, thereby drawing us toward faith in His gospel.

If such grace were indiscriminately conferred upon all without distinction, it would still be cause for us to extol God. However, when we witness some hardening their hearts, others wavering, some remaining steeped in unbelief, and others displaying utter indifference, the magnificence of God's grace shines even more brightly. As recounted by St. Luke, at the preaching of St. Paul, those who believed were appointed to receive salvation [Acts 13:48]. Although a multitude heard St. Paul's sermon, he possessed the grace that could have softened even the hardest of hearts. Nonetheless, many persisted in unbelief and obstinacy, while others embraced faith. St. Luke explicitly emphasizes that this disparity was not due to differing intelligence or virtue among individuals but rather because God had singled them out for salvation. Therefore, all human merits must be set aside, lest God's due praise be withheld. We must also apprehend that faith does not originate from within ourselves, for if it did, there would exist some merit in our deeds. Even as, through faith, we acknowledge our own wretchedness, damnation, and sins, faith itself would still be a meritorious work if it were initiated by our own volition. Consequently, we must unequivocally affirm that individuals cannot believe unless such a gift is bestowed from above.

Certainly, St. Paul proclaims something profoundly significant when he utters, "Blessed be God." And for what cause? Because He has enriched us

in Jesus Christ to such an extent that our lives are filled with happiness and blessedness. Furthermore, he appends, "according to His election of us." Does faith not stand among the spiritual riches St. Paul enumerates? Indeed, it ranks supreme among them all. Through faith, we receive the Holy Spirit; through faith, we find fortitude amidst life's adversities; through faith, we become obedient to God's will; through faith, we are sanctified for His divine service. In summation, faith claims the preeminent position among the spiritual benefits lavished upon us by God.

Let us keep in mind the sequence delineated by St. Paul. He asserts that God has bequeathed us faith, along with these other blessings, in accordance with His choice of us. Hence, we discern that faith is contingent upon God's sovereign election; to suggest otherwise would be to impugn the veracity of St. Paul's teaching. On the first note, it is evident that those who recoil from open discussions on predestination manifest a vehement antagonism to God's grace and endeavor to shroud it in obscurity. Concealing it equates to undermining the very core of all true religion.

The second note pertains to the assurance of our salvation. Some contend that we should harbor doubt, approaching God with a mere hope that He may deign to accept us. To possess unwavering assurance is deemed presumptuous. However, when we approach God in prayer, we must address Him as Father, at least if we are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He has explicitly instructed us to do so.

Now, when we address Him as Father, is it a mere formality, or do we truly believe that He is our Father? Without genuine conviction, our prayers become hollow, mere acts of hypocrisy. Papists, in this regard, fail to grasp the essence of praying to God because they lack the certainty of their salvation. In stark contrast, as we shall discern, particularly in the third chapter, Scripture instructs us that to approach God in prayer with sincerity, we must possess faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith that imbues us with

confidence, granting us boldness in our communion with Him. Thus, we must not waver or harbor doubts but be firmly persuaded and assured within our hearts that God regards us as His children. How can we achieve this conviction? By embracing His mercy through faith as extended in His gospel, and by anchoring ourselves in His eternal election. Were our faith reliant solely on our own strength, it might easily falter and be shaken. While we are indeed preserved by faith, as St. Peter attests [1 Peter 1:5], it is God who upholds us. Therefore, if our faith were not rooted in God's eternal election, it could be vulnerable to the snares of Satan. Our Lord Jesus provides the remedy to fortify us against all temptations when He declares, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." [John 15:16] Thus, we discern that God's eternal predestination not only glorifies Him but also secures our salvation, providing ample reason to reflect upon the profound wisdom St. Paul imparts in this passage.

It is true, as previously stated, that many raise objections upon hearing that God has chosen some according to His divine will while leaving others aside. They question why the majority has been seemingly rejected by God. However, it is akin to arguing that God's sovereign will should be subject to our own preferences. First and foremost, we must grasp that God is beholden to no one. Should we entertain the notion that He owes even the slightest concession to anyone, we would undermine His very sovereignty. Since God does not owe us anything, we should ponder the implications of our objections. If we were to insist that God treat all individuals alike, His freedom would be more constrained than that of finite beings. Consider this analogy: a wealthy person possesses the liberty to dispose of their wealth as they see fit. If they choose to bestow a gift upon one person, should they be dragged to court, with every individual demanding an equal share? Similarly, a loving parent may decide to elevate one of their children. Yet, if every needy child were to approach and demand the same treatment as a

matter of entitlement, it would be absurd. Hence, a person has the prerogative to adopt even the most distant stranger in the world as their own child and heir. By the same token, God extends His benevolence to all, causing His sun to shine on both the righteous and the unrighteous [Matthew 5:45]. However, He selects a specific number of individuals to confer the special privilege of adoption as His children. What then do we gain by challenging His divine wisdom? Some may contend that He appears to be showing favoritism, but this is not the case [Colossians 3:25]. He does not favor the rich over the poor or the noble over the humble [1 Corinthians 1:26]. Thus, it is fallacious to accuse God of partiality; rather, in choosing those who are undeserving, He reveals His unfettered goodness. He does not deem one person more worthy than another; He simply selects whomsoever He pleases.

What more could we possibly desire? It is only fitting that we find our contentment in God's sovereign will and exercise restraint, leaving Him to choose whomsoever He pleases. His divine will stands as the ultimate standard of justice and righteousness, silencing the mouths of the entire world [Romans 3:19]. Even though the wicked and the profane may grumble, complain, or even blaspheme, the Almighty is more than capable of upholding His righteousness and infinite wisdom. In due time, those who have raised their voices against Him will be utterly confounded. As for us, the profound teaching of St. Paul becomes clear. It is by no means a mysterious doctrine when he declares that God has blessed us. Indeed, by enlightening us with the faith of the gospel through His Holy Spirit and granting us a share in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has unequivocally demonstrated that He chose us before the foundation of the world. Therefore, it is imperative that we comprehend that to truly magnify God's grace, we must, as previously elucidated, trace it to its source and original cause, which is His divine election.

Now, we must further investigate this matter to completely dispel any notion of human merit or worthiness that some may attempt to assert. Human nature tends to attribute some semblance of merit to itself and struggles with the idea of being rendered utterly insignificant. Hence, St. Paul emphasizes the phrase, "before the foundation of the world," thereby dismantling such futile notions. He reminds us that we could not have presented ourselves at that time since we had not even come into existence. In reality, God chose us before the world's creation. What, then, could we have possibly offered Him at that point? Some individuals, particularly those who hold to the papal teachings, employ subtle arguments in this matter. They concede that God elected certain individuals unto salvation who had not yet merited it but argue that He foresaw their future worthiness. While they acknowledge that there was no merit before election in terms of order or time, they contend that God (as the omniscient one to whom all things are known) foresaw those who would become worthy. In making this assertion, they do not deny the concept of God's election. Consequently, to reveal that those who now vehemently reject it are acting in a manner akin to incarnate devils, engaging in more egregious and vile wickedness than even the papists, we must take into account that the papal adherents indeed affirm the idea of God's election and predestination, even before the creation of the world. They hold to this doctrine, whereas these dissenters deny it and seek to obliterate God's majesty by overturning His divine counsel.

The papal theologians, particularly the scholastic monks and friars, delve even deeper into this matter, acknowledging that this election is purely at the discretion of God, as He chooses individuals solely because it pleases Him. However, they subsequently convolute the issue, asserting that when God chose whom He pleased, it was in anticipation of their future worthiness. They base all their merits upon this notion, to the extent that they conclude individuals can earn their place in the heavenly kingdom through their own efforts. While they concede that election is a free gift,

they perpetually revert to the erroneous assumption that God foreknew those who would perform good deeds.

Yet, how could God foresee something that was utterly impossible? We know that all descendants of Adam are inherently corrupted and lack the capacity to conceive a single virtuous thought, let alone engage in righteous actions. Even if God were to tarry for a hundred thousand years for us, assuming we were to live that long, we would never draw nearer to Him or do anything other than perpetuate our wickedness, sealing our own condemnation. In brief, the more time people spend in this world, the deeper they sink into their own damnation. Thus, God could not have foreseen anything virtuous within us unless He Himself instilled it within us.

So, how do we draw near to God? How do we obey His divine will? How do we attain a tranquil heart that yields in accordance with faith? All these things have their origin in God Himself, meaning He must accomplish them entirely on His own. Therefore, when St. Paul affirms that God elected us before the foundation of the world, he presupposes a profound truth – namely, that God could not perceive any inherent goodness within us apart from the prevailing sinfulness. There was not even a hint of virtue for Him to discover. Hence, the fact that He chose us stands as irrefutable evidence of His unfettered grace. This same principle is illuminated in Romans 9, where St. Paul discusses the twins Jacob and Esau while still in their mother's womb, prior to any acts of good or evil. It is explicitly stated that the elder shall serve the younger, demonstrating that everything is determined by the One who calls, rather than by human deeds [Romans 9:11–12].

We can see, then, how St. Paul expounds upon this more extensively elsewhere but briefly alludes to it here. He underscores that since God elected us before the world's foundation, it is crystal clear that no individual

is inherently more deserving or virtuous than another, and God's choice was not contingent upon any inherent worthiness. Consequently, all adoration and praise must be directed solely toward God, with nothing attributed to humanity. This is the central point to grasp when St. Paul mentions our predestination before the creation of the world.

He further reinforces this truth by asserting that the same choice was made in Jesus Christ. If our election had been based on our own merit, one might argue that God found some hidden goodness within us, known only to Him. However, this is not the case, as He chose us apart from ourselves, loving us independently of any inherent qualities. How, then, should we respond to this divine reality? When I do good to someone, it is because I love them. If asked the reason for my affection, it might be attributed to shared qualities or some other valid rationale. However, we must not attempt to apply this human logic to God. St. Paul unequivocally informs us that we have been chosen in Jesus Christ. Did God have us in His thoughts when He decided to love us? No, for if that were the case, He would have utterly rejected us. True, He had compassion on us when considering our wretchedness, but that was because He had already loved us in Jesus Christ. Thus, God must have had Jesus Christ before Him as the model and mirror to behold us, signifying that He first beheld our Lord Jesus Christ before choosing and calling us.

In summary, after St. Paul vividly illustrated our incapacity to offer anything to God and how He acted out of His unmerited grace by choosing us before the creation of the world, he provides an even more compelling confirmation of this truth. This divine election occurred within our Lord Jesus Christ, who can be likened to the authentic registry. When God elected us from all eternity, it was as if He inscribed our names in the book of life. Jesus Christ serves as this registry, where we are recorded and acknowledged by God as His beloved children. Since God had us in view through Jesus Christ, it naturally follows that He did not find anything

within us upon which to base His choice. This is the eternal reality that we must etch deeply into our hearts and minds.

Furthermore, it is stated that this divine election is "so that we should be pure and blameless before God in love." The term "love" might be interpreted as pertaining to God, signifying that the sole reason for God choosing us as His children is His boundless love. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, St. Paul is unveiling the genuine condition of righteousness and perfection within the faithful, which is to lead lives of righteousness in the presence of God. We cannot delve exhaustively into its full meaning here, but in essence, St. Paul is conveying that while God's election is free and nullifies any human worthiness, deeds, or virtues, it does not grant us a license to engage in wrongdoing or live a disorderly life. Instead, it serves to rescue us from the evil in which we were once ensnared. By our very nature, we can do nothing but provoke the wrath of God, wickedness holds sway within us, and we are ensnared under the dominion of Satan. Thus, it is incumbent upon God to work in us and effect a transformation, for all goodness springs forth from His divine election, as St. Paul has so clearly articulated.

So, you discern that what St. Paul aimed to convey to the faithful is that just as God elected them through His boundless grace, He does not grant them permission to indulge in wickedness. Rather, His purpose is to preserve and safeguard them in a state of purity, set apart for Himself. God's election of us and His call to holiness are intimately intertwined, as St. Paul elucidates in another passage, affirming that we are called not to impurity and filthiness but to a life of consecration to God in all piety and holiness [1 Thessalonians 4:7].

Now, as we stand on the brink of partaking in the supper of our Lord Jesus Christ—a sacred moment that serves both as a seal of our divine election and the anchor of our hope for salvation, and as the source of all spiritual

blessings emanating from God's unfailing love—let us acknowledge that God bestows His abundant riches upon us not for our misuse but with the intention of receiving glory from us. Our praise of Him should not be confined merely to words, but it should resonate in the entirety of our lives. In light of the fact that we receive all things from Him, let us also learn to belong wholly to Him and willingly submit ourselves to His divine authority so that He may possess us in perfect peace. Our primary aim should always be to earn His favor, to bear the distinctive marks of His children, and to authentically walk under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, all while addressing Him as our loving Father. This, essentially, is the profound lesson we should glean from this passage until we proceed further.

Now, let us humbly bow before the majesty of our benevolent God, acknowledging our faults and limitations. May we beseech Him to grant us a deep awareness of our shortcomings, a revelation that continually propels us toward a growing reverence for Him, and a steadfast commitment to increasing in the fear of the Lord. In the interim, may we patiently bear our weaknesses while steadfastly rejoicing in His boundless grace, trusting that He will fully forgive and wipe away all our sins for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. With these thoughts in our hearts, let us collectively affirm, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father."

The Third Sermon on the First Chapter

> According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the

> praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. - Ephesians 1:4-6

I previously began to elucidate that it is entirely improper for us to engage in licentious living under the pretext of God's predestination of us before the world's inception. We must not employ this as an excuse to surrender ourselves to all forms of wrongdoing, assuming that we are immune to perishing because God has chosen us as His beloved children. We must not sever what God has firmly linked together. In light of His choice for us to lead lives of sanctity and moral purity, our divine election should serve as the foundational source of good fruits in our lives. When God leaves us in our natural condition, we are inevitably inclined toward wickedness, for human nature is inherently corrupt and prone to sin. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to undergo a profound transformation through God's grace, a transformation that encompasses His predestination of us even before our birth.

Moreover, we ought to take heed that God occasionally permits His chosen ones to stray temporarily, allowing them to appear as if lost, only to lovingly gather them back into His fold at His chosen time. This experience serves to humble them and magnify God's boundless goodness and mercy before the eyes of the world. Had God ordained His elect to lead perfect lives from infancy, it might not be as apparent that such righteousness is the fruit of His grace and the workings of His Holy Spirit. Yet, when individuals who were once mired in sin are transformed, it becomes evident that such a transformation cannot transpire without the divine intervention of God. Consequently, we must acknowledge that every ounce of goodness within us is owed to God. We should approach this realization with humility, recognizing that we were on a perilous path until He mercifully rescued us from it. Some erroneously hold the belief that God steers His elect from their earliest moments, instantly consecrating them upon birth. However, this notion contradicts both our experiences and the teachings of

St. Paul to the Corinthians and Romans, which clearly demonstrate that God effects the transition from iniquity to holiness in individuals.

It is imperative that we eternally bear in mind that God has chosen us not to permit us to live in unrighteousness, but rather to beckon us toward lives of holiness. Had He not extended His grace to us, we would remain as wretched outcasts, captives to our own corrupt inclinations, persistently drawn toward evil. Our inclination toward righteous living is the direct result of God's unfettered mercy, a divine benevolence manifested long before our birth and the inception of the world. This passage soundly refutes the blasphemous assertions of those who seek to disentangle God's sovereign election from a life characterized by righteousness, arguing that, by virtue of being divinely chosen, we are immune to the consequences of our actions. The answer is straightforward: deprived of God's predestination, rebellion against righteousness would inevitably dominate our lives, given the natural tendencies of our fallen human nature. We engage in acts of righteousness because God guides and directs us through His Holy Spirit, all owing to His gracious election. Therefore, let us remain steadfast in preserving the inseparable union ordained by God.

Moreover, it is crucial for us to grasp that God's transformative work in us and His guidance toward the righteous path does not signify instantaneous or lifelong perfection. St. Paul does not assert that God leads His chosen ones to a state of flawless perfection but rather that He steers them in that direction. Our journey towards perfection extends throughout our entire earthly existence, and even until our last breath, we remain in the process of growth and learning. We must continuously acknowledge the presence of many faults within ourselves. Those who believe they have reached perfection are either ensnared by the deceits of hypocrisy and the snare of pride, or they lack the true fear of God in their hearts, thus becoming nothing more than empty pretenders. Those who engage in honest self-

examination will invariably discover a reservoir of vices within, leading them to humility and deep introspection.

Individuals who proclaim that we can attain perfection while inhabiting these mortal bodies are either ensnared by the treacherous grip of pride or stand as irreligious and impious souls bereft of true piety. For us, it is paramount to recognize that God has elected us to be blameless, but such a state remains beyond our reach until we are liberated entirely from our inherent weaknesses and have departed from this sinful prison in which we are presently ensnared. Consequently, when we encounter blemishes within ourselves, we should confront them with unwavering courage, unyielding in the face of discouragement that might lead us to question whether we are indeed children of God, simply because we have yet to achieve faultlessness in His sight. Our sins, which render us blameworthy, always remain in our consciousness.

Even as we encounter numerous inner struggles that may seem to divert us from the righteous path, we must persevere, ever conscious of the enduring journey that accompanies our sojourn in this earthly realm. We must continue our onward progress, cognizant that we have not yet arrived at our journey's end. Such understanding should fortify the hearts of the faithful, leading us to sigh and groan beneath the weight we carry. The perfection of the faithful and God's children is found in our recognition of our own frailty and in our entreaties to God, not only for the correction of our misdeeds but also for His enduring forbearance, appealing for mercy rather than facing the full brunt of His severity. Thus, our refuge and aid rest in God's boundless mercy, which veils and pardons all our transgressions. We have not yet attained the pinnacle of holiness and blamelessness to which He summons us. Nevertheless, we must press onward, unwavering in our course.

If, in this context, the term 'love' pertains to our fellow human beings, then St. Paul seeks to underscore the essence of genuine righteousness for Christians. This essence resides in walking the path of faithfulness and uprightness. Many hypocrites endeavor to appease God with ostentatious ceremonies and outward displays of piety while simultaneously engaging in deeds of wickedness: acts of thievery, envy, malice, cruelty, treachery, intemperance, and licentiousness. St. Paul decisively rebukes such hypocrisy by asserting that true Christians should tread the path of love, which serves as the bond of perfection and the embodiment of God's law. Only in this way can our lives gain God's approval. This is the profound lesson we should draw from this passage.

Moreover, let us humbly acknowledge that every virtue and goodness dwelling within us originates from God. Whether we exhibit zeal, strive against our vices, or obediently follow the path of the Divine, it is because God ordained it so – an outcome of His prior election. We must firmly grasp that the credit for our righteous actions belongs to God, and we should never withhold from Him the praise rightfully His. Even if we were to lead lives as virtuous as angels, ascribing such righteousness to our own willpower and endeavors would be grievous error, missing the essential truth. All our virtuous deeds ought to resound with the glory of God, not ourselves. St. Paul's intent in this passage is to continually remind us of God's gratuitous choice, underscoring that all goodness springs forth from this divine source.

He promptly adds that "we are predestined by adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." When St. Paul asserts that God has predestined us through adoption, he underscores that our status as God's children arises not from our inherent nature but solely from His boundless grace. This grace is not contingent upon anything God foresees in us, as previously elucidated, but solely because He predetermined and designated us for such adoption. The cause of this

adoption resides entirely within God Himself. St. Paul underscores that all of this unfolds in and through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the pivotal message in this passage is that we attain the status of God's children solely through His selection of us in Himself. Our origin is not derived from human lineage or inheritance, and it is not a consequence of flesh and blood. This serves as a poignant reminder that absent divine intervention, humanity remains disconnected from God's kingdom.

While it is true that our forefather Adam was originally created in the image of God [Genesis 1:26] and possessed inherent excellence, the advent of sin rendered us all entirely helpless. Even Adam himself, after the onset of sin, was utterly devoid of strength. His free will, initially bestowed upon him, merely rendered him more culpable, as he fell willingly through his own disobedience. This underscores his inherent instability, for though meticulously formed, he fell from grace and thereby brought ruin upon himself and all of us. Consequently, we are all born as children of divine wrath, bearing God's curse [Ephesians 2:3].

As long as we persist in our fallen state, we are marred by nothing but eternal death. Thus, it is incumbent upon God to graciously beckon us to Himself, for we are entirely incapable of purchasing such a lofty calling. We lack the gold, silver, or virtues to reciprocate God for such a profound and magnificent privilege. In essence, this divine calling does not derive from any earthly source but solely from God's act of adoption [John 1:13]. Here, St. Paul employs the term "adoption" to signify God's selection of us as His children. When a person adopts a child, they choose that child as their heir, and all their possessions subsequently pass to the child under that title. Similarly, we, as heirs of heavenly life, are divinely chosen and adopted by God as His cherished children. What's more, St. Paul does not merely extol God's grace but also declares that God has preordained and predestined this divine arrangement.

St. Paul has masterfully gathered all elements that might debunk the misguided beliefs suggesting that we could somehow contribute to God or raise ourselves to a level where we become acceptable to Him. Every pretense must be shattered, leaving only God's grace to be recognized in this matter. Hence, he reiterates "through Jesus Christ." If someone inquires why and how God predestined us to be His children, it is purely because He took delight in considering us in Christ. As elucidated earlier, Jesus Christ serves as a mirror that brings God pleasure. The distinction lies in this truth. Furthermore, St. Paul underscores that God's selection of us was "in Himself." Though God is the author of all goodness, St. Paul aims to emphasize that no other cause influenced Him to choose us apart from His own sovereign will. St. Paul eliminates any room for partiality by stating that God elected us in Himself. If God had discovered merit, worthiness, disposition, goodness, virtue, or anything in us that pleased or met His approval, we would not have been chosen in Himself; our role would have been a part of the process.

Hence, St. Paul implies that individuals gravely deceive themselves when they assume they possess any intrinsic worth or have readied themselves to receive such grace. To genuinely comprehend the foundation and origin of our salvation and its supreme and exclusive source, we must direct our gaze to God's divine plan. This is precisely what St. Paul conveys when he declares that God accomplished it in Himself.

Nevertheless, St. Paul takes this even further by appending, "according to the good pleasure of His own will." Had he only employed the word "will," it would have sufficed, as we have already witnessed and elucidated, to convey that St. Paul was chosen according to God's will. Why? Because he was neither fit nor deserving of apostleship, except that it pleased God to designate him. Thus, St. Paul does not boast of having earned his apostleship but humbly recognizes it as a gracious gift from God. This underscores the significance of the term "will," not in one instance alone

but consistently throughout the sacred Scriptures. Whenever God's will is mentioned, it serves to emphasize that humanity cannot contribute anything of their own. However, St. Paul employs an even more robust term here, declaring, "according to the good pleasure." Essentially, he conveys that God's will is the cause of our salvation, and we should not seek other explanations or avenues. Yet, owing to human ingratitude and wickedness, which frequently obscure God's glory, it is imperative for us to grasp that it emanates from the good pleasure of His will. This signifies an independent will that relies solely on itself, regardless of external factors. God graciously selects us because it pleases Him.

Now we can grasp why those who attempt to ascertain the cause of God's election of us would, if given the chance, undermine His eternal purpose, for the two are inseparably entwined. If God has indeed chosen us, as this passage reveals, then nothing hinges upon our merits or anything we might proffer. God acted in accordance with His own free will, without discovering any rationale other than His good pleasure. Some may find this perplexing because they strive to approach God too familiarly. This audacious disposition demonstrates their disregard for God's sovereignty in pure freedom, where what pleases Him is received as good, just, and right without contradiction. Nevertheless, regardless of how vociferously individuals may protest, this decree, delivered by the Holy Spirit through St. Paul, remains unalterable. It unequivocally asserts that we should not search for any deeper cause of our election than the good pleasure of God, which emanates from His own free will. He chose us when we were utterly undeserving, and His solitary impetus lies encapsulated in the phrase, "it pleased me." This elucidates the vital lesson we should draw from St. Paul's words.

St. Paul promptly appends that this election is "to the praise of the glory of His grace." In this declaration, he unveils the ultimate motive that impelled God to select us: that His grace might be extolled, not in an ordinary or

commonplace manner, but with a particular brilliance. He intertwines these two elements to evoke profound reflection when contemplating how God has plucked us from the abyss of damnation, flung wide the gates of His kingdom for us, and summoned us to the inheritance of salvation. This reaffirms the point I previously underscored: those who attempt to erase or sidestep discussions of God's predestination expose themselves as fierce adversaries of God's adoration. They mistakenly assume that such adulation fades into obscurity. But who possesses the authority to make such a judgment? Do they believe themselves wiser than God, who unmistakably refutes their assertions? It is undeniable that the wicked will invariably unearth reasons to blaspheme, and they cannot be deterred. Nevertheless, God has ample justification to vindicate Himself, and those who oppose Him and His righteousness shall be disconcerted.

With that said, it is not without justification that St. Paul proclaims that God is justly glorified, and His exalted praise is upheld when we acknowledge that He freely selected whomever He willed. There exists no other rationale for the distinction between individuals: those who are reprobate perish because they merit it, while those called to salvation ought not to seek an alternative cause but rather recognize it in this gratuitous adoption.

Furthermore, through these words, St. Paul also kindles within us a fervent and zealous praise for God. Mere confession of our salvation as a product of God's pure liberality is insufficient if it remains tepid and detached. Rather, we should be ignited with an ardent dedication to His praise, as if our entire being were wholly consecrated to this purpose. St. Peter underscores that, having been rescued from the abyss of death, we possess every reason to extol the indescribable praises of God. By this, he conveys that even when the faithful exert their utmost efforts to extol God's benevolence, they will never fully achieve it, for it is beyond comprehension. Thus, we must grasp that humanity will never ascribe to God His rightful glory until every reason for boasting is utterly

extinguished. Even if we were to disregard God's election, He would still be deserving of praise. When we contemplate the wonders He unveils to us in His creation, there exists abundant cause to engage in continuous praise throughout our lives. Similarly, when His gospel is proclaimed, we find reason for praise, even without explicit mention of His election. However, people would deprive God of His primary praise, erroneously believing they had faith through their own initiative and free will. As I previously emphasized, faith is a fruit of election. The sole distinction between us and unbelievers lies in God's outstretched hand, drawing us to Himself through hidden means while we were turning away and estranged. In summation, St. Paul asserts that God's praise will never receive the honor it deserves until we acknowledge His election as the cause of all the blessings He lavishes upon us. Devoid of this acknowledgment, we would steal a portion of the praise for ourselves, robbing God of His rightful glory. To conclude, this passage instructs us that we must wholly humble ourselves, ensuring that God receives His due praise, with none sharing in His glory. All must confess that He is both the origin and the culmination of our salvation.

We must also carefully contemplate how St. Paul adds that 'of his own grace he has accepted us in his well-beloved.' This further elucidates why our salvation rests exclusively upon God's election and free grace. Men will not relinquish their foolish presumption unless they are so utterly overwhelmed that words fail them. Therefore, St. Paul makes it clear that we are condemned and lost within ourselves. When such a thunderbolt descends upon us, we ought not to display insolence. If individuals persist in fruitlessly searching for something within themselves apart from God's grace, this declaration should suffice to dissuade them. We were not within God's favor until we were enveloped in Jesus Christ, for we stand wholly condemned and accursed in our natural state. This matter has been expounded sufficiently, yet our sluggish understanding and hypocrisy often obstruct our comprehension of what should be plain to us. In truth, our own experience should instruct us in this matter. Were it not for hypocrisy

clouding our vision, we would discern the wickedness within us, and God's wrath would strike us with fear. Nevertheless, God must compel us to obedience, for we are incapable of entirely relinquishing self-praise to Him on our own. Therefore, let us grasp the significance of this statement, affirming that we were received into favor in Jesus Christ because He is the beloved of God. Why is Jesus Christ designated as God's beloved, as evident in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew and other passages, as elucidated by the prophet Isaiah? This title signifies that God justly despises and abhors us while we remain in our natural condition.

If this title were not exclusively reserved for Jesus Christ, then it would have been in vain for God to declare, 'This is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' If this title is unique to Jesus Christ, then no other creature can rightfully claim it. While God indeed loves His angels, they cannot attain perfect favor from Him without Jesus Christ. As for us, a profound consideration arises. Sin has estranged us from God, causing Him to regard us as His adversaries and turning away from us. Therefore, among humanity, Jesus Christ alone is beloved, while the rest of us are rejected and disowned by God to the extent that He repented of having made humankind. This implies that we are not even worthy to be counted among the lowliest creatures such as donkeys or dogs. Despite any boasting or self-aggrandizement, the Holy Spirit debunks the pride of those who presume themselves worthy. Thus, let us recognize that if we are counted as enemies of God, we are in a far worse state than if we had never been created.

However, St. Paul reassures us that 'God has accepted us in His well-beloved.' Just as our Lord Jesus Christ is received by God the Father as the beloved, not only in His own person but also extending to all the members of His body, we are reconciled and God embraces us as His children, even though we were once His enemies and utterly detestable to Him. Nevertheless, we must consistently revisit the topic of election, as the

graces bestowed upon us through our Lord Jesus Christ also originate from the same divine source.

Continuing on the subject I have previously touched upon, St. Paul highlights our great need to be beloved in Jesus Christ. Without God's persuasion, we would never genuinely recognize that we owe everything to Him. Our natural inclination is always to seek self-advancement, and everyone seeks to reserve something for themselves, even if it amounts to no more than a trivial token.

However, St. Paul, in contrast, reveals that God must truly love us apart from any merit within ourselves, and our acceptability to Him cannot be based on our own qualities. Why? Because we are captives and slaves to sin, held under the oppressive yoke of Satan, ensnared in the shackles of death until we are ransomed by our Lord Jesus Christ. The essence of this teaching lies in urging humanity to look beyond themselves and find their salvation in the pure goodness of God, particularly through the means presented here, which involves turning to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two harmful extremes must be vigilantly avoided. Firstly, when approaching our Lord Jesus Christ, we should never entertain the notion that there is any inherent worthiness in us that merits His bestowal of benefits. How can we correct this vice? By acknowledging God's gratuitous election. Men often overestimate the capabilities of their free will and form inflated opinions about their own merits and worthiness, failing to grasp that their value is derived solely from God's acceptance, driven by His innate goodness and grace through His prior election in His eternal counsel.

Hence, we cannot attribute the commencement of our salvation to God unless we confess that we were utterly condemned and accursed when He adopted us, and that the inception of His adoption of us can be traced to His predestination before the dawn of creation.

The second perilous extreme we must guard against is the realm of speculation. There are those whose imagination leads them to say, "Since I may never ascertain if God has chosen me, I shall remain in my state of perdition." Yet, this stems from their failure to approach Jesus Christ. How can we come to know that God selected us before the world's inception? It is through our faith in Jesus Christ. As previously mentioned, faith is the fruit of election, with the root concealed within. Whoever believes is thereby assured that God has been at work within them, and faith serves as an authentic duplicate of the original document of our adoption, graciously granted to us by God.

I express these matters in terms familiar to humanity, for we understand that God does not employ paper or parchment to inscribe our names. As mentioned before, the ledger in which we are inscribed is our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, God reserves knowledge of our election unto Himself, akin to a prince safeguarding the chief and original document. However, He furnishes us with sufficiently reliable copies or deeds, imprinting them upon our hearts through His Holy Spirit to demonstrate that we are indeed His children.

You can discern that the faith we hold in our Lord Jesus Christ is ample to secure our confidence in our election. What more could we require? I previously elucidated that Jesus Christ serves as the mirror in which God perceives us when He seeks to find us pleasing in His sight. From our perspective, He is the mirror upon which we must fix our gaze to ascertain our election. For anyone who believes in Jesus Christ is unmistakably a child of God and, consequently, an heir, as I have proclaimed before. The conclusion, therefore, is that if we possess faith, we are also recipients of divine adoption. Why does God grant us faith? It is because He elected us prior to the world's inception. This establishes an unerring sequence: the faithful receive God's grace, embrace His mercy, acknowledge Jesus Christ

as their Head to attain salvation in His path, and in this way, they possess the sure knowledge that God has adopted them.

Indeed, election, in its essence, remains shrouded in secrecy. It is a purpose so profound and concealed that we can only marvel at its mystery. Yet, notwithstanding its enigmatic nature, God reveals it to us when necessary, understanding that it is for our welfare and salvation. He does so when He illuminates us with the faith that emanates from the gospel. Thus, you can discern why, after St. Paul expounded on God's eternal election, he presented Jesus Christ as the One to whom we must turn in order to obtain assurance of God's love for us and His acknowledgment of us as His children. Consequently, He adopted us before we knew Him and even before the world's inception.

Furthermore, it is crucial for us to grasp from this passage that the doctrine of predestination should not serve as fuel for extravagant and unproductive speculations. Rather, it is a doctrine designed to humble us and dispel the erroneous belief in our inherent worthiness and merits. It underscores God's absolute power, privilege, and sovereign dominion over us. He possesses the authority to reprobate whom He deems fit and to elect whom He pleases. This realization should lead us to exalt and glorify Him, acknowledging that He chose us in Jesus Christ, thereby securing us firmly through the unwavering faith we place in His gospel. As members of His divine family, with Jesus as our Head, we are bound together in a sacred union that can never be severed as long as we remain steadfast in our belief in His gospel. It is to Him that we must turn for the assurance of our salvation.

Through our experiences, we discern that God has indeed adopted and chosen us. He calls us, offering assurance through His gospel that He will be our Father. This assurance is indelibly etched upon our hearts by His Holy Spirit and is utterly truthful. Although the gospel may be proclaimed

to all, even to those who are ultimately reprobate, God does not extend to them the special grace of granting them spiritual life.

Hence, when we find our adoption deeply engraved in our hearts, it serves as a trustworthy and unwavering pledge that God will guide us to the very end. He has initiated our journey toward salvation and will lead us to the perfection to which He beckons us. Without His divine guidance, we could not even take a single step along this path.

Therefore, let us approach the majesty of our benevolent God with humility, confessing our shortcomings and faults. May we beseech Him to deepen our awareness of our own imperfections, leading us to abhor our vices and sinful ways. In our pursuit of healing, we must never stray from Him as He reveals Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. We must remain steadfast on this path, fully aware that we are chosen in Him, sustained, and preserved for His name's sake. He will continue to work within us until we have completed our earthly journey and arrived at the heavenly inheritance that awaits us. We earnestly implore Him to grant us unwavering strength to persevere, even when our destination seems distant. May He continually renew us in His image until His divine likeness shines brilliantly within us, making us partakers of the glorious immortality that He has lovingly secured for us. In our prayers, we extend our heartfelt pleas for His grace not only to ourselves but to all peoples and nations.

The Fourth Sermon on the First Chapter

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded

> toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." - Ephesians 1:7-10

I have previously explained that our reception of God's love hinges entirely upon His only Son. Even the angels in heaven are not deemed worthy of God's children without a head and mediator. So, where does that leave us, who continually provoke God's anger with our daily iniquities (Isaiah 59:2)? In fact, we find ourselves in direct opposition to Him! Therefore, God must, by necessity, look upon us through the lens of His only Son, or else He is compelled to harbor hatred and abhorrence toward us. In summary, our sins create such an impassable chasm between God and us that approaching Him without immediately sensing His majestic wrath upon us would be impossible, as if He were poised to obliterate us entirely.

Now, we must delve into how God graciously welcomes us into His favor through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is precisely what St. Paul conveys by adding that "in Him, we have redemption through His blood, that is, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). First and foremost, we must comprehend that God's enmity towards us does not stem from our intrinsic nature but rather from our corruption. I say it is not a matter of our nature because, since God has fashioned us, it is indisputable that He cannot harbor hatred towards our very being. However, humanity has become deeply tainted and is ensnared in all forms of wickedness, compelling God to be a fierce adversary to us and stand in opposition until the remembrance of our sins is effaced from His sight. For we remain deserving of eternal damnation until we are restored, since God, the source of all justice and righteousness, must naturally abhor the evil He perceives in us. Thus, until our sins are erased, it is impossible for us to entertain the hope that God will extend His favor or affection towards us.

But let us carefully consider how St. Paul employs two pivotal words to elucidate how we are reconciled with God. Firstly, he introduces the concept of ransom or redemption, which essentially signifies the same idea. Subsequently, he presents the forgiveness of sins. So, how does the soothing of God's wrath, the reconciliation between us and Him, and His gracious acceptance and recognition of us as His children come to pass? According to St. Paul, it is through the pardoning of our sins. Moreover, as pardon inherently entails redemption, he wisely intertwines these two concepts.

In truth, God blotted out our sins through His own boundless benevolence and revealed His abundant generosity, without seeking any recompense from us. Indeed, can any mortal ever make amends for the slightest misdeed they have committed? Even if each of us were to devote our entire lifetime to rectifying a single transgression, striving to earn favor from God through such efforts, it is undeniably clear that this undertaking far surpasses our capacities. Thus, God must extend His mercy to us without demanding reparation or satisfaction. Nevertheless, this pardon, bestowed upon us gratuitously, came at a great cost to the Son of God (1 Peter 1:19). He found no other currency than the shedding of His own blood, offering Himself as our guarantor both in body and soul, representing us before God's judgment to secure our absolution. Our Lord Jesus Christ wholeheartedly embraced this mission, bearing the immense anguish not only outwardly, through a cruel and ignominious death in the eyes of humanity but also inwardly, as if God Himself were His judge. He presented Himself on behalf of sinners to provide complete atonement. This is why St. Paul has united these two terms in this passage.

Hence, we must first recognize that we can receive no grace from God or be welcomed by Him until our sins are erased, and their memory completely obliterated. As previously noted, God detests sin wherever it resides. Thus, as long as He perceives us as sinners, He must naturally abhor us, for within us and our very nature lie nothing but various forms of evil and turmoil.

Consequently, we remain His adversaries, and He stands opposed to us until we turn to the remedy presented by St. Paul here, which is the forgiveness of our sins. From this, we glean that no one can garner God's love based on inherent merit. As elucidated before, God must be inclined to fix His gaze on our Lord Jesus Christ and not on us at all. Moreover, it is unmistakable that we are unworthy of God's acceptance until He has pardoned our debts and adopted us, despite our standing as worthy of death in His presence. Thus, we perceive that our understanding of salvation, as Zacharias' song tells us, is rooted in God's mercy and the remission of our sins, which render us His adversaries (Luke 1:77).

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that the full remission of our sins through God's gratuitous goodness is not extended without the ransom paid by our Lord Jesus Christ. This ransom is not in gold or silver, as St. Peter mentions in his first epistle (1:18), but it was imperative for the immaculate Lamb to offer Himself for this purpose. Therefore, whenever we seek God's favor and mercy, let us fix our entire focus on the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, where we find the means to placate God's wrath. Furthermore, since our sins are blotted out through such payment and satisfaction, we must grasp that we cannot contribute anything of our own to reconcile ourselves with God. In this, we discern how the adversary, through cunning, has undermined all hope of salvation in the world by promoting the belief that every individual must redeem themselves and make amends with God. This is precisely what people term as good works, merits, and virtues within papal teachings. What, then, is the purpose of all the elaborate inventions they have concocted? Why do they engage in ceaseless self-mortification, tirelessly performing various acts and rituals? The objective of all these endeavors is to appease God. Therefore, all the virtuous deeds upheld in papal doctrine are naught but methods to atone for sins.

However, such a mindset effectively nullifies the very ransom St. Paul speaks of here. These two aspects, the act of God erasing our sins from His memory and casting them into the depths of the sea, and His acceptance of the payment made in the person of His only Son, are intimately intertwined. We cannot obtain one without the other. Thus, if we yearn for God's favor, we must acknowledge our status as His adversaries until He, in His boundless mercy, forgives all our debts. Additionally, we must recognize the pivotal role our Lord Jesus Christ plays as the mediator between Him and us. Through His sacrificial death, He secures an everlasting atonement for us, and it is in this atonement that we must perpetually seek refuge.

Indeed, the entirety of our Lord Jesus Christ's life serves as our ransom because the obedience He demonstrated in this world to God His Father compensated for Adam's transgression and all the iniquities for which we stand indebted. However, St. Paul specifically mentions His blood here, for we are obligated to turn our focus to His death and passion as the means by which all our sins are washed away. It is for this reason that God, in the ordinances of the law, established that reconciliation with Him could only be attained through this avenue.

It is true that Jesus Christ not only shed His blood through His death but also endured the fears and terrors that rightfully belonged to us. Nevertheless, St. Paul encompasses the entirety of this concept under a single heading, as is customary in holy Scripture. In sum, we must learn to discover our righteousness solely in God's manifestation of His mercy, freely extended to us by His own benevolence. We must not presume to present any of our virtues before Him to claim a debt. It should suffice for us that He welcomes us into His love, not on account of our own worthiness but because the memory of our sins is forever removed from His presence. We must recognize that this can only be achieved through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is upon this foundation that we must entirely rely.

Furthermore, St. Paul emphasizes that "all is done according to the riches of God’s grace." He has a compelling reason for underscoring God's mercy in accepting us favorably. On one hand, we witness how individuals deceive themselves with their foolish self-assurance. Most people have perpetually harbored the belief that they could make amends for their sins through their own acts of satisfaction and an array of other maneuvers. In response to this human inclination toward self-deception, St. Paul, to dispel these misconceptions, asserts that we must be overwhelmed by the boundless wealth of God's grace. He could have simply stated that God accomplishes everything through His grace, but by invoking great treasures, he aims to dissuade people from the erroneous notion that they can bring mere pennies when their needs amount to millions. In reality, when adherents of papal doctrine speak of their acts of satisfaction, they do not claim to be comprehensive in every aspect. Instead, they hold the erroneous belief that, in addition to the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, they can supplement it with their own contributions. They erroneously believe they can perform various deeds, bit by bit, to satisfy and appease God. Thus, we witness this deceptive perspective prevalent in papal teachings, where they rely on masses, recite numerous prayers, embark on pilgrimages, observe various feasts, partake in diverse devotions, and even wear hair-shirts, all with the misguided intent of complementing the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, as if it were insufficient.

Still, St. Paul reminds us that the goodness of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is an immeasurable treasure that eclipses all else. When we contemplate the immense kindness God bestows upon us, it becomes audacious to think that our humble deeds, like pilgrimages and other devotions, hold any value or merit. Is it as if the blood of Jesus Christ is insufficient to be the price and ransom for our salvation? On one hand, St. Paul aimed to eliminate vain notions where people believe they can appease God's wrath through acts of self-satisfaction and payments. On the other hand, he sought to aid our weakness. Although we are prone to harbor

grandiose beliefs about our own virtues and deceive ourselves into thinking God owes us greatly, in moments of earnest prayer and trust in God, Satan may tempt us to despair. We may be assailed by trials and tribulations that leave us so disheartened that all the promises in Holy Scripture and all that is proclaimed to us about the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ fail to give us hope. Thus, St. Paul, to counteract this deeply rooted vice of unbelief, presents the vast treasures of God's goodness, so that our self-conceit may be entirely submerged. God condescends to display such boundless kindness toward us.

Furthermore, he adds that "He has made the same grace to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding." With these words, he unveils the means by which we can attain what he previously mentioned. Our ultimate happiness and well-being hinge on reconciliation with God, allowing Him to recognize us as His children and enabling us to address Him as our Father with complete freedom. But how can we attain this when we are so distant from it? Although we are utterly unworthy and incapable of achieving anything, it is said that in Jesus Christ, we will find everything that is lacking in ourselves. His death and passion will suffice as a sacrifice to obliterate the memory of all our transgressions.

However, does it then follow that all individuals partake in this benefit secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ? No, for unbelievers have no share in it. It is a unique privilege for those whom God gathers to Himself. St. Paul also underscores the indispensable role of faith, without which Christ's sacrifice will profit us naught [Gal. 5:4]. Thus, once we comprehend the blessings brought to us by Christ and offered to us daily through His gospel, we must unite with Him through faith. For Jews, Turks, Papists, and others of the like, are severed from Christ and languish in their own corruption because they presume to perform wonders themselves. It is a common principle among Papists, Jews, Turks, and all manner of heathens that they must appease God's wrath. And how do they seek to do this? Through a

multitude of means of their own invention, each person concocting their own ideas. Such individuals have no part in Christ. Therefore, if faith is the key to unlocking the door to access the treasure St. Paul has just described, then through faith, we shall be enriched sufficiently for our salvation, lacking nothing if we are joined to Christ.

Nevertheless, there is a significant reason why St. Paul has used these two words, 'wisdom' and 'understanding.' They signify that the teaching of the gospel is sufficient for our full growth, and anything added to it is mere waste, filth, and decay. In essence, St. Paul's reference to the gospel with these honorable terms implies that everyone should humbly listen to what God imparts through His only Son. We should be so receptive that we do not assume knowledge beyond what comes from His mouth. In all simplicity, we must accept whatever He teaches, even if the entire world rejects us and opposes us. We must not overly esteem worldly wisdom, as many are inclined to do, having itching ears and always seeking novelty. Therefore, to avoid becoming frivolous or harboring an unlawful desire for excessive knowledge, let us carefully note how St. Paul asserts here that if we have profited from the gospel, we will find all the wisdom we need within it. Consequently, we should reject all other teachings, not just as unnecessary but as detrimental because they can lead us away from the pure doctrine that God intends to unite us with Him. To summarize, St. Paul aims to show that God bestows an immeasurable favor upon us when He calls us to the knowledge of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Once we have Him, we must disregard all else and not be consumed by the foolish desire to know more, for the fullness of our knowledge is found in knowing our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, consider why St. Paul declared himself a faithful teacher to the Colossians, aiming to bring them to the perfection of wisdom. Although he admitted that his speech was unrefined and plain [2 Cor. 11:6], lacking the worldly wisdom and eloquence praised in society, he asserted that if his

teachings were embraced, they would discover it brimming with substance for the complete nourishment of their souls, requiring no addition. When we hear these words today, we should heed the warning to restrain our insatiable and foolish curiosity, deeply ingrained within us. Instead, we should cling to the pure gospel doctrine and wholly rest upon it. This is the essential lesson to glean from this passage.

Furthermore, let us recognize what I have previously touched upon: every time the gospel is preached, God's grace is bestowed upon us. If we acknowledge His kindness and generosity, as evidenced by His provision of rain to make the earth fruitful for our physical nourishment, we should understand that when God sends us the message of salvation, He not only refreshes us for the well-being of our souls but also allows us to drink so deeply that we can be entirely satisfied. St. Paul doesn't merely suggest that the gospel brings us some relief when we are barren; he compares it to God showering an abundance of water upon us. Through this, we are not just refreshed but nourished, gaining strength to endure until the end. Therefore, we must highly esteem God's goodness when He draws us to Himself through the gospel, and we must realize that by this means, we come into possession of the benefits secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. He offers them to us through His Word, and He intends for us to receive them through faith.

For a more extensive exploration of this matter, St. Paul immediately adds that God's actions are guided by His revelation of the secret of His will, according to His own good pleasure and purpose predetermined within Himself. This should further enhance the value of the gospel, as it contains the once-hidden secrets of God. St. Paul consistently conveys this theme, not only in this letter but also throughout his writings, emphasizing how we should be deeply moved when the gospel is proclaimed. In the gospel, God unveils what was previously incomprehensible to all humanity, something no one could have believed or imagined. Initially, it appeared that God had

chosen only the line of Abraham, seemingly rejecting the rest of the world. Thus, it was a remarkable occurrence when His grace was poured out upon all people without distinction. We know that when Jesus Christ arrived in the world, the same people had fallen into degeneracy, and God's teachings had become corrupted with superstition among the Jews. At that point, it seemed hopeless, but unexpectedly, salvation was offered to all nations. Christ, who had been shrouded in profound obscurity, emerged as the sun of righteousness to illuminate the world.

For this reason, St. Paul asserts that in the gospel, we comprehend the secret of God's will. At first glance, the gospel may appear simple, and some scoffers consider its teachings suitable only for the unlearned. They pride themselves on devising more sophisticated ideas in their dreams than what Jesus Christ's doctrine contains. However, such individuals are unworthy to grasp the depths of what is revealed here, as their pride blinds them and makes them foolish. Nevertheless, the faithful clearly perceive the divine majesty within the gospel's teachings. St. Paul wants us to understand that when we approach the gospel, we are not coming to learn something ordinary but to transcend the worldly perspective. We can never be receptive to God's instruction or truly benefit from His school unless we rise above the world and show reverence for the words spoken by God Himself. In essence, the foundation and gateway to our faith is humility. However, genuine humility cannot exist unless we acknowledge that what God communicates far surpasses our own understanding and capacity. St. Paul's aim is for us to hold the gospel in reverence, firmly believing that it is not our place to judge whether God has spoken wisely or not. We must be fully convinced that everything originating from Him is characterized by infinite wisdom, devoid of any fault. Therefore, St. Paul intentionally introduces this concept to suppress all self-boasting, ensuring that we learn to respect the doctrine delivered to us in God's name with humility and modesty.

To emphasize our indebtedness to God, St. Paul reiterates the phrase "according to His good pleasure," which he had previously mentioned. This repetition serves to eliminate any notion of human worthiness. God's good pleasure can only come into play when we come to Him completely empty-handed. When we presume to offer anything to God, it obscures His grace, depriving it of its beauty and prominence as it should have. Therefore, to curb all vain confidence, St. Paul redirects us to God's good pleasure, implying that the gospel is preached to the world solely because of God's generous and free goodness. To quell human audacity, he further states that "God had purposed the said decree and the said high incomprehensible counsel of His will beforehand in Himself." Why do many people take such liberties in questioning, debating, and challenging God? It's because they believe they are dealing with matters that should be open and well-understood. Recognizing our foolishness and rashness in presuming to inquire into God's counsel, St. Paul likens it to a sealed letter, with God's counsel residing within Himself, beyond the reach of creatures. Attempting to rise higher is a sure path to self-ruin and disaster.

It is true that we should earnestly seek to understand God's will, but we must not go beyond what is revealed in His Word, for His Word is our guiding light. Where God chooses to remain silent, He intends for us to restrain ourselves, as if we were captives, and not venture further. Trying to know more than what is granted to us, exceeding what we ought to know, or going beyond what His Word imparts leads us into a labyrinth or, rather, the depths of hell. Therefore, let us grasp St. Paul's intent in this passage: whenever God keeps His purpose to Himself, we should bow our heads and be content with our ignorance. It is a cursed wisdom and leads us down the path to hell when we presume to know more than what God has taught us. On the contrary, our ignorance is wiser than all the worldly wisdom when we do not attempt to know anything beyond the guidance of God's Word.

Indeed, there is but one single and simple will in God. However, He reveals it to us according to our capacity and in a manner that is expedient and beneficial for us. As we have come to understand, the forgiveness of sins is a matter we cannot overlook, which is why Zacharias refers to it as the knowledge of salvation. It is equally vital for us to know where we can find the forgiveness of our sins. Without Jesus Christ, we remain God's enemies, lacking atonement and inner peace, while God's judgment looms over us. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is our source of peace. When we grasp the truths conveyed to us through God's Word, we must also revere the mysteries that remain hidden from us, as has been previously emphasized and will be revisited when discussing God's election. St. Paul once again employs the term 'foreordaining' here to emphasize that God predestined us before the creation of the world, though this was concealed until now. In essence, we must bear in mind that we are not called to understand the gospel through our own abilities, self-promotion, or by making God indebted to us through virtue. Rather, God, in His infinite goodness, has chosen to enlighten us. This was not a sudden whim on His part, as humans often make hasty resolutions, but a purpose established in His own counsel, even before time began.

If our restless spirits tempt us to inquire why God elected us beforehand and why He did not reveal it sooner, why it remained concealed until now, St. Paul clarifies that this purpose was, so to speak, hidden within God until it was disclosed to us. In short, we are not permitted to know more than what the gospel announces to us, and we are required to reverence it. For this reason, it is mentioned that this revelation occurred according to the dispensation of the truth in the fullness of time.

St. Paul illustrates that people may torment themselves, but they will fall short of their goal, and all their thoughts and speculations will fail if they persist in seeking to know more than God has allowed. If someone demands why God did not act more swiftly in this matter, they presume to be wiser

than God, displaying a devilish pride. Is the creature worthy of support from the earth when they exalt themselves so high? Therefore, St. Paul asserts that the arrangement of affairs belongs to God. Just as a person in their own home can dictate how their people are provided for, what they drink, eat, and how they sleep, how much more should we allow God to do so? Why should He have fewer privileges than the lowly earthworms? Let us, therefore, grant God the authority to govern His church and the salvation of His elect as He sees fit. For we are not meant to be judges or arbiters in this matter, measuring the times, years, months, or days. It should suffice us that God desires it to be this way.

Someone might argue and ask, "Why did God wait for four thousand years between the fall of Adam and the arrival of Christ? Could He not have sent the Redeemer earlier? During this time, countless people wandered in darkness, and a deluge engulfed the world, and yet Jesus Christ remained hidden. Moreover, only a small number of people experienced Him through types and shadows. Only the Jews, who awaited the Redeemer, found salvation through Him, and even they had to offer calves, sheep, and other animals to seek forgiveness for their sins and God's favor."

To understand this, let us turn to what is stated here in a single word: the time had not yet fully come. Why? Because God had ordained it so. This aligns with what we've already learned in the Epistle to the Galatians, where St. Paul refuted the misguided speculations of those who sought to exalt themselves beyond what is permitted. Therefore, let us recognize that it is God's special role to appoint times and seasons, and we must not consider any other time to be the appointed one than what He ordains. Even though we experience the changing seasons every year, if summer arrives late, we should restrain ourselves from murmuring against God. We can say, "If it pleases God to send us warmth, we will gladly welcome it." However, we must firmly believe that it is God who governs, and all sovereignty and authority belong to Him.

If we are expected to act with such humility regarding the natural order that is familiar to us, in which God reveals Himself, how much more should we humble ourselves when it comes to the secrets of the heavenly kingdom, the eternal salvation of our souls, and the profound mystery of the Son of God coming to restore what was lost and perishing? Should we not lower ourselves in this matter, humbly receiving whatever God imparts and conforming to His will? This is why St. Paul explicitly mentioned the "fulness of time." It signifies that we can only benefit from the gospel when we honor God enough to be content with His will alone, refraining from challenging Him or arguing against Him, but rather glorifying Him by acknowledging His counsel as the ultimate source of wisdom, righteousness, and equity.

To illustrate this further, St. Paul immediately adds that it was God's purpose "to gather all things together both in heaven and on earth, by Jesus Christ, in himself." The use of the word "gather" here serves as a reminder that we are all in a state of profound disarray until our Lord Jesus Christ restores us. This restoration applies not only to us but also to all of creation.

In essence, it's as if he is telling us that the entire natural order has been marred and all things have suffered decay and disorder due to Adam's sin until we find restoration in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. While we can witness God's marvelous wisdom, power, goodness, justice, and righteousness in all His creations, there are still traces of sin at various levels, and all creatures are subject to corruption and disorder because of our fallen state, leading God to distance Himself from us [Rom. 8:22].

Therefore, it is Jesus Christ who must effect this restoration, as implied by the "gathering together" that St. Paul mentions here. We are thus called not only to recognize our own state of disarray but also to acknowledge that we have brought the entire world into the same state and perpetuate it daily

through our sins. The only remedy is for Jesus Christ to mend everything, to bring about a gathering and unity that will reunite us with our God.

This is the primary lesson to glean from this passage. While it may be expressed concisely, it warrants deep contemplation. It is a matter that should occupy our thoughts continually. When we reflect on ourselves, we should humbly acknowledge our wretched state, realizing that we are separated from our God from birth. We see that we are His enemies, deserving of His wrath, and that our inherent nature tends toward evil and perversity. However, it is not enough to recognize this disorder within ourselves alone; we must also understand that our perverseness has thrown the entire world into disarray.

Therefore, let us humble ourselves and feel a profound sense of shame. Simultaneously, let us openly acknowledge the immense debt we owe to God for His gracious act of gathering us together in the person of His only Son—us who have, by our sinful actions, torn asunder the order He so perfectly established.

It's essential to note that when St. Paul mentions "all things that are in heaven and earth," he encompasses even the angels in this gathering process [Col. 1:20]. Although the angels were never estranged from God and never fell from their original state, they too required this gathering through our Lord Jesus Christ, and for two significant reasons.

Firstly, while they remained steadfast and never strayed, God's righteousness always shone through them. They served as mirrors and exemplars of His righteousness. However, had God chosen to scrutinize them with severity, they would have fallen short of His perfect righteousness, as referenced in the book of Job [Job 4:18]. Secondly, it's vital to understand that the angels needed to be established by Jesus Christ in a way that ensured their unwavering constancy and stability. Without His intervention, they might have lacked the necessary firmness. This

underscores one aspect of their gathering. But the gathering St. Paul speaks of here also pertains to their reuniting with us.

We are aware that after our expulsion from God's kingdom, we were cut off from all hope of salvation. Consequently, the angels were immediately compelled to become our adversaries, a state they would still maintain if not for the connection we share with them through the common Head, who is Jesus Christ.

Consider, for instance, the symbolism in Jacob's ladder, as described in the Bible, where it is said that God stood at its top, touching both heaven and earth, while angels ascended and descended on it [Genesis 28:12]. In our Lord Jesus Christ, the true, living, and eternal God, heaven and earth are united. God has joined His divine essence with human nature in His person. Thus, the pathway to heaven is reopened, allowing angels to acquaint themselves with us, even becoming our servants, as mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews [Hebrews 1:14]. They are entrusted with the care of our souls and, as the thirty-fourth Psalm says, they encamp around us, watching over us and serving as our guardians.

This union with the angels of paradise is made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is why He declared, "From now on, you shall see the heavens open and the Son of Man descending in His majesty with His angels" [John 1:51]. Through this statement, He signifies that heaven was previously closed to us, and we were unworthy of God's favor. However, He has now come as our Head, reconciling us with His Father, taking on the role of mediator, and becoming the Head not only of the faithful but also of the angels. He has gathered all together in such a way that, while the devils wage war against us and continually plot our destruction, the angels are armed with infinite power to support us [Colossians 2:10]. Although we may not see them with our eyes, we must undoubtedly believe that they watch over our salvation.

Consider the alternative. The devil is likened to a roaring lion seeking to devour us [1 Peter 5:8], and he employs numerous strategies to ensnare us. Therefore, the angels require immense power to defend us. It is also imperative that we remain under the protection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who serves as the Head for both us and the angels.

In essence, what St. Paul conveys in this passage is that we were previously scattered and alienated. Through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have not only been reconciled to God but also reunited with the angels. They have become our brethren and companions, entrusted by God to guide, support, and watch over us. They engage in ceaseless battle against all our adversaries until we are gathered into the heavenly rest [Psalm 91:13].

Now, let us humbly prostrate ourselves before the majesty of our gracious God, recognizing our faults and praying that He may lead us to genuine repentance, which we will maintain throughout our lives. As we do so, let us place unwavering trust in Him and boldly offer ourselves for His service, knowing that our sins are forgiven by the shed blood of Christ. Let us conform to this doctrine and acknowledge that, having been purchased at such a high price, we should devote ourselves entirely to His service. Since He has proven Himself as a compassionate Redeemer, we should have no doubt that His goodness will continue to sustain us through all trials until He rescues us from the clutches of Satan and all his allies, ultimately ushering us into the blessedness He calls us to.

May He extend this grace not only to us but to people of all nations.

The Fifth Sermon on the First Chapter

> "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."- Ephesians 1:13-14

We have thus far observed how St. Paul unequivocally declares that the foundation of our salvation rests solely on God's boundless goodness. We must not seek elsewhere for the cause of His choice, why He selects one and not another. It is incumbent upon us to be content with His pure will, His unwavering purpose, and His unalterable decree. Those who venture beyond this boundary will inevitably fall into a perilous abyss through their own recklessness, discovering that those who do not honor God's majesty and His secret counsel with profound humility and reverence are ensnared in confusion. Therefore, when we seek the source of our salvation, we must learn to ascribe it entirely to God.

Certainly, to become God's children and heirs, we must belong to the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is attained through faith. However, we cannot have faith in the gospel unless God, through His Holy Spirit, draws us near. We can observe that God does not treat all individuals alike, as He could have easily illuminated the entire world and eradicated all unbelief, yet we see the contrary. Therefore, we must firmly believe that He chooses as He pleases. If someone were to inquire about the reason for His choice, it would be a grave error of pride. This is precisely why so many presumptuous individuals stumble into their own downfall, for they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that God governs humanity according to His own will, a prerogative He rightfully possesses.

Furthermore, St. Paul has placed both Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing in our examination thus far, a topic that warrants more extensive consideration. While God chose the descendants of Abraham, it might be mistakenly inferred that they possessed some inherent merit. Indeed, if we contemplate the grace bestowed upon the Jews, they stand far above the rest of the world. However, if we assess them in their intrinsic state, we find them devoid of righteousness. The fundamental point to remember is that God is under no obligation to any individual, and His reception of the Jews through free adoption is not due to their greater worthiness or for them to boast in themselves. Hence, St. Paul explicitly asserts that those who believed in Jesus Christ in times past are included in God's election, just like the others. Therefore, no one can boast of being more deserving or having earned more than others. It is imperative to understand that both Jews and Gentiles were chosen by God as He saw fit, and that mercy alone should be considered in this regard. This serves to silence all objections and prevent anyone from asserting that they contributed anything of their own to this divine plan.

Now, as St. Paul delves into this comparison between the Jews and the Gentiles, he points out that if one considers God's choice of the Jews as His heritage, they were indeed a holy lineage. God had bestowed upon them His law and promises, elevating them above all others He had rejected and forsaken. However, when we direct our focus towards God Himself, all human boasting must cease. In that context, St. Paul specifically addresses the forgiveness of our sins and our acceptance of God's grace through faith. He emphasizes that these blessings cannot be attributed to anything other than God's profound compassion. As we've seen in the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul reminded Peter that they were Jews by birth. Yet, despite this, their only refuge and assurance of salvation lay in believing in Jesus Christ. St. Paul knew that humanity, by its nature, was utterly ruined and lost, bringing nothing but God's wrath and curse. Therefore, just as he previously demonstrated in other passages, St. Paul aims to dispel any

delusions of human merit or worthiness. To firmly establish this doctrine, eliminate disputes, and quell objections, he directs us to the source: God not only bestows faith upon whom He pleases but also elected and chose us before the world's creation. In essence, all individuals, from the greatest to the least, are indebted to God, and there is no one so holy or esteemed who can claim exemption from this universal condition.

Furthermore, St. Paul extols God's goodness in that the Ephesians, prior to their belief in the gospel, were brought together and united with those who were previously considered God's people and members of His church. Before their conversion, diversity prevailed among the Ephesians, as elaborated upon in the second chapter. The believing Jews, who had already embraced our Lord Jesus Christ, were as brethren to the angels of heaven, being part of the common Head. Meanwhile, the Ephesians, in their wretched state, were shut off from any hope of salvation, enemies of God, and destined for destruction. Despite these differences, God removed that diversity and incorporated them into one body. God's goodness was vividly displayed as He rescued those who had been steeped in the depths of despair, making them partakers and heirs of His heavenly kingdom alongside His own children. This is why St. Paul, after discussing those who had believed in Jesus Christ previously, explicitly emphasizes that God has gathered and established His church in such a way that it becomes evident that even the greatest among us entirely depend on His pure mercy. Those who were seemingly cast aside and hated now have reason to glorify Him, having been delivered from their state of confusion.

Additionally, St. Paul demonstrates that the truth of what he previously stated is evident through the effects of God's grace. Our election, as mentioned earlier, is a hidden and incomprehensible matter. When people attempt to investigate it to the fullest extent, they are inevitably overwhelmed by their own thoughts, realizing that they cannot fathom the eternal counsel of God. Therefore, we must not venture beyond where the

Scriptures guide us and reveal the way. Thus, God's choice of us remains concealed within Himself, yet He provides evidence of it through the gifts of grace He bestows, such as faith, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, even if this were merely a gift similar to when He makes His sun shine upon both the good and the bad, or when He causes the earth to yield its fruit to all without exception, it would still be counted as one of God's gifts and blessings. However, faith is a unique gift that God does not grant to all in common but reserves as a treasure to be given according to His pleasure. Why does He do this? We all descend from Adam, sharing the same lineage. So, why does He illuminate some while leaving others in their spiritual blindness? There is no other explanation but His election. Hence, although we cannot comprehend through argument or reason how God chose us before the world's creation, we know it because He has revealed it to us. Experience itself strongly supports this when we are enlightened by faith.

Consider this: why do I embrace the gospel and adhere to it while others remain in a beastly stupor or even become hostile to the message of salvation? If I believe it's due to my own wisdom or efforts, I commit sacrilege. We must always return to what we have already recognized and acknowledge, "Who made you superior to others?" Therefore, St. Paul, in this statement, humbles all human pride, ensuring that no one exalts themselves or claims to possess anything of their own. We should not presume that we have inherent worthiness, but rather that everything comes from God. Thus, in this passage, St. Paul illustrates how the Ephesians were chosen by God through their experience. They should anchor their faith entirely on God's free goodness. The proof lies in the fact that they heard the gospel's doctrine and believed it. But how did this happen? St. Paul explains that they had to be sealed by the Holy Spirit. If they were sealed, it implies that the Holy Spirit worked beforehand. Therefore, delving too deeply into the intricate labyrinth of God's eternal counsel is futile. God, in

essence, points to how He chose us, provided we are not ungrateful but instead acknowledge the good He has bestowed upon us. We must be fully convinced and resolved within ourselves that the only reason for this is that He sealed us for Himself from all eternity, reserving us as His own children. St. Paul's intent is clear. Let us, therefore, refrain from lengthy preambles when it comes down to confessing that we all possess everything solely through God's pure mercy. Our faith bears witness to this truth, as it is not a product of our human understanding but a gift from above, bestowed only upon those whom He chooses.

Additionally, there are profound truths here that warrant our careful consideration. First and foremost, St. Paul seeks to exalt the grace of the Holy Spirit by emphasizing that we can have no share in our Lord Jesus Christ or in any of the countless blessings He has secured for us unless God imparts our salvation to us through His Holy Spirit. This is a crucial point. St. Paul also underscores the immeasurable benefit bestowed upon us by the gospel, labeling it as 'the word of truth' and 'the gospel of salvation.'

To begin with, he aims to provide us with unwavering assurance so that we may call upon God without hesitation or a troubled conscience. As long as we remain uncertain about whether God loves or despises us, we cannot genuinely and wholeheartedly pray to Him. Consequently, our salvation is jeopardized, as expressed by the prophet Joel. The Holy Scripture consistently teaches that we can only attain salvation by seeking refuge in God through prayer and supplication. This assurance is indispensable, as we will explore more deeply in the third chapter.

Therefore, it is crucial for us to be entirely convinced that God is our Father and that He embraces us as His beloved children. How can we attain such certainty if the gospel's doctrine is not unassailable in every aspect, leaving no room for doubt? This is why St. Paul refers to it as the "word of truth." While there are other truths as well, even when God issues warnings or

threats, they are not idle; both His promises and His warnings are faithfully fulfilled. Yet, in this context, the primary aim is to eradicate all unbelief in us, a tendency to which we are inclined. St. Paul designates the gospel as the doctrine of truth, essentially saying, "Dear friends, God is a trustworthy witness of His own will to you through the gospel. Therefore, place your unwavering trust in it." Furthermore, he emphasizes that our salvation is intertwined with the gospel, encouraging us to cherish and hold it dear. After all, who in their right mind would scorn their own well-being? He asserts that all of this flows from God's pure mercy and His eternal election, which remains distant and mysterious to us. Still, we gain knowledge of it through the gospel, which serves as its conduit and instrument.

Therefore, as St. Paul urges, let us firmly rest upon the gospel's doctrine in such a way that it feels as though God is manifestly revealing Himself to us, and the heavens are opening before our eyes. Remember always the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who declared that when sins are forgiven to men through the proclamation of the gospel, this forgiveness is also ratified in heaven. This should leave us with no doubts regarding whether God will hear our prayers or not. As the gospel teaches us to believe, St. Paul reminds us to treasure it as an invaluable gift, for it is the very power of God unto salvation for all who believe, as he emphasizes in his letter to the Romans.

Considering our own lost and helpless state, with no other means to draw us back to God but through the gospel, we must greatly cherish this treasure and ensure that we derive true benefit from it. In doing so, we should fearlessly reject both the devil himself and all his temptations, for God has called us and provided ample evidence of His fatherly love and goodwill towards us.

Now, let's turn to the second aspect I mentioned. St. Paul asserts that apart from God's willingness to have the gospel preached to us, it is imperative

for Him to work through His Holy Spirit and bestow special grace. Some may readily concede that God was motivated by His free grace alone to send us the gospel. However, they may still presume that the reason some accept it while others do not is due to the sway of their own free will, thus diminishing God's grace. God does not offer His grace to us like one would offer an apple to children, where the swiftest recipient claims it. Such a notion would imply that the majority of our salvation is the result of our own power and skill, with praise directed toward ourselves.

After demonstrating that God calls us, both presently and continually, to inherit His heavenly kingdom out of His pure, free grace, St. Paul further emphasizes the necessity of being influenced by His Holy Spirit. Although he discusses only one aspect of the Holy Spirit's grace here, it is because he previously explained the other part. He began by highlighting God's free goodness, from which we are all filled, and revealed that faith springs from the well of free election. Now, regarding the second aspect, he underscores that God's enlightenment of our hearts through His Holy Spirit, transforming us from blindness and inscribing His grace within us to bend our wills to obedience, is insufficient on its own. In addition, God must establish and strengthen us, granting unwavering perseverance to endure until the end.

You can perceive the direction in which St. Paul is guiding us. Beyond receiving faith from the Holy Spirit and the enlightenment by His grace, which I have discussed previously, God also ensures that we remain steadfast and do not fall away. To grasp this concept more deeply, we must first recall what has been explained in more detail before. When God leaves us to our own state and condition, we are like blind wanderers in darkness. No matter what is preached or conveyed to us, we remain unmoved in our ignorance. For the earthly-minded individual cannot comprehend matters related to God or salvation. You can see, therefore, how we are entirely shut out from heavenly light until God takes pity on us and bestows upon us the

spirit of enlightenment and understanding. This covers the first point, which has been addressed previously, and I shall not delve further into it.

Now, there is another facet to consider. Once we have embraced God's grace through faith, understanding that our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all we need for perfect happiness, it becomes crucial for us to be firmly established in this truth. Why is that? We should observe how fickle human beings are. Even those most inclined to follow God will quickly stumble because we are so fragile that the devil seeks to overcome us at every moment. Without God's unwavering support, we would be continuously confounded, not just by a single setback, but by countless falls, as I mentioned earlier. As soon as we set foot on the path to salvation, our frailty, lightness, and inconstancy would promptly divert us if we were not restrained. It is said that God displays His power in upholding us once He has chosen us and entrusted us to our Lord Jesus Christ. Without God's intervention, what would become of us? We would be entirely overcome, not due to one setback alone, but facing an infinite number of falls. The moment we embark on the path of salvation, our own weakness would turn us away from it. It is only through God's work within us, through His Holy Spirit, that we can withstand all the assaults of the devil and the world. God's Spirit serves a dual role in our faith. Firstly, He enlightens us, helping us understand things that would otherwise remain hidden from us, enabling us to receive God's promises with complete obedience. This constitutes the first part of His work. The second part is that the same Spirit is pleased to abide within us, granting us perseverance so that we do not falter on our journey. This is what St. Paul is currently addressing.

It's as if he were saying, "My dear friends, you have experienced the grace of God, and He has drawn you to obey His gospel. You would never have come to it if He hadn't shown you His mercy. Be assured that He not only initiates His grace but also increases it by giving you the strength to

persevere. If you had continued for only three days, three years, or even longer, God would have had to sustain you; otherwise, you would have been tossed about like lost souls without any certainty. God has promised to care for you and guide you until you reach the end of your journey and complete your course. That's why he says here that you were sealed by the Holy Spirit. Let's carefully consider the metaphor St. Paul employs. Throughout history, people have endorsed deeds and documents with seals, often using a seal or ring instead of a signature. Wills, covenants, and other agreements were ratified this way.

In this context, St. Paul suggests that we must be sealed in our hearts. Strictly speaking, he should have said that the gospel was sealed. However, to emphasize that our doubt and inconsistency stem from us, and that the gospel is inherently authoritative, he wants to show that God's sealing of His truth is a response to our hard-heartedness. We are like wavering reeds, shaken by every wind, until God strengthens us. Therefore, understand that the Holy Spirit serves as the seal by which God confirms His truth to us.

As I've mentioned before, we are in great need of this assurance. Although we acknowledge that God's Word should be accepted without question or doubt, we often find ourselves wavering. Troubles and annoyances reveal our doubts. If we were truly convinced of God's goodness as He assures us, we wouldn't be so easily shaken by fear when difficulties arise. The trials that shake us demonstrate that we do not fully embrace the gospel as we should. Therefore, God empowers it through His Holy Spirit and engraves it in our hearts with such certainty that our faith remains unshaken by anything the devil may do to undermine it."

We can grasp this concept even more deeply by reflecting on our own weaknesses, as I mentioned earlier. Despite all the reasons in the world, we may never be as fully and perfectly assured as we should be of God's mercy and protection amidst the constant dangers of this world. It's as if we are in

a turbulent sea, where winds and storms assail us continually, and we are always at risk of being overwhelmed. How, then, can we stand firm against Satan when we are like defenseless sheep, lacking armor, weapons, or any means of help? How can we find joy in both life and death if we know that Satan can wreak havoc on us unless we are securely sealed? Therefore, in addition to heeding the warning in this text to cast off all presumption and pride so that only God may be praised and magnified, we can also infer from St. Paul's words that we possess the weapons needed to confront and withstand the adversary. Even though our enemy is formidable and resolute, he will never prevail against us as long as we take advantage of what St. Paul conveys here: that God's Spirit seals the truth and the certainty of the gospel's promises within us.

Furthermore, St. Paul employs another metaphor, likening God's Spirit to a deposit. It shouldn't surprise us that St. Paul reinforces this doctrine, as the devil has persistently endeavored, from the dawn of time, to inflate people with vain notions of their own wisdom and strength. Adam's fall occurred because he aspired to ascend beyond his rightful place, desiring to be wiser than God, a desire for which God granted no permission. The same holds true for us, and the devil continues his onslaught. Consider how he deceived humanity through cunning, and his ongoing effort is to convince us of our ability to achieve various things. Consequently, St. Paul had to strip away this false and accursed belief in human free will and self-righteousness, revealing that we are indebted to the Holy Spirit for everything.

Moreover, our dense and worldly nature necessitates that this doctrine be made tangible to us. We are incapable of grasping God's invisible, gracious gifts, just as we cannot perceive or touch them with our physical senses. Thus, St. Paul found it imperative to employ figurative language to illustrate that it is God's Holy Spirit who empowers us to possess the gospel and all its benefits and sustains us in them until the end.

We are familiar with the practice of confirming contracts by providing a deposit, often referred to as earnest money. When dealing with the purchase of lands, houses, inheritances, or goods, even though one's word should suffice, human wickedness is such that if individuals perceive any disadvantage in a matter, they may not hesitate to retract their promises. Therefore, this practice of making a deposit was introduced, serving as a guarantee that the transaction is settled and the contract is unalterable. In this context, St. Paul signifies that God's Spirit functions as an absolute assurance of our salvation. To what end, you may ask? "For your inheritance," he asserts, "until the day of your redemption." It is undeniable that we are already God's heirs, being His children. However, it is crucial to acknowledge what is stated in the eighth chapter of Romans [v. 24]: our salvation is held in hope. Hence, we cannot presently witness or fully relish it, as articulated in the third chapter of Colossians [v. 3], where it is noted that we are like deceased individuals, detached from this world, and our life remains concealed with God in Jesus Christ. Consequently, although we are indeed God's offspring, we do not currently apprehend its complete fruition.

This aligns perfectly with the teaching of St. John in his Epistle: "We know," he affirms, signifying that our faith is unwavering. Nevertheless, he adds that it is not yet realized, and we must await the day when we will be akin to God, a time when we will possess the clarity to fully perceive what we presently hold only in belief [1 John 3:2]. Furthermore, we have discerned how St. Paul expounded in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians that during our earthly sojourn, we are, in a sense, separated from God [2 Corinthians 5:6]. Why is this so? Because we tread the path of hope, not yet seeing the fulfillment as though it were present; instead, we apprehend it through faith. In short, although we have transitioned from death to life, as referenced in the fifth chapter of John [v. 24], we continue to contend against various forms of death besieging us.

St. Paul adeptly bridges both aspects in this passage. On the one hand, he asserts that we have not yet reached our redemption and inheritance; simultaneously, he underscores that we can hold absolute certainty of it and that only our ingratitude prevents us from gloriously embracing God to the fullest. We can confidently affirm that we harbor no doubts about attaining heavenly life because we possess a pledge of it through the Holy Spirit and are so intimately united with our Lord Jesus Christ that all His possessions become ours through faith.

Let us delve deeply into the wisdom conveyed by St. Paul in these words. He affirms that the Holy Spirit serves as our guarantee. Armed with this knowledge, we must foster unwavering confidence in our redemption, an experience that shall fully unfold on the ultimate day. The stark realities of our existence affirm this truth. We are but humble beings, ensnared by the relentless march of decay and corruption, enduring countless tribulations. The world often scorns and ridicules our simple faith. We grapple with hunger and thirst, and on occasion, it appears as if God has forsaken us, subjecting us to His divine silence. To the external eye, we seem utterly insignificant. Such is our outward plight. Thus, in the midst of trials and sorrows that seem ceaseless, we must find solace in the promise of the Holy Spirit as our pledge. Even when the world heaps contempt upon us and subjects us to the crucible of temptations and trials, we can offer praise, as echoed in Romans 8:15, for it assures us that, as confident children of God, we may continue to call upon Him. Though we may be beset by afflictions and torments, our unshaken conviction remains that He is our Father, leading us toward the celestial glory. Even amidst this trial, our hope endures.

Furthermore, we receive counsel to cultivate patience. Recognizing that God has granted us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, we must quell the impatience that often plagues our hearts. When God deals sternly with us, we tend to murmur and resist suffering. Our human nature bears testimony

to our inherent tenderness and sensitivity. Nevertheless, we must patiently endure, for God does not intend for us to traverse the path to His kingdom in a single bound. He guides us through a world replete with thorns and thistles, and we shall encounter manifold trials and tribulations. With such a potent antidote at our disposal, invigorating us with unwavering fortitude through His Holy Spirit, we must be prepared to wage an unrelenting battle until we attain ultimate victory.

While it is true that our faith already exerts some influence, we have not yet fully savored its rewards or witnessed its complete fruition. Hence, we must steadfastly commit ourselves to continuous struggle and lamentation, all the while rejoicing in our hearts. Why, you may ask? Rejoicing in our hearts while echoing the cry of St. Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" is not an inconsistency. Thus, let each of us mourn and grieve, acknowledging our profound entanglement with sinful desires and numerous vices. Nevertheless, let us never cease to render gratitude to God, contenting ourselves with the provision He has graciously offered, as we await His fulfillment and perfecting of the work He has initiated within us. With His Holy Spirit dwelling within us, bearing the promise that He shall never forsake us until the journey's end, we draw strength and encouragement to endure, triumphing over the manifold miseries of this world as we press onward toward our ultimate destination.

This is precisely why St. Paul speaks with intent about redemption. While it is undeniable that our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of our redemption, granted to us through other passages [1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Tim. 2:6], we have yet to fully experience its profound impact and ultimate realization. Redemption, therefore, comprises a dual aspect—one accomplished in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and another that awaits unveiling upon His return. In the eighth chapter of Romans [v. 23], St. Paul emphasizes that, despite our groaning and suffering, we should not be disheartened or surprised, for all of creation shares in this state, akin to a woman in the

throes of childbirth. We witness how the entire world languishes in corruption due to Adam's transgression. In light of this, let us not waver in our sighs, but rather temper our desires, taking solace in the knowledge that our redemption has been assured through our Lord Jesus Christ. We must trust that He will accomplish in us and for us what He has already achieved in Himself. St. Paul's message is clear: God's Spirit acts as our assurance as we await liberation from this temporal existence and release from the shackles of all forms of suffering, with the burden of sin being the most grievous. Until we are delivered from these trials, we must place our reliance on the indwelling presence of God's Spirit.

Concerning the term 'redemption of purchase,' it can also be interpreted as 'purchased redemption,' a common manner of expression. In the same way that 'the Spirit of promise' signifies the Spirit who fulfills all promises or 'the Spirit of the fear of God' denotes the Spirit that leads us to obedience in His righteousness, 'redemption of purchase' conveys the idea of redemption procured on our behalf. This underscores the importance of experiencing its transformative effects within us, leaving no doubt about what Jesus Christ has accomplished for our benefit and delight. Indeed, His suffering would be utterly meaningless for us if it did not reach us to bring about our salvation and enjoyment. This, then, is the essence of what was achieved in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, during this interim period, we must practice self-restraint, guarding against ingratitude that might lead us to reject the precious gift God has extended—a gift that enables us to rejoice in the midst of our afflictions, for we are assured of our ultimate salvation. We must refrain from complaining against God or uttering blasphemous words. Instead, we should walk in steadfastness until we are liberated from our current state of bondage, ultimately being gathered together in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let us bow before the majesty of our benevolent God, humbling ourselves and acknowledging our transgressions. Let us pray that He deepens our awareness of these failings to the point of genuine disgust for the corruption within us. As we recognize ourselves as nothing more than an abyss of iniquity, let us learn to seek His righteousness at its source. We must acknowledge that He has revealed Himself as a merciful Father to us. In doing so, we affirm our belief in His predestination of us before the world's inception, which should embolden us to call upon Him with unwavering perseverance, never ceasing in our supplications.

And so, let each of us utter the words, "Almighty God, heavenly Father."

The Sixth Sermon on the First Chapter

> Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."- Ephesians 1:15-18

We have previously noted how St. Paul directed the Ephesians not only to the primary but also the exclusive source of their salvation. He made it clear that they must attribute their entire salvation to God without mixing in any foolish pride. They should not entertain the idea that they had contributed to God's grace in any manner, be it through their free will or good intentions.

Thus, St. Paul has shown that not only the Ephesians he addressed, but all who were part of God's church before them, must openly confess that their well-being originated solely from God's free benevolence. This was true not only because they were all redeemed through our Lord Jesus Christ, but also because God had called them to believe in the gospel, in accordance with His election of them before the creation of the world.

Now, he reaffirms this doctrine by bearing witness before God, emphasizing God's goodness even when he is seemingly separated from human sight and all witnesses. Certainly, the teaching of the gospel should not be esteemed any less when proclaimed openly before the entire world. Yet, the one who proclaims it must have it deeply imprinted on their heart, speaking the same message to themselves and before God and His angels as they do before people. Otherwise, it would amount to mere noise or, rather, a desecration of God's Word. If someone were to preach with eloquence but lacked personal conviction in what they preached, it would be better for them to be drowned a hundred times.

Therefore, it is not without reason that, after St. Paul had expounded on God's free benevolence in His election and calling, and after confirming His chosen ones with His strong hand, giving them unwavering constancy and steadfastness, he now adds that God knows his sincerity and earnestness in bearing witness to it. He testifies to his prayers, offered alone when no one could discern his thoughts or the words he uttered, confessing the same doctrine before God. Even then, he prays for God to bring to completion what He has initiated.

Here, it is imperative to begin by observing that those who aspire to be profitable in building up the church, and those who possess genuine zeal, should not only dedicate themselves to teaching but also fervently beseech God for His power and grace to work alongside them. Often, we find ourselves merely "beating the air," even if we possess the eloquence of

angels, because we fail to pray for God to render our teaching effective. We are but unprofitable instruments, and God, having bestowed upon us the gift of speech, must infuse it with efficacy. As the adage goes, "He who plants is nothing, and he who waters is nothing, but it is God who gives the increase" [1 Cor. 3:7]. Therefore, those entrusted with instructing God's church should approach their duty with reverence and diligence. They must not only seek to guide people to God but also humbly acknowledge their own inadequacy. They are akin to mere echoes in the air, which would soon dissipate, if not for God's mysterious work of the Spirit alongside them. Such is the lesson we must glean from St. Paul's words here.

Furthermore, let each of us apply this principle to our own lives. When we come to study God's Word, or when any one of us reads it individually, we should not presume that our intellects are so discerning as to fully grasp all that Scripture imparts. Instead, we ought to admit our lack of understanding and entreat God to cause His doctrine to take root within us so that it may not slip away. St. Paul's approach in this passage can illuminate this concept if we carefully weigh the words he employs.

He declares that he "unceasingly thanks God" for the faith he heard of in the church at Ephesus "and for their love toward the saints." Yet, he continues to supplicate God, entreating Him to further illuminate them and lead them toward the perfection to which all the faithful should aspire until God has transported them from this world. In his assertion that he does not cease to offer thanks to God, we find an exemplar of how the faithful ought to spend their time. The primary offering that God requires and approves is the acknowledgment of His blessings and the rendering of the praise He deserves. This should not be an intermittent practice but an uninterrupted one. Just as God ceaselessly bestows His blessings, it is only fitting for each of us to labor tirelessly to bless and extol Him without end. St. Paul, in his blessing upon the Ephesians, extends the same sentiment to all other churches. It would be inconsiderate not to recognize the benefits conferred

by God. We are all duty-bound to praise God for our brethren. If we become aware of God's blessings upon His church or His compassion toward His people, even if they are distant, our mouths should unfailingly open in praise.

If we are obligated to offer thanks for blessings we may not witness but which our distant neighbors enjoy, how much more are we obligated when God enriches us with spiritual gifts of grace that lead us far beyond the bounds of this world? Given the lavish abundance that God displays towards us, we have no valid reason if we fail to emulate St. Paul's example, dedicating our entire lives to the continuous exaltation of God's name.

St. Paul further illustrates that faith and love are divine gifts, not products of our own making, despite the misguided pride some harbor. He genuinely gives thanks to God for the faith and love demonstrated by the Ephesians. If faith and belief were attainable by every individual independently or through their own willpower, it would be unjust to acknowledge God for these gifts. Such acknowledgment would be a mockery if we claimed indebtedness to Him for what we obtained elsewhere. St. Paul extols God's name for illuminating the Ephesians in faith and molding their hearts with love. Therefore, every blessing ultimately originates from God.

Pagan belief often led them to attribute their good fortune solely to their own prowess and abilities, believing they owed nothing to God. While some among the papists might concede a role for God's grace, they still advocate for human effort in attaining faith. St. Paul firmly rejects these misguided ideas and asserts that whenever a church or a people embrace the gospel, God deserves the entirety of the glory because His hand must have been instrumental. Left to our own devices, we would not naturally incline towards goodness unless guided, directed, and sometimes even compelled by the Holy Spirit. Our inherent rebelliousness is so entrenched that we are

not merely weak, as some papists claim, but entirely at odds with God until He transforms us. This is why, through His prophet Ezekiel, He speaks of changing hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, signifying the softening and submission to Him that is required.

Moreover, within these two fundamental concepts, faith and love, St. Paul encapsulates the entirety of Christian perfection. The primary objective of the first table of the law is to revere the one God, relying on Him for all things, acknowledging our dependence, seeking refuge solely in Him, and dedicating our lives in His service. This sums up the first table of the law. The second table, in contrast, focuses on living with justice and righteousness, treating our neighbors in a manner that seeks to assist all without causing harm to anyone. God has granted us a splendid and comprehensive guide for righteous living in His law, to which nothing can be added.

Hence, it is not without profound reason that St. Paul presents faith in Jesus Christ and love as a comprehensive summary of the entire Christian life, highlighting the path we should tread and the standards we should uphold. However, it is crucial to recognize that within the term 'faith,' St. Paul encompasses the entirety of our divine service. Once we come to grasp the boundless goodness of God, unveiled through His only Son, it becomes inevitable that we are consumed by love for our heavenly Father. God delivers us from the abyss of confusion and death, opening wide the gates to His celestial kingdom, declaring His intention to embrace us as His children. How can we hear such profound truths and believe without fully dedicating ourselves to Him, forsaking the world, and abhorring the darkness that separates us from His radiant presence? Thus, 'faith' implies wholehearted devotion to God.

Moreover, faith is not a passive state; it involves a profound turning towards God. When sin stains our souls, faith guides us to seek His healing

through prayer. Every need we encounter serves as a divine nudge, urging us to draw near to Him. Therefore, faith encompasses prayer and supplication. It entails sanctifying the name of God by placing our unwavering trust in Him and offering the glory that inherently belongs to Him alone. We understand that everything flows from His boundless bounty, and He expects nothing from us but the humble offering of gratitude. Hence, faith encompasses the entirety of the principles laid out in the first table of the law.

Indeed, this is a part that symbolizes the whole, yet we must always remember that these elements are inseparable. We are also reminded that living righteously and justly with our fellow human beings is essential, as articulated in Psalm 15:2-3. We acknowledge our perpetual indebtedness to God for all His blessings and recognize that our best efforts can never truly repay Him. When we endeavor to bring an offering to God, it is of little significance in His eyes. What then does He truly desire? He yearns for us to engage in acts of benevolence toward His devoted people, a point explicitly emphasized by St. Paul in this passage.

While it is undeniable that we are called to practice love even towards our adversaries, for we cannot claim to be children of God without loving them and endeavoring to assist them, this does not diminish the importance of cultivating a fraternal affection for all of God's children. We share a unique bond with them. This is precisely why it is underscored in the sixteenth psalm and reiterated by St. Paul in this passage that we should nurture love for all the faithful. In another instance, St. Paul addresses the challenge posed by this commandment, instructing us to love all individuals in general, and especially those who are part of the household of faith. Therefore, God beckons us to emulate His likeness, following His example by performing acts of kindness to all, even those who may not seem deserving of it, to the extent that we actively seek the welfare of those who may harbor ill intentions toward us.

Furthermore, as God has imprinted His divine image on all the faithful and entrusted them to our care, it becomes our sacred duty to nurture a profound brotherly love towards them. Whenever we discern the divine gifts at work within them, we must hold them in the highest regard, in harmony with the wisdom of Psalm 15:4, which admonishes us to embrace those who revere God and shun those who walk the path of wickedness. When we bear witness to the unmistakable signs of God's presence in His devoted people, it is only fitting that we are stirred to love them deeply. Essentially, St. Paul encapsulates the complete framework of righteous and sanctified living here, emphasizing that we must first surrender ourselves entirely to God's divine sovereignty and cling resolutely to Him. Second, we must lead lives of honor and righteousness in our interactions with our fellow human beings, refraining from evil deeds and diligently striving to do good to all, to the utmost extent of our strength and capacity. How can we realize this noble endeavor? By recognizing our heavenly Father's infinite benevolence towards us, acknowledging His ceaseless blessings, and partaking in His divine favor each day. Our very existence hinges upon Him, and He alone is the wellspring of our eternal salvation, compelling us to continually call upon Him and offer up our heartfelt gratitude throughout the entirety of our earthly pilgrimage.

Furthermore, in relation to the second aspect, it is imperative to understand that we cannot genuinely love our neighbors unless we lead lives of temperance, eschewing harmful examples and conducting ourselves in a manner that leaves no room for reproach. What form of love can be found in the actions of an adulterer seeking to dishonor another person's marriage or a thief attempting to abscond with another's possessions? Given that our lives should be illuminated by honor and integrity, engaging in debauchery, blasphemy, or similar vices not only harms others but also leads to theft, extortion, and unrestrained self-indulgence. Thus, if we genuinely harbor love for our fellow human beings, we must lead lives characterized by righteousness and equity, governing our actions in such a way that we

remain unentangled in frivolous pursuits. In contrast to the practices of the papists, who often engage in elaborate ceremonies and regard mindless babbling and pilgrimages as forms of divine worship, we must adhere to the path of virtuous living in accordance with God's divine calling. To avoid expending fruitless labor, we should diligently observe what God deems pleasing and faithfully adhere to it. There can be no deviation from the path when we consistently follow the course laid out in His Holy Word, particularly since the Lord succinctly outlines His expectations for our lives in such a concise and straightforward manner. Were these requirements lengthy and complex, one might find excuse in a perceived lack of erudition or memory. However, as the Lord articulates His entire will in just a few words, we are compelled to acknowledge that our failure to remember such a brief, pithy, and unambiguous lesson results from our own obstinacy, cunning, and deliberate refusal to heed His divine counsel.

Lastly, it is worth noting that when St. Paul employs the term 'faith,' he intentionally specifies 'faith in Jesus Christ' for a profound reason. The patriarchs of old perpetually held the divine image of God before them, as they were required to offer sacrifices in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, wherein the divine mercy was symbolically manifested. They had no reason to hope for divine audience or mercy through any other avenue, for they possessed the visible image of the Ark. However, we have been graced with Jesus Christ, who is the living image of God Himself, even though God's inherent nature remains invisible to mortal eyes. St. Paul, with great wisdom, asserts that God remains inscrutable until He chooses to unveil Himself through His beloved Son.

With Jesus Christ as our guide, the precise image of God, our gaze must be firmly fixed upon Him. This clarifies why He is aptly referred to as the 'express image of the power of God, His Father.' While we acknowledge the distinct persons of the Father and the Son, it is Christ who reveals to us the indispensable path to our salvation. As declared by St. John, knowing the

Son inherently leads us to the Father, and those who turn away from the Son, despite any claims to approach the Father, find themselves in a state of rejection. Hence, as we are admonished here to place our faith in Jesus Christ, let us heed His own counsel to His disciples: 'Do you believe in God? Believe also in Me.' In doing so, He illuminates the understanding that the venerable fathers living under the Old Covenant possessed only dim shadows of divine revelation until His arrival in the world. They devoutly worshipped the living God but approached Him through intermediaries and symbols. They did not possess the radiant clarity that we now enjoy under the gospel. Thus, it is fitting to refer to Christ as the image of God, the inherently invisible deity, for we could not truly comprehend Him unless He chose to manifest Himself in this manner.

In summary, let us firmly grasp that our endeavors remain bereft of true value until our faith finds its unwavering foundation in Jesus Christ. This reality becomes all the more apparent when we scrutinize the myriad errors that continue to pervade the world. Papists may fervently profess their faith in God, much like Turks and Jews. The Jews, for instance, lay claim to the worship of the living God, the very God who delivered His law through Moses. Yet, what significance does this hold when they reject Jesus Christ, the culmination and essence of that very law? As for the papists, although they proclaim themselves Christians and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior, it is evident that they stand at odds with His teachings. They have devised their own manner of serving God, crafting practices riddled with disorder. The Turks may boldly declare, "Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth," yet can we genuinely believe that God would retract His own decree that no one may approach Him except through His beloved Son, whom He has ordained as the sole mediator between Himself and humanity? We bear witness to how the papists profess faith in God, yet persist in invoking patron saints and advocates as intermediaries on their behalf. Merely being redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ does not suffice for them; they introduce their own merits and attempt to atone

for their sins through self-effort. When they transgress against God, they resort to various means of reconciliation. A closer examination of the papist beliefs reveals a tapestry woven with their own fantasies, weaving whatever thoughts they please with Jesus Christ, even though He should stand supreme.

St. Paul guides us to the authentic measure of our faith, firmly rooted in resting upon Jesus Christ. We must wholeheartedly acknowledge our utter lack of righteousness and draw from His boundless abundance to be filled with all that is good, or else we shall face condemnation. Even if we were to have all the angels in paradise on our side (if such a notion were conceivable), it would yield naught but confusion unless we cling resolutely to the Head, as articulated by St. Paul in the first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Colossians. Thus, the profound lesson we ought to glean from this proclamation becomes resoundingly clear.

Now, as St. Paul offers his heartfelt gratitude to God for the manifestations of divine grace in the church at Ephesus, he also makes it known that he continually lifts up prayers to the Almighty. This serves as a poignant reminder that when we bear witness to the bountiful bestowal of God's excellent gifts upon His children, we are duty-bound to entreat Him for their perpetual augmentation. This is motivated by two paramount considerations. First, even those who stand firm today may stumble tomorrow, for our human nature remains prone to frailty. Second, the grace of God must be in a state of perpetual ascent, for the soul's growth and spiritual development demand a ceaseless outpouring of divine favor. In essence, even the most perfected souls among us would find ample cause for self-abasement if they were to undertake a scrupulous examination of their inner poverty. Hence, St. Paul encourages us to couple our gratitude with prayer when we extol God for the gracious gifts He has lavished upon His chosen ones. Why? Because it is befitting that the Lord brings to fruition what He has initiated, and we must unfailingly approach this

conviction: the Lord will not abandon the work of His own hands, but rather, He shall perfect it.

What we are called to do on behalf of others is equally imperative for our own spiritual welfare. In essence, we are summoned here to magnify the goodness and endowments of God in such a manner that we become acutely aware of the insufficiency within ourselves. It is indispensable for our spiritual pilgrimage that God bestows upon us the gift of perseverance until the journey's culmination. Simultaneously, He must rectify the lingering imperfections that mar our souls while enhancing His grace within us until the day we attain consummate perfection—an accomplishment only realized upon liberation from this mortal vessel.

However, in spite of the paramount significance of this doctrine, we cannot overlook the disheartening reality that Satan has ensnared some souls into envisioning a flawed concept of spiritual perfection. In this misconception, they reduce the Lord's Prayer to a mere fragment, focusing solely on the initial three petitions—those seeking the hallowing of God's name, the arrival of His kingdom, and the fulfillment of His will. They disregard the remainder of the prayer, which our Lord Jesus Christ has graciously bequeathed to us. I possess written evidence from their own hands, and their disciples stand as witnesses to this lamentable fact. In committing this grievous error, they inadvertently withhold from God the honor and acknowledgment that we continue to bear the burden of our inherent frailties, grapple with numerous corruptions, and contend with multifarious vices. Thus, God must unfailingly cleanse us of these impurities, day by day, until He leads us to the pinnacle of perfection to which He has summoned us.

It is incumbent upon us to approach this doctrine with utmost care and discernment, for the Papists, despite their errors, have not plunged as deeply into falsehood as those who now disseminate their pernicious doctrines in

clandestine gatherings and secluded enclaves. Therefore, let us be vigilant and attentive to the profound lesson the Holy Spirit imparts through St. Paul when he speaks of his ceaseless prayers to God. The query arises: Why did he embark upon this sacred endeavor? As I have earlier elucidated, the Ephesian congregation had flourished magnificently, with the gifts of God and His Holy Spirit abounding amongst them, as alluded to by St. Paul. In his concluding remarks, he beseeches the Almighty to grant them that which they currently lack and continue to require. Thus, we should discern that the more abundantly we have been blessed and prospered, the more earnestly we must humble ourselves and, with profound humility, beseech God to consummate that which He has initiated, increasing His divine gifts within us until we yearn for nothing more. This subject will be explored in greater depth during the forthcoming assembly mentioned in the fourth chapter.

Now, let us carefully contemplate the precise words employed by St. Paul. He begins with a powerful invocation, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," or the glorious Father (for the term 'Father of glory' aligns with 'glorious Father' in the Hebrew language). He earnestly petitions the Almighty to grant us the spiritual enlightenment needed to comprehend Him fully. In directing our focus to Jesus Christ, St. Paul asserts that the God he invokes is the same God who stands as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, affirming his unwavering conviction that his prayers will be heard. His intention is to inspire the Ephesians to adopt the same approach and pattern of prayer. Whenever they approach God, they are encouraged to tread the same path he has taken—a path that adheres directly to our Lord Jesus Christ.

For those who may wonder about the position of God in relation to our Lord Jesus Christ, this question can be easily resolved by considering the role of the mediator. This mediator humbly descended on our behalf to bridge the gap between God and us. It is undeniably true that Jesus Christ is

one with His Father, as unequivocally stated in John 10:30. When we invoke the name of the living God, it is of paramount importance to recognize that the fullness of the divine Godhead resides within Him, as eloquently affirmed in Colossians 2:9. Therefore, it is a grave error to attempt to separate our Lord Jesus Christ as if He were a distinct deity or something other than the God who has been revealed to humanity from time immemorial. Alas, in our present era, certain misguided individuals disseminate such abhorrent and blasphemous notions.

It is of utmost importance to comprehend that Jesus Christ is the same God —the only God—who has chosen to reveal Himself to us in the person of the Father. Consequently, when we seek to approach God, we do so through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Within this context, we must also consider the role of Jesus Christ as the mediator—a role in which He willingly humbled Himself. It is vital to understand that this act of humility did not entail the relinquishment of any aspect of His divine majesty or the diminishment of His eternal glory in any manner. None of this transpired. Instead, out of boundless love for humanity, He willingly humbled Himself and took on human form, as eloquently described by St. Paul in Philippians 2:7. Thus, when we speak of Jesus Christ submitting to God His Father, it signifies His voluntary assumption of our human nature and His profound identification with our humanity.

This profound union is illuminated by the words of Jesus Christ Himself, as recorded by St. John in his twentieth chapter (verse 17): "Go to my brethren and tell them, I go to my God and your God, to my Father and your Father." This declaration is indeed remarkable, as it underscores the intimate bond that Jesus Christ shares with His faithful followers, to the extent that He declares the same God as His and theirs. But how can this be? Is Jesus Christ not God Himself? Most assuredly, He is God, and yet, because He willingly assumed our humanity and condescended to become incarnate for our sake, He shares the same God with us. This is why the apostle

appropriates the words from Isaiah and ascribes them to the person of Jesus Christ: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders" (Isaiah 8:18; Hebrews 2:13). In this context, Jesus Christ stands as the captain who presents Himself before His Sovereign and Prince, declaring, "Lo, here I am, together with the children whom thou hast bestowed upon me." In summation, Jesus Christ serves as the conduit through which we are drawn to God His Father, instilling in us the utmost confidence that our prayers shall find a welcoming audience. Without Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), who would dare to hope that their supplications would ascend to the divine throne, and what measure of grace could we hope to attain?

To gain a deeper insight into the necessity of guidance from our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul invites us to contemplate the boundless glory of God. How can we, in our audacity, approach God's presence without an advocate who secures a pathway for our access? Consider that when the sun, a mere creation, dazzles our eyes and scorches our skin from a distance, what fate awaits us when we draw near to the presence of God? The sun possesses but a fraction of the divine power instilled by God Himself. Should we not then fear being consumed when we approach the incomprehensible majesty of God? Yet, in having Jesus Christ as our advocate, we come to understand that God is not only the Father of glory but also the Father of mercy. He gazes upon those who are most wretched and despised by the world with compassion and grace. This is the assurance upon which we must rely as we approach God in prayer.

Here, St. Paul earnestly beseeches God to grant the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation. It is undeniably true that God had previously unveiled the truth of His gospel to them, as we have witnessed. Without the prior work of God within us, even a glimmer of faith or understanding would remain beyond our reach, as clearly expressed by Jesus in His words to Peter: "Flesh and blood has not revealed these things to you, but my

Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Nevertheless, although they had received some measure of knowledge, Peter, as we later observe, demonstrated a lack of comprehension regarding the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Thus, even the small taste of the gospel he possessed was a divine gift. This underscores the necessity for God to continually augment His gift within us. Our spiritual journey is aptly described as a "way" because it demands unceasing progress until our course is ultimately fulfilled. Anyone who harbors the illusion of attaining perfection in this earthly realm is deceived by the machinations of Satan and spurns the grace of God. Yet, it is crucial to understand that this in no way implies that God alters His divine purpose or permits His grace to be apportioned at the whims of human caprice. God has ordained an order in which we are to grow and mature daily, all the while maintaining a vigilant awareness of our imperfections, grieving over them, exercising self-discipline, and practicing restraint.

Thus, it becomes evident that the Ephesians had already been granted the spirit of revelation, and yet they were still in need of it to be bestowed upon them by God. Although there exists but one Spirit, the gifts He imparts are diverse and allocated to each of us according to His sovereign will and measure. Only Jesus Christ has received these gifts in their entirety; He alone stands as the inexhaustible wellspring from which they flow. The Spirit of God rests upon Him, allowing us all to partake in His abundant grace. Therefore, let us acknowledge that even the wisest among us must remain perpetual learners, continuing to acquire knowledge until the very end of our earthly sojourn. The term "revelation" in this context condemns the inherent spiritual blindness that afflicts every one of us. We may possess the ability to distinguish between black and white, perceive the sun and the moon, and render judgments concerning worldly matters without necessitating new revelation, for these capabilities are inherent within us. Nevertheless, St. Paul reveals our spiritual blindness, highlighting our incapacity to fathom God's grace unless He chooses to open our eyes,

remove the veil that shrouds our understanding, and bestow upon us a new vision that we do not possess innately. In essence, until God illuminates our spiritual eyes with His Holy Spirit, we remain, in a sense, worse than blind —underscoring the paramount importance of divine intervention in our comprehension.

Furthermore, St. Paul continues to address a crucial aspect, which is to have the eyes of your understanding enlightened. Now, someone might ask, "If we already possess the spirit of revelation, why do we need more?" To this, I say, you speak as if your vision is unclouded. Indeed, you see in part, but your sight remains obscured. This is true for all of us, as we are told that in this world, we perceive things dimly, as if through a mirror. It is only when we are capable of beholding God in His heavenly glory that our vision will be perfected, and we shall be made like Him. St. Paul writes in this manner to prevent anyone from asserting that God must reveal things to us as if we were utterly incapable of seeing anything at all. Are we no better than beasts devoid of discretion or judgment? To this, I answer that although we possess some understanding, we are, nonetheless, blind due to the corruption of sin. Therefore, God must grant us new eyes, as I mentioned earlier.

The apostle also adds the term 'wisdom' to humble the foolish pride that often swells within us when we attempt to soar toward God without wings, thinking ourselves wise. While seeking true wisdom from God's hand is a commendable and righteous desire, we are often plagued by two faults. First, we desire to be wise in our own conceit, thinking, "Am I not wise enough to govern myself?" Second, we disregard God's Word, wishing to have complete autonomy and do as we please. Both of these excesses are detrimental. St. Paul here rectifies both errors. When he beseeches God to grant His faithful people the spirit of wisdom, he underscores that they lack discernment, similar to brute beasts, unless guided by our Lord Jesus Christ

on their journey to the kingdom of heaven. Even in worldly matters, God bestows discernment only upon those whom He chooses.

Therefore, if God reserves His special gift of wisdom for Himself, granting it to whom He pleases for the governance of worldly affairs, then it is He who enables unbelievers to be wise. In matters of the heavenly life, however, there is no innate wisdom within us. Thus, St. Paul presupposes what I have already stated: we must be taught by God to know Him through the doctrine of truth, conveyed by the testimony of the gospel. Without this, we would be like those fanatics who fall into error under the pretext of possessing the revelation of God's Holy Spirit. However, St. Paul does not use the term 'revelation' in this manner when he prays for God to bestow it upon His children. For instance, when Jesus Christ speaks of His Spirit, He does not separate it from the doctrine He has preached. He declares, "When the Spirit comes, He shall tell you all truth." But how does this occur? Had not the apostles already received it? Yes, but He adds, "He shall show you that which you now hear from my mouth." In essence, it is the unique role of the Holy Spirit to instruct us in such a way that the words we hear may truly take root and be valued, enabling us to benefit from them.

Furthermore, St. Paul reveals the essence of all our light and knowledge, which is to know God through His only Son. This knowledge is what we should seek to possess. If we possess curious minds and an eagerness to explore matters beyond our capacity, we must reflect on the limitations of our weak and undeveloped understanding. If our hearts are weighed down and sluggish, how can we aspire to ascend beyond the confines of heaven and earth? Can we truly encompass all of this with our limited faculties? Yet, we often see people arrogantly delving into questions and disputes that exceed their grasp, challenging God. Thus, St. Paul reminds us here that true wisdom requires sobriety. Wisdom originates from God and our Lord Jesus Christ, as he will further elucidate later. Once we have reached this

point, we possess everything we need. If we dare to go further, we only endanger ourselves needlessly.

St. Paul will expound on this matter at length later, but it should suffice for us to understand, both in this passage and throughout the Holy Scriptures, that we should learn about the God we must serve, His will, how to trust in Him, and how to approach Him in prayer and seek refuge in Him at all times. This should be our focus. However, it is only attainable through Jesus Christ, in whom God has revealed Himself. In essence, the majesty of God is beyond our reach, and we would be lost in our attempts to approach Him if He had not descended to us.

Yet, with Jesus Christ, we have a living image of God in which we can see everything necessary for our salvation. In Him, we understand that God is our Father, and through Him, we are cleansed of our sins and transformed into God's glory. Through Him, we recognize that God accepts us as righteous and reconciles us to Himself. Through Him, we realize that we are redeemed and will never be deprived of the grace of His Holy Spirit until we inherit our eternal reward. Therefore, we find all that we need to know in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why St. Paul says in another place that he desires to know nothing else but Jesus Christ and boasts only in Him. As we have seen before, he abandoned all worldly pursuits to remain under the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although this may bring shame and reproach in the eyes of the world, he declares that he considers everything else he once valued as worthless and a hindrance, even as filth and dung, in comparison to his devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that those who cling to the misguided belief in their own merit separate themselves from our Lord Jesus Christ. To be united with Him, we must forsake our self-righteousness and present ourselves to Him, empty of our own goodness, ready to be filled by Him.

Now, consider why St. Paul expresses his willingness to arrive at the haven of salvation completely naked and destitute rather than remain in the perilous sea of worldly pride. Even if he were esteemed as a holy being or half an angel, he regarded these accolades as insignificant compared to sharing in the forgiveness of sins bestowed upon him through Jesus Christ and the grace extended to all His followers. Therefore, let us exalt God's grace to such a degree that we forsake the delusions that the devil uses to inflate the pride of unbelievers. Let us approach our Lord Jesus Christ with complete humility and emptiness, seeking His grace. We must acknowledge our utter unworthiness to receive even a single drop of it.

Now, let us prostrate ourselves before the majesty of our benevolent God, acknowledging our faults and praying for a heightened awareness of them. May this awareness humble us deeply, leading to a firm foundation in His grace. Let us strive to draw nearer and nearer to Him, humbling ourselves so that He may lift us up through His boundless mercy. Let us wholly depend on Him, turning to Him as our Father, and persist in doing so until He rescues us from the prison of sin, uniting us perfectly with Himself. May He grant this grace not only to us but to all people.

The Seventh Sermon on the First Chapter

> "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." - Ephesians 1:17-18

By nature, all individuals possess a measure of understanding. This understanding does not immediately manifest at birth but is gradually acquired over time, allowing everyone to discern between good and evil, thus affirming their status as rational beings. However, the innate understanding we possess falls short when it comes to guiding us to the heavenly kingdom. In matters of heavenly life, we often find ourselves lacking. Many tend to focus on worldly concerns and personal interests. Even those who may wish to silence their conscience occasionally experience moments of moral reckoning, acknowledging the difference between good and evil. God has implanted this moral sense within our hearts, ensuring that all are left without excuse and compelled to serve as their own judges.

Nevertheless, as previously noted, this foundational understanding remains insufficient to lead us to God or unveil the kingdom of heaven in a manner that enables us to grasp the path to salvation or how to call upon God effectively. In this respect, we are profoundly blind, for our vision does not extend beyond the earthly realm. Consequently, it becomes incumbent upon God to work within us and bestow upon us new eyes capable of comprehending the essentials of our salvation. This is precisely why St. Paul entreats God for enlightened eyes in his prayer, presuming that humans already possess a rudimentary understanding—not enough to ascend to the loftiest heights required, yet adequate to have a seed of religious consciousness within them and to acknowledge the existence of God.

Moreover, God must bestow upon us a clarity of vision, a precious gift we utterly lack due to the original sin of Adam. We find ourselves immersed in such profound darkness that we instinctively wander from the right path, desperately needing God's divine intervention. It is crucial to understand that what is conveyed here is that God has done much more for us by granting us the eyes of understanding than merely creating us as human beings and placing us in this world. Through this profound gift, He not only

transforms us but also imparts to us clear and certain insight, particularly regarding His chosen ones. This privilege is reserved exclusively for His children; it is not a common experience for all of humanity. As we have observed, even when God performs miracles in plain sight, only those with enlightened eyes can truly grasp the depth of His power.

A poignant illustration of this truth can be found in the example of the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness. Despite bearing witness to astonishing miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea, water gushing from a rock, manna descending from the heavens, the guidance of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, the abundant provision of meat, and the severe punishment of rebels and those who succumbed to their desires, the people remained spiritually blind. Moses admonished them, urging them to seek God, that they might be illuminated by His Spirit. Even after witnessing these wondrous signs, their hearts and eyes remained veiled to the truth. This illustrates that humans, by their very nature, are spiritually dull and unable to comprehend anything related to their salvation until God graciously works within them.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to cast aside all pride and humbly implore God for understanding. We must acknowledge our innate incapacity to rightly discern the works of God and derive benefit from them until He bestows upon us the gift of spiritual insight from the heavenly realms. This forms the core message of this passage.

It is pertinent to observe how the world has been ensnared by the notion of free will that has been deeply ingrained in their minds. The Papists readily concede that without God's grace, we cannot conduct ourselves as we ought. Nevertheless, they also assert that we can enhance God's grace through our free will, amalgamating the two. When they attempt to define free will, they describe it as a complex faculty encompassing reason and prudence to choose the good and avoid evil, coupled with the power and

ability to execute our intentions. However, St. Paul's words here shed light on human reason, a faculty they exalt as the supreme authority governing all our thoughts and actions. St. Paul vividly illustrates that this human reason is utterly blind until God renews it. It is not a matter of us possessing some inherent ability, with God merely required to supplement our deficiencies. Had that been the case, St. Paul might have expressed that God assists or augments the light within us or adds what it lacks. However, his language differs significantly. He implores God to grant us enlightened eyes, emphasizing that it is a divine gift, not a mere patching up of our deficiencies. St. Paul unequivocally asserts that as blind beings, we are incapable of perceiving anything until God opens our eyes. We are guided and governed by the revelation of His Holy Spirit, as previously discussed.

Now, given that human nature is inclined toward extremes and often indulges in unproductive speculations, St. Paul wisely redirects our attention to what should fully occupy our hearts and minds – the pursuit of understanding the hope associated with our divine calling. As I've noted previously, humanity possesses an inherent curiosity, perpetually exploring and concocting various groundless ideas. This tendency often leads individuals to torment themselves, ceaselessly accumulating knowledge without ever attaining a genuine comprehension of the truth, as St. Paul astutely points out. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we recognize that all knowledge we ought to seek is centered on the hope to which God has summoned us. The purpose of Scripture is not to inundate our minds with vacuous or extraneous information, but rather to edify us for our ultimate benefit. Its intent is to instill in us a profound appreciation of God's goodness, drawing us nearer to Him and unveiling our true happiness, which is found in His presence.

From this, it becomes evident that, without the illumination of the Lord through His Holy Spirit, we are utterly incapable of discovering the way or gaining access to the heavenly life, not even catching a glimpse of its

essence. Consequently, our most pressing need is for the Lord to bestow upon us the possession of our salvation by the power of His Holy Spirit. As I previously mentioned, faith serves as the conduit through which we access the kingdom of heaven and the inheritance secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. However, it is imperative that God imparts this faith to us through His Holy Spirit. Therefore, we require not only to have the gospel proclaimed to us but also for God to open our ears to hear and our eyes to perceive what He unveils. In essence, He must initiate and accomplish every aspect of our spiritual journey.

Nevertheless, as I have indicated before, due to humanity's proclivity for extremes, we often either take on more than we should or undervalue God's gracious gifts. St. Paul underscores the significance of the hope we mentioned earlier by describing it as "the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints." While we frequently acknowledge that matters pertaining to God and our Lord Jesus Christ are lofty, we often employ this as an excuse to keep our distance. If we could evade the responsibility of understanding religious matters, we would readily remain ignorant. We display an insatiable appetite for vanity and falsehood, yet when God calls us to seek knowledge, we resist as strenuously as possible, conveniently claiming simplicity, limited understanding, and the profound and inscrutable nature of God's Word as our reasons. We may know how to utter such excuses, but in reality, it is mere pretense and hypocrisy.

In demonstration of this, individuals invariably pass judgment according to their own preconceived notions. When presented with God's Word, they respond with queries such as, "Is that so? How can it be?" They reason and question, even when it is God who is speaking. They refuse to accept God's message without offering objections. Thus, it becomes evident that their professed dullness or lack of discernment is disingenuous, for they think quite the opposite. Even those who may be considered the most ignorant

and foolish among them often regard themselves as wiser than God Himself.

On the contrary, one of the reasons the gospel faces disdain is that many proud and fanciful individuals perceive it as a simplistic doctrine, lacking the complexity they crave. Thus, it is imperative for us to meditate upon what St. Paul presents here: the glorious inheritance to which God has summoned us is indescribably rich. Considering our humble origins and fallen state, and the fact that sin should have left us utterly devoid of hope, especially when we were once God's adversaries, what can we anticipate but utter destruction from His hand? Yet, it pleases Him to elevate us to a partnership with the angels of paradise, and even more astonishingly, to make us members of our Lord Jesus Christ, destined to share in His life and glory. These are treasures of unparalleled magnificence! When we contemplate these riches with all our hearts and minds, should we not be profoundly humbled? God has shown us such incomprehensible goodness. Therefore, St. Paul, seeking to rouse people from their spiritual slumber and rebuke their ingratitude, because they fail to acknowledge even a fraction of God's grace as they ought, tells us that by contemplating these truths, we should be prompted to pray for God's enlightenment. Without His divine illumination, we would never approach faith or any semblance of true knowledge.

Now, we can discern St. Paul's intended message, which he further elaborates by adding, 'what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.' He also mentions, 'according to the working of His mighty power.' In these expressions, he essentially conveys the same profound truth. This serves as a correction for human wickedness, as people often strive to diminish the magnitude of God's goodness. When they cannot wholly obscure it, they endeavor to reduce it to a point where it appears trivial. As though God's grace were a mere spark, when it should shine brilliantly. However, it is crucial to understand that when St. Paul speaks of

saints and believers, he is referring to the faithful whom God has already called. By doing so, he illustrates that even when we possess faith, all our holiness originates from God's boundless mercy, and human beings contribute nothing of their own. While the designation 'saints' is highly honorable, it is imperative to trace the source of holiness. In ourselves, we are nothing but impurity. Though God's children must be holy, they must always ponder the origin of this holiness—whether it arises from their own efforts or is bestowed as a divine gift from God. St. Paul emphatically demonstrates that all praise for it should be directed solely toward God. This is manifest in the frequent affirmations of God's own holiness. Moreover, we acknowledge that Jesus Christ sanctified Himself for our sakes, purifying us from all our impurities.

Subsequently, St. Paul addresses the root of our faith: individuals cannot attain it unless they are drawn by a secret inner compulsion. As it has been stated, we must learn from God, not merely because His Word encompasses all wisdom and faithfully imparts what is beneficial, but also because our Lord Himself explicitly affirmed, 'Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father.' He, being the very embodiment of God's wisdom, conveyed this message while simultaneously underscoring that His spoken words could only take effect when God's Spirit worked within a person's heart. Now, if Jesus Christ, who personified God's wisdom, could not effect change in people through His teachings unless God's Spirit operated within their innermost being, how can the preaching of mere mortal men have any impact? We must recognize that while men may sow the seeds of truth and offer nourishment, it is God who grants the increase, as St. Paul articulates in the third chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Moreover, as previously emphasized, we must derive our entire holiness from Jesus Christ, in whom we find its fullness. Additionally, we should grasp that this declaration serves as a warning against impurity and wrongdoing. Instead, it calls us to be set apart, dedicating ourselves wholly

to the service of God. Many may boast of being believers, and the term 'faith' may easily roll off the tongues of many. Nevertheless, faith holds greater significance than we might initially realize, for it purifies our hearts, as stated in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. It sets us apart, consecrating us to wholly dedicate ourselves to the service of God. This signifies that those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ are, in a sense, drawn out from the world, as St. Peter also mentions in his First Epistle.

As mentioned earlier, we have already established that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ in order to be set apart from this world. This aligns with His prayer in the Gospel of St. John, where He implored God the Father not to remove us from this world and its fleeting life but to shield us from the world's corrupting influences and exempt us from their grasp. Therefore, it is essential to remember that holiness is the genuine evidence of our faith. Anyone bearing the name of a Christian should be consecrated to God and should avoid entanglement in, or defilement by, the impurities and filthiness of the world. While it is true that our holiness will never attain perfection while we dwell in this world, as we constantly battle our own weaknesses, sin may not reign over us. It resides within us, and we continually strive to overcome it. Nevertheless, once God has sanctified us, we must commit ourselves to His service, endeavoring to purify ourselves increasingly from all vices, and surrendering ourselves entirely to Him so that we no longer resemble the worldly individuals who follow their own desires. This is fundamentally what St. Paul intended to convey.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that in this passage, St. Paul draws a striking comparison between those who are steeped in total ignorance or so hardened that they have no inclination to submit to the obedience of the gospel but instead vehemently oppose it, and the faithful, who are akin to poor sheep following the voice of the good shepherd. Here, St. Paul condemns all scoffers who deride God and resemble dogs or brute animals devoid of any religious sensibility. When we encounter them, they serve as

mirrors that should give us pause, reminding us of what we would be like if God had not shown us mercy. Therefore, when we witness people openly ridiculing God to the point of plunging recklessly into all manner of wickedness, we should acknowledge the infinite goodness of our God in separating us from their midst. Consequently, when we observe one group stupefied in unbelief and another filled with pride, bitterness, and obstinacy against the gospel, we should understand that we would be like them if God had not reached out to us.

Now, let us pay close attention to the words St. Paul uses here: 'the exceeding greatness of His might, according to the working of His power.' It appears as if the Holy Spirit intended to strongly address the erroneous belief that has clouded the minds of people throughout history—the concept of free will. Pagans went so far as to assert that God had indeed created them to exist in the world, and it was His responsibility to grant them good fortune, as they called it. However, they believed that every individual possessed the power and free choice to pursue virtue and lead a faultless life. They divided responsibilities between God and themselves, attributing the lesser matters of life, such as our earthly existence, to God, but insisting that the attainment of heaven and virtuous self-control were within the realm of human capability.

On the other hand, both Jews and Catholics have not wholly embraced this belief, for, as mentioned earlier, they acknowledge our need for God's assistance. Nevertheless, they still maintain that we should combine some measure of our own holiness with God's grace and cooperate with it. In their view, after all considerations and allowances, the primary role is always found within ourselves.

However, let us contemplate why the Holy Spirit employs these terms—highness, power, strength, effectual working, and might. It is to demonstrate the foolishness of those who presume beyond their rightful station. Not one

word here supports our boasting in even the slightest shred of goodness. If someone says, "I possess a good disposition, I have some virtue," this is what St. Paul refers to as 'highness.' It is as if he intended to convey that all the goodness we possess descends from above and has no root or origin in us; it descends from on high, as St. James suggests. If someone argues that we have the power to resist our own vices and combat temptations, St. Paul asserts that our strength, power, and might come from God, and He must bestow it upon us, and we receive it from Him. If individuals still claim they can accomplish certain things through their own efforts, St. Paul tells us that no effective work can be done, nothing can be achieved, unless God grants it, as he speaks in the second chapter of Philippians, where he explains that we should walk in fear and caution since it is God who both provides the will and the ability to act according to His good pleasure. In short, we should recognize that the terms the apostle employs here are like thunderclaps and lightning strikes, intended to annihilate and subdue all human pride. Thus, by humbling ourselves, we may glorify God as He deserves. With utmost humility, we should openly and freely confess our fault, acknowledging that all goodness emanates solely from Him, and that we are indebted to Him alone for it. Essentially, this passage teaches us to humble ourselves so profoundly that we have no desire to claim a partnership with God. We should refrain from saying that He merely aids us and that there is some portion of His grace and Holy Spirit in our free will. Instead, we should wholly and simply attribute all praise for our salvation to Him.

Moreover, this should lead us to disdain the world and find contentment in the hope of eternal life secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. We comprehend that although human beings often face numerous hardships, and our earthly existence is justly referred to as a vale of misery, God subjects His own children to even greater adversity because they consistently require encouragement to detach from the world. If we live here too comfortably and indulgently, we might grow complacent, even

though God persistently urges us to hasten rather than linger on this earth. In summary, God will test us in various ways after calling us to faith in the gospel to prevent us from growing excessively attached to the world. If everything proceeded smoothly here, we might lose interest in serving Him, and His love would appear insignificant. Therefore, St. Paul intends to draw us nearer to God in a way that nothing obstructs us from pursuing our calling. If our desires are not always fulfilled in this world, let us learn to value the immeasurable blessings of our God more deeply so that we may declare with the spirit of David (as expressed in Psalm 16:5), "I have a beautiful inheritance." Because God has given Himself to me, I possess such an outstanding legacy that I do not fret about enduring the world's afflictions - poverty, illness, reproach, fear, and threats. All these trials shall be sweet to me as long as I possess my God, who has chosen and set me apart for Himself, intending to make me a participant in all His blessings.

So, fundamentally, we are to be encouraged and fortified in patience to bear all the afflictions and adversities of the world with meekness. We must not be distressed or irritated when God occasionally presents us with a bitter cup and gives us reason to sigh and lament. Instead, we should refrain from grumbling and complaining, assuring ourselves that God has provided us with great comfort by summoning us to partake in His kingdom. He has already demonstrated His power in us, even though it may seem insufficient to us. We should rise above all worldly matters, regarding them as beneath our feet.

However, since we do not yet perceive the fullness of God's grace as we desire, St. Paul directs our attention to our Lord Jesus Christ. Without this addition, it might be disheartening. We might wonder, "Where are these riches of God?" For we are not only deprived of the goods of this world but are also spiritually dry and barren in terms of the grace of God's Holy Spirit. If there is any portion of it within us, it is so small that we should be humbled by it. Despite this, we are weighed down by our weaknesses. If we

speak of God's power, it should be victorious over all sin within us, yet we are so feeble that we are easily overcome. We should be wholly devoted to God, but the world ensnares us, and we become entangled in it.

Hence, it is crucial for the faithful not to lose heart when contemplating God's grace; instead, they should be drawn closer to Jesus Christ. St. Paul emphasizes that God showcased the magnificence of His power in raising our Lord Jesus Christ from the clutches of death. The focus on Christ's resurrection is deliberate because His death alone might appear as an act of vulnerability. In His crucifixion, there seemed to be nothing but weakness. However, by triumphing over death, Christ manifested Himself as the Son of God, the sovereign of glory and life, vested with boundless authority. St. Paul further asserts that God exalted Him to His right hand. Christ's resurrection was just the beginning; His ascension granted Him enduring dominion. His resurrection proclaimed His divinity, while His ascension ratified His sovereignty over the world, seated at the right hand of God the Father. He now sustains and guards His followers who call upon Him, wielding the power to overcome Satan, the world, and all adversaries.

Hence, St. Paul's purpose is clear. He presents Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar through whom we can perceive what is not yet fully evident in ourselves—the immeasurable might of God, surpassing that of the entire world. Firstly, Christ was resurrected from the grave, and secondly, He occupies the position at the right hand of the Father. Mentioning God's right hand employs a human analogy. God, being infinite and spiritual, does not possess physical hands. When Christ is said to sit at God's right hand, it symbolizes His pervasive authority throughout the cosmos. Even though His physical presence is no longer with us due to His ascension into heaven, His influence remains undiminished. He permeates all things with His Holy Spirit and resides within us, nurturing us through His very essence, as affirmed in the belief that His flesh is our sustenance and His blood our nourishment.

Consequently, God's right hand is not a specific physical location where Christ is seated but signifies the dominion He has acquired over the entire universe. It is a metaphorical expression drawn from human customs, akin to when a prince appoints a vice-regent and stations them at his right side, signifying their status as second-in-command to be obeyed. Therefore, God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrates His role as our Father. Although the complete fullness of the Godhead resides in Jesus Christ, we, being limited and sluggish in comprehending God's majesty, are assured that Jesus Christ possesses supreme authority. Under His protective care, even the forces of hell cannot overcome us. Our Head, Jesus Christ, wields all power, even though we, the members, may be feeble. Thus, we need not seek His assistance far and wide, for He governs all aspects of both the heavenly and earthly realms, and we are entrusted to His loving care.

To summarize St. Paul's message here, he affirms that God has unveiled His lofty and boundless power within us. Yet, due to our perceived inadequacies and numerous imperfections, we have not yet realized our full potential, not even a fraction of it. To bolster our confidence concerning all that we require, we must recognize that these provisions are found in Jesus Christ.

Do we still confront the shadow of death? Consider that Jesus Christ has ascended to eternal life precisely because He took on mortality, so that His life could become ours. Does sin persist within us? Acknowledge that Jesus Christ is immaculate and without flaw. Are we feeble? He embodies the power of God the Father, and whatever He acquired in His humanity, taken from us, was for our benefit. In essence, all our deficiencies and needs for solace and sustenance can be found in our Lord Jesus Christ. This understanding guards us against anxiety and perplexity, as if we were excluded from the blessings elucidated by St. Paul.

In summary, this passage instructs us that though God's grace may appear limited within us, offering only a modest beginning instead of the complete

abundance we yearn for, this grace grants us a foretaste and a guarantee of hope in Him. Even with a small measure of His Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we recognize it as a token and earnest of the promised life. Despite the indwelling sin within our mortal bodies, we should find contentment in the fact that God benevolently bestows even a fractional portion of His Holy Spirit upon us.

Moreover, owing to our finite understanding, weaknesses, and deficiencies, we cannot entirely grasp all these truths. Therefore, we must direct our gaze toward Jesus Christ. While we may discern all perfection in Him, we remain separated from Him in terms of physical presence. In this regard, as St. Paul mentions, we are absent from Him, for we walk by faith rather than by direct sight. Nonetheless, we are integral members of His body. Just as a root cannot be detached from the tree and imparts its nourishment to all branches, we should comprehend that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His entirety, has received spiritual endowments for heavenly life, intending to gradually share them with us as our faith matures.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to recall that we should cultivate humility and recognize our inherent imperfection. We must approach God with meekness, openly acknowledging our shortcomings and dependencies. In doing so, we ought to hasten to Him, knowing that His assistance can increase with each passing day. Without His ongoing support, we would be adrift, and everything we hold dear would slip through our grasp. Thus, it becomes paramount for us to remain closely united with our Lord Jesus Christ, comprehending the unbreakable connection between Him and ourselves. He willingly embraced poverty to bestow riches upon us, and this is how His abundant blessings are communicated to us even now. Though we may not fully partake in them, having a small portion is sufficient to savor God's boundless love and trust that He will never forsake us. He has drawn near to us, taking up residence within us through His Holy Spirit, as

we have witnessed in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, assuring us that He will continually fill us to the brim.

St. Paul's choice of the term 'enrich' serves as a reminder that in us, there will always exist a sense of insufficiency and need. Nevertheless, we should firmly place our trust in the promise that the One who initiated a virtuous work within us will bring it to fruition on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. This assurance grants us solace during times when life seems protracted, and we yearn for the fullness of perfection to be unveiled in us, eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus Christ. Until that glorious day, we must persist in our journey and implore God not to allow us to stumble. Undoubtedly, we will encounter moments of lack and want, but He will come to our aid in such a manner that we will discern His benevolent gaze upon us. Through this union with our Lord Jesus Christ, each of us, in accordance with our faith, shall partake in suitable blessings until we are wholly replenished, a consummation that will transpire when we are flawlessly united with Him.

And so, let us bow in humility before the majesty of our benevolent God, acknowledging our transgressions and praying that this awareness may steer us away from them. May it serve as a compass guiding us to dutifully obey His commandments, bearing witness through our deeds that He has not redeemed us at such a high cost in vain. We must renounce the desires of the flesh and consecrate ourselves wholeheartedly to His divine service, recognizing that He has unequivocally adopted us as His cherished heritage. Therefore, let our voices unite in saying, "Almighty God, our Heavenly Father."

The Eighth Sermon on the First Chapter

> "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." - Ephesians 1:19-23

We have previously witnessed how God has unmistakably revealed to us that with His only Son, Jesus Christ, in our possession, we possess the ultimate perfection of all that is good. When we turn our gaze upon Him, we discover all that our hearts could ever desire. Despite the numerous faults within us and the fragility of our human condition, we have an unshakable support upon which to lean. Our Lord Jesus Christ beckons us to His side, declaring that the blessings bestowed upon Him by God the Father are intended for us all. While we may not yet fully partake in these blessings, we shall not fall short of receiving them. In essence, our Lord Jesus Christ sits enthroned at the right hand of God the Father, overseeing the governance of all things. He holds dominion over the entire world, and from Him emanates every good thing. Under His protective mantle, we can boldly defy the devil and all adversaries.

To further encourage us to find complete contentment in Jesus Christ alone, without straying, as we often do, St. Paul explicitly adds that "He has been set above all might, sovereignty, principality, and power." In this context, "might" pertains to angelic beings. St. Paul employs this language to emphasize our unwavering devotion to Jesus Christ, discouraging any diversions or detours. Essentially, he conveys that while God has indeed vested some of His glory, honor, and power in the angels, it in no way diminishes the preeminence bestowed upon Jesus Christ. Thus, we shall

find all that we require in Him, with no need to seek elsewhere. Associating anyone with Jesus Christ is impermissible, for He alone possesses all eminence and all that may be regarded as noble and excellent. This message is also conveyed by St. Paul in the first chapter of Colossians. The world's inclination to turn away from our Lord Jesus Christ, feigning devotion to the angels of heaven, is no recent development. Throughout history, God's creatures have been lured into various forms of superstition, even crafting idols in honor of angels. People often seek the protection of St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and others, mistakenly believing they have gained much through such practices. This vice is not a newly devised temptation; it is a recurring deception perpetuated by the devil, the father and originator of falsehood, throughout the annals of time. Even Christians have been ensnared by such delusions, as secular histories bear witness.

Throughout history, pagans have held the belief that angels are akin to demigods, making them intermediaries to reach God, as they deemed themselves unworthy. Regrettably, the papists still uphold similar convictions to this day. These erroneous beliefs began to take root on Earth even during the time of St. Paul. Hence, St. Paul underscores the impropriety of associating anything with Jesus Christ. While angels are honored with titles such as powers, authorities, principalities, dominions, and other designations, these celestial beings must ultimately bow in submission to the Head. The highest reverence is to be reserved exclusively for God's Son, as every knee, both on Earth and in heaven, is to bow before Him, as proclaimed in Scripture [Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10].

Therefore, it becomes evident that St. Paul's extensive terminology concerning angels in this passage serves as a firm reminder for us to remain unwavering in our devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to place our complete reliance upon Him, refraining from entertaining thoughts that angels possess superior and noble attributes. From this passage, we can

discern that the errors within the papacy, where patrons, advocates, and intermediaries towards God are conceived, stem from a lack of understanding concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and the divine gifts bestowed upon Him by God the Father. People tend not to lean upon Him unless they grasp His purpose in His incarnation. On one hand, the papists have distanced themselves from our Lord Jesus Christ, failing to recognize that He has become our brother, granting us intimate access to God. On the other hand, they have stripped Him of His ordained role in Holy Scripture, reducing it to a lifeless form.

Thus, it is of paramount importance that we give careful heed to these words, understanding that we are joined together as one body with the angels of heaven and the holy patriarchs who lived under the old covenant. Alongside the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, we must unite in the glorification of our common Head, Jesus Christ, with unwavering unity. His exaltation must shine forth for all to behold, and every impediment obscuring His glory must be cast aside. The surest way to overcome any obstacle Satan may place before us, hindering our approach to Jesus Christ, is to acknowledge that no dignity or worthiness exists anywhere in the world, whether above or below, that is not subject to His authority. In this manner, we are united to Him in perfect harmony, and this constitutes the essence of the message we derive from this passage.

Admittedly, these words also imply that God assigns distinct roles to His angels according to His divine will. However, it is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend the extent of their responsibilities. Let us be content with the knowledge provided through our faith, approaching God's Word with humility and sobriety. We should refrain from indulging in futile curiosity, as some are wont to do when engaging in intricate debates about the angels, as if they possessed the authority to appoint offices within God's house. Few things are more audacious than embarking upon such discussions about God's mysteries beyond what He has revealed to us in His Word. Let

us, therefore, acknowledge that while angels, no matter how exalted, serve as ministers of our salvation through Jesus Christ, our approach to them should not resemble the practices of the papists with their distinct prayers to angels. Instead, let us approach Jesus Christ, for through Him, all things become shared between us and the angelic hosts.

When we confess our belief in the communion of the saints following our acknowledgment of the church, it is crucial to understand that the angels are an integral part of this communion because God employs them in His service to us. This divine inclusion is not a result of our worthiness but stems from God's gracious gathering of all of us under the banner of Jesus Christ. Thus, the true bond of unity and brotherhood between us and the angels of heaven is established through our shared connection to Christ.

Additionally, St. Paul emphasizes that "Jesus Christ has obtained a name (that is, a majesty) that is above all names, both in heaven and on earth." In this concise statement, St. Paul underscores the essence of our wisdom, which lies in comprehending the blessings bestowed upon us by the Son of God and which we possess exclusively through Him. Our faith must find its unwavering foundation in Him alone, as reiterated in the Acts of the Apostles, "There is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." As I mentioned earlier, God, being incomprehensible and dwelling in unapproachable light, necessitates Jesus Christ to stand as the bridge between Him and us. This enables us to approach God with boldness, knowing that He is not distant from us. Thus, it is crucial to recognize that when the term "Name" is used here, it signifies God's desire to reveal Himself through His only Son. Simultaneously, it affirms the singularity of deity; while we have one God in essence, we encounter the living and precise representation of the Father in Jesus Christ. Therefore, in Him, we find everything essential for our salvation. While it is true that we should boast in our knowledge of the one true God, this knowledge is achieved through the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who seek God apart

from Jesus Christ as their way and guide become ensnared in a bewildering maze. This clarifies St. Paul's intention in this passage.

Moreover, it is added that "the same is not only for this world, but also for the other," signifying that our knowledge of Jesus Christ is sufficient for our heavenly life. At first glance, there may appear to be a contradiction between this statement and what is mentioned in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where it is stated that on the last day, Christ will yield the kingdom to God the Father, from whom He holds it. However, these two statements are not contradictory. When we affirm that Jesus Christ possesses a name above all names and is the image of God the Father, we do so to accommodate our human weakness and fragility. Similarly, when Christ is referred to as the Lieutenant of God, it is to reassure us that God extends His hand to aid us in our need. This truth is most vividly manifested in Jesus Christ, who has drawn near to us and become our brother.

It is essential to understand that when God rules through Jesus Christ, it does not imply that He has relinquished His own divine role and remains passive in heaven. Such a notion would be erroneous. Indeed, in the fifth chapter of St. John (verse 17), our Lord Jesus Christ Himself declared, "My Father and I are always at work." He made it unequivocal that His appointment as the ruler of the world was not to suggest that the Father is at rest in heaven, but rather, this statement is intended for our benefit, to reinforce our faith in God's continuous presence when we seek Him. In the future, after the final judgment, we will be granted new eyes, as mentioned by St. John. Being transformed into God's likeness, we will behold Him as He truly is—a privilege beyond our current limited understanding. Hence, for the present moment, it suffices that we perceive Him as if through a dimly lit mirror, as described by St. Paul, and that our knowledge of Him remains partial. This transfer of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father serves to facilitate our ability to behold God's majestic

essence, which currently transcends our grasp. Our nature will undergo a profound transformation, attaining heavenly glory, and we will be liberated from the corruption that surrounds us in our earthly existence.

Nonetheless, this transfer of the kingdom does not imply any diminishment in the stature of Jesus Christ; on the contrary, He will be even more exalted. As elucidated in the third chapter of Colossians, our life is securely hidden in God with Jesus Christ, and when Jesus Christ is revealed, our life will also be unveiled. In essence, when we attain the supreme happiness that awaits us, we will realize the fullness of our current hopes. Jesus Christ will gather all things to Himself, and we will partake in His glory, each according to our allotted measure and degree. Hence, these two passages align seamlessly: Christ will surrender the kingdom to God the Father so that we may behold the heavenly majesty of God, which our present carnal nature cannot fully comprehend. Furthermore, we will recognize that Jesus Christ, though appearing to us as a mortal man, has been glorified to such an extent that He is indeed God, sharing the same divine essence as His Father—a revelation that will become fully known at that time, in contrast to our current partial understanding.

Moreover, let us acknowledge that when God exalted Jesus Christ, it was done with the primary purpose of securing our eternal salvation. Thus, in the ninth chapter of Isaiah, He is referred to as the "Father of the age to come." This title signifies not only that He is given to us for our temporal life but also that the core of our faith, grounded in Him, resides in heaven. In that celestial realm, we will fully experience what is currently veiled from us, obtaining the complete blessings already bestowed upon Him. This clarifies why St. Paul specifically mentions the "age to come" in his discourse.

St. Paul swiftly follows this by affirming that 'God has placed everything under His feet and appointed Him as the head of the Church over all things.'

The emphasis on the subjection of the entire world underscores that if we turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, He possesses the capability to provide us with whatever we require, for all things are subject to His authority. We must recall what is stated in the eighth Psalm, which declares God's care for all His creation, from the sheep and birds of the air to the fish of the sea. In essence, all creatures are within His dominion. And what is the purpose of this divine order? The Holy Spirit intends to instruct us, akin to nurturing children, that spiritual blessings, of paramount importance, are conveyed to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. This message underscores that we can possess even a morsel of bread only as members of Jesus Christ's body.

It's as though He is guiding us through a gradual education, commencing with the fundamentals. Since everything has been entrusted to our Lord Jesus Christ, contingent upon us being genuinely united with Him as members of His body, all that He possesses becomes our rightful inheritance. If we remain inseparably connected to Him, He will make us participants in even greater and more remarkable blessings in the days to come. We will be recognized as children of God, becoming temples of His Holy Spirit. The profound privilege of approaching Him freely and addressing Him as our Father is truly remarkable! The restoration of the gifts we lost due to Adam's sin is nothing short of wonderful! Being in communion with the angels instead of living under Satan's tyranny and the bondage of sin is an astounding transformation! How can we attain these lofty and noble blessings? The answer lies in understanding that we can lay claim to nothing, not even a morsel of bread, except as members of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we comprehend the true intention behind St. Paul's declaration that all things are subject to our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us cultivate gratitude to God in the name of His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, sent not only to sustain our physical bodies but also to nourish our souls unto eternal life. Let us acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ possesses the boundless resources to meet all our needs. In times when the devil's assaults threaten to overwhelm us, let us recognize that our

Lord Jesus Christ is an impregnable fortress, equipping us for victory in every battle. Thus, in our weakness, let us turn to His strength. In times of grace deficit, let us implore Him for the grace we require. When our adversaries, fierce as wild beasts, menace us with the threat of being engulfed in turmoil, let us beseech our Lord Jesus Christ for His protective shield, entreating Him to restrain Satan and his cohorts from overwhelming us.

Hence, it becomes evident that all things were subjected to our Lord Jesus Christ, not for His personal gain (for what need did He have of them?), but for our benefit. This divine arrangement was orchestrated so that He could bestow upon us whatever He deems beneficial. Consequently, we must learn to seek all things from Him, knowing that when our adversaries seem to gain the upper hand, He holds the power to subdue them.

Moreover, when St. Paul conveys that Christ was appointed as the Head of the church 'in all things,' he does so with the purpose of directing us wholly to Jesus Christ. It's as if he were saying, "While it is true that God's gracious gifts are dispersed, and angels and mortal men may serve as vessels for these gifts to reach us, we must always turn to the source." Just as the veins throughout the body provide strength to every part by carrying the life-sustaining blood, the source of life always remains in the brain.

Similarly, consider a tree where sap circulates throughout. Although the root does not ascend to directly nourish every branch and leaf, all sustenance originates from the root. Even if someone were to claim that the entire tree is kept alive by a single branch, reality speaks otherwise. While a substantial branch may indeed nourish nearby branches and twigs, it doesn't diminish the root's significance. Likewise, the members of a person's body should not overshadow the head, even though each member fulfills its own function.

Here, St. Paul emphasizes that our Lord Jesus Christ was appointed as the head of the church above all things, implying that we should all turn to Him. In this regard, there's no distinction between St. Paul, St. Peter, the Virgin Mary, or St. Michael—they possess nothing of their own. They all depend on Jesus Christ to fill them, making it necessary for all, regardless of their status, to draw from His abundance. This is why, in the passage I referenced from Colossians 1:19, St. Paul states that it pleased God the Father that all fullness should dwell in Christ. The title of Head isn't just an honorary designation; it signifies the supreme authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence, just as a natural head not only holds authority and supremacy over the entire body but also nurtures and sustains the whole body, the same holds true in the relationship between our Lord Jesus Christ and us. Without Him, everything would crumble into chaos. Although it may seem that we have already received remarkable gifts from God, all is in vain if we are not firmly connected to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Additionally, as Christ is designated as the Head, it is fitting that all others should submit to His authority. We should willingly embrace His teachings, allowing Him to govern the Church, just as the head directs the rest of a person's body. In the Church, Christ must rule, and all must obediently follow Him. In this passage, we must first recognize that our salvation hinges entirely upon Jesus Christ, and there are no angels or humans, no matter how holy, who do not require what they lack from Him.

When we need something essential for our present or future life, for our bodies or our souls, we should not turn to St. Peter, St. Paul, or anyone else. Instead, we must approach our Lord Jesus Christ directly. This is a key takeaway from this passage. Secondly, we must learn to yield to His authority and be obedient, thus demonstrating ourselves as true members of His body. He cannot be our Head unless He is also our Shepherd,

possessing complete authority over us. The devil has attempted to overshadow the glory of God's only Son with the shadows of angels, and has even introduced an idol into the world to obstruct our path, suggesting that Jesus Christ might be separated from us. The Pope shamelessly perpetuates this blasphemy, claiming that the Church would be leaderless if he did not rule over it with universal dominion, as if everyone should look to him and his throne were above the entire world.

This is akin to suggesting that Jesus Christ has no place here and should be content in heaven while His successor rules in His stead. This endeavor to diminish the sovereignty of the Son of God is evident, and we must keep this passage in mind, where St. Paul unequivocally declares that Jesus Christ is appointed as the Head of the Church above all else.

It is true that the Pope may assert himself to be in a subordinate role, and thus Jesus Christ is not ousted from His rightful position. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind what I have previously emphasized: Jesus Christ will not only possess an honorary title but will also retain the authority that inherently belongs to Him. A head must not only occupy the loftiest position but must also be the source from which all others receive everything. We must all comprehend that He is the very wellspring of our life, and the fountain from which we must draw, even though He bestows His spiritual blessings and goodness among us through various channels as He deems fit. These are the points we must hold fast to.

This matter is expounded upon at length in the first chapter of Colossians (verses 16-18). St. Paul illustrates that our Lord Jesus Christ was designated as the Head from the very inception of the world, as all things were created through Him, not merely because He is our Redeemer in the present age. Even if Adam had not fallen into the ruinous state he brought upon us, the Son of God would have perpetually held the position as the firstborn of creation. This does not imply that He Himself is a created being but rather

signifies that He is the foundation. As St. Paul further elucidates, the angels were created by Him and exist within Him. Consequently, the Son of God would have eternally maintained pre-eminence both in heaven and on earth, even if we had not plunged into the state of confusion caused by sin. Nevertheless, now our Lord Jesus Christ must function as our Head in a distinct manner, to reconcile us with God the Father and gather us back to Him. We were estranged from God due to sin, and He was our mortal adversary until we found reconciliation through Jesus Christ's forgiveness of our sins.

Furthermore, St. Paul affirms in the same passage that Jesus Christ was designated as the Head of the Church so that all fullness should reside in Him. Hence, we should unite with the angels, the ancient fathers, and the prophets, but under the condition that our Lord Jesus Christ remains foremost and preeminent, and that all things are related to Him. Our interactions with one another should be such that each individual retains their place, and we all function as members of one body, without having more than one head. If we introduce anyone else as an associate to Jesus Christ, it diminishes what God the Father has bestowed upon Him exclusively. We should find contentment in Him making us participants in His blessings, with the understanding that all goodness emanates from Him, and we should seek everything in Him. Psalm 45 illustrates that we are all joined with Jesus Christ and receive a share of the blessings conferred upon Him. However, this does not imply that He is merely one of us or equal to us, as the papists contend. Rather, it underscores that none of the blessings we desire are remote from us; they are presented to us by Him. He is so benevolent that He desires us to receive what is for our well-being, as He Himself proclaims, "Come to me, all you who are thirsty, come and drink water, yes, even without money or cost, drink your fill of water, wine, and milk." (Isaiah 55:1)

Here, our Lord indicates that we must turn to Him, and when we behold Him, we will perceive that His majesty is too exalted and distant for us. Consequently, Jesus Christ must serve as our mediator, and since He has descended to us, we ought to turn to Him, as elucidated in the seventh chapter of St. John (verses 37-38), "Come to me, all you who are thirsty; and whoever drinks the water I give him will be so satisfied that fountains of water will flow out of him." If individuals seek what they require faithfully in Jesus Christ, He will not only provide us with what benefits each of us individually but will also abundantly supply us to share with our neighbors and aid them in their necessities.

To conclude, St. Paul adds that "the church is the body and fullness of him that performs all things in all men." By designating the church as the body of Jesus Christ, he underscores what I have previously mentioned: we do not need to embark on lengthy journeys or encounter hardships to obtain what we need. Being united and connected to the Son of God, what more can we ask for? We must embrace the principle that apart from God alone, we possess no life, joy, or anything good. With this acknowledged, let us contemplate how we can approach Him – it is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, we comprehend why it is declared here that all fullness dwells in Him, and His responsibility is to reconcile us to God and rescue us from our lost condition.

Hence, there can be no deviation in attributing to St. Peter or St. Paul what is exclusively reserved for Jesus Christ, without detracting from what rightfully belongs to God. Though we may be reluctant to confess it, our hypocrisy will not absolve us before God. We may raise numerous excuses, but in doing so, we condemn ourselves by acknowledging that we should seek our salvation solely from God.

If we admit our unworthiness to approach God, that admission is true. If we declare that we cannot soar without wings, that is also true. However, if we

argue that we must turn to St. Peter or St. Paul, we speak from our own fantasies. God declares the opposite – "I send you to my only Son," He proclaims, "for in Him, you will find all you need. Do not fear that you will lack anything if you are filled with the grace I have placed in Him and abide in Him." This is why the prophet Isaiah specifically mentions wine, water, and milk (Isaiah 55:1), as if to convey that we have all fullness of life in Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who turn to St. Peter and St. Paul, believing in the need for patron saints and mediators, not only wrong Jesus Christ by dividing what is entirely His but also dishonor God. Since God wills that all fullness should dwell in Jesus Christ, as I mentioned earlier, we openly defy Him when we step beyond the boundaries He has set for us and do not submit ourselves to the person He has given us to provide all we need.

Furthermore, what St. Paul adds should offer us even greater comfort when he states, "the church is the fulness of Him that fills all." Here, by "fulness," he means that our Lord Jesus Christ, and even God the Father, consider themselves incomplete unless we are united with Him. This is a testament to God's infinite goodness, which is truly beyond marvel. First and foremost, God does not need to depend on others, for He is perfect in Himself, and He lacked nothing even before creating the world. When He did create it, He did so not for His own benefit but so that we could witness His goodness, power, wisdom, and righteousness. He placed us on this stage to observe His glory in all His creations, even though He could easily exist without us. However, suppose we were to imagine that God needed others to perfect Himself, like mortal men who cannot do without company. What could we possibly offer Him? We are nothing but infection and filthiness, corrupted by Adam's sin to a horrific extent. How then can we bring perfection to God? Though we are frail, perverse, and evil, though we are filled with all manner of filth, and in summary, though we are repulsive in His sight, He still desires to unite with us, even with the condition that He should find His perfection in us through this union. It is as if a father were to say, "My house feels empty to me when I do not see my child in it,"

or a husband were to say, "I seem incomplete when my wife is not with me."

In the same manner, God reveals that He does not consider Himself complete and perfect unless He gathers us to Himself, uniting us as one with Him. He takes immense delight in us and desires His glory to radiate through us, so that His brilliance may illuminate all corners. While all glory rightfully belongs to Him, He still desires that we partake in it. This essentially elucidates why St. Paul referred to the church as the embodiment of God and Jesus Christ.

Now, can we excuse ourselves before God when we assert that we cannot draw near to Him? After all, we are His body through our Lord Jesus Christ. If one of our feet were diseased and strayed away in search of a remedy elsewhere, severing itself from the body, it would be utter folly. If the body's members possessed understanding and speech, they would reprimand the foot for seeking what it needed outside the body. Similarly, when the papists and other idolaters argue that they require the assistance of saints and various intermediaries to approach God, it is as though they are declaring, "Jesus Christ holds no significance for us, and we have no access to Him." Can the members genuinely be detached from the Head? St. Paul has indeed accused and condemned all those who, under the pretext of unworthiness, contrive new means for themselves, apart from Jesus Christ, diminishing His authority, and rejecting the benefit and privilege offered by our Lord Jesus Christ's union with us as His body. Therefore, let us learn to have such freedom with our Lord Jesus Christ that we turn to Him at all times, especially when we discern our deficiencies and needs.

Furthermore, to ensure that the Lord's majesty remains unobscured, St. Paul adds that He continually accomplishes all things in all things. We often observe that when people are bestowed with God's gifts, they start to behave as if they can supplant Him and seek recognition beyond what is

lawful. Likewise, when we hear of Jesus Christ's humiliation for our sake, His descent into the depths of death, and His submission to various forms of reproach, we may be tempted to hold Him in disdain. St. Paul, in order to humble all pride and illustrate that Jesus Christ's glory was not diminished by His humility, affirms that He still achieves all in all things. Hence, we should receive the blessings, grace, and benefits bestowed upon us by our Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge our insignificance, realizing that our lives are fleeting and our supposed virtues are like fading flowers. Let us not boast in our wealth when we are impoverished, rely on our free will, presume upon our merits, or indulge in the illusions of popery. Instead, let us draw from the inexhaustible well to quench our thirst whenever we are parched.

Finally, there are two ways in which God accomplishes His work in all things. Just as He brought the world into existence, He continues to guide and govern all things with His loving hand. When we ponder who causes the sun to rise and set each day, who orchestrates the harmony of nature, who establishes the rhythms of days, months, and years, and who regulates the ebb and flow of day and night, the answer is God, who accomplishes His work in all things. This principle extends to every facet of the universal order. Therefore, let us not mistake God as a Creator who merely set the world in motion and then withdrew; instead, He sustains His creation in every moment. However, St. Paul, in this context, is speaking of spiritual blessings, akin to the inheritance granted to God's children. In this realm, God accomplishes His work in us, not merely through the natural order but by illuminating us with the faith of the gospel, purifying us from the vices and sinful desires of our flesh, drawing us away from the worldly temptations, and providing us with everything essential for our well-being and salvation. Thus, God accomplishes His work in all things. St. Paul essentially conveys that the faithful are utterly dependent on God, lacking any ability, power, or possession of their own.

In these words, St. Paul is not referring to the natural elements, such as the sun, moon, trees, or any other aspects of the physical world. He is not speaking of animals or even humanity in their unregenerate state. Instead, he speaks of those whom God has renewed through His Holy Spirit. All that pertains to salvation and the heavenly life can be obtained only through Him. He encompasses all things within Himself and accomplishes His work in all things, as expressed here. Therefore, let us truly humble ourselves and offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God. Let us ascribe to Him the praise and honor He rightfully deserves. May none of us separate ourselves from Him through ingratitude, but instead, let us give Him the glory by recognizing that everything we receive comes from Him. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, our eternal God, we understand that He is the source of all goodness, and all glory should be attributed to Him alone.

Now, let us bow in reverence before the majesty of our benevolent God, confessing our sins and seeking His help to perceive them more clearly. May this awareness lead us to abase ourselves and earnestly dedicate ourselves wholly to our Lord Jesus Christ. He has called us through His gospel, and we should conform to His ways, forsaking all forms of superstition. Let us grasp that any human contrivances to attain the kingdom of heaven are mere deceptions of Satan. It is sufficient for us to have Jesus Christ as our sole refuge. Just as the Father exalted Him so that all humanity should turn to Him, let us fix our gaze upon Him and direct our entire being towards Him. Let us acknowledge that He alone is the way and the preparation we need. Once we have embarked on this righteous path, let us persevere steadfastly toward our goal until we attain perfection. May God bestow this grace not only upon us but upon all of humanity.

The Ninth Sermon, the First on the Second Chapter

> "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)." - Ephesians 2: 1-5

As we have seen before, to fully comprehend God's infinite goodness, we must always consider our own wretchedness and our state before God showed us His mercy. Until people examine themselves and recognize their wretchedness, they will never give God the fraction of the honor He truly deserves. Therefore, let us remember this lesson: to give God the praise He is due, each of us must reflect on what our condition would be if God had not extended His hand to us. In truth, our human nature tends towards all manner of evil. In the first chapter, we discussed this matter continually, emphasizing that we cannot adequately praise God, considering the mercy He has shown us. To further illustrate this point and deeply affect us, Paul paints a vivid picture of what we were like before God's grace reached us and brought us back to Him.

Paul portrays us as being trapped in such a horrifying dungeon that the very thought of it should humble us and make our hair stand on end. It is inevitable that upon hearing this, we are moved and compelled to praise God for seeking us even in the depths of hell to raise us up to the kingdom

of heaven. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His work, reveals the wretched state from which He rescues us. He is like the One who calls forth the dead with His voice. Thus, we see that the Son of God's role is to draw us from death to life through the teachings of His gospel. He emphasizes that those who believe in Him have transitioned from the state of death in which they were held and have entered into the promise of heavenly life. Although the faithful do not fully possess it in this world, they hold it with such assurance through hope that they consider it as good as obtained.

Now, when our Lord Jesus Christ says that His voice has the power to raise the dead, He uses a comparison to illustrate that no matter how much we may think of ourselves as alive, we are in a state of spiritual death if we are separated from God. Even though unbelievers may consider themselves fully alive in their own wisdom and virtue, they harden themselves and continue in their misguided ways.

Let us examine where the wellspring of life is. It is in God, and they are alienated from Him. Also, let us consider what constitutes the true life of humans. It is not about being subtle and clever, able to navigate worldly matters through cunning and strategy, or acquiring fame and the wisdom to counsel others. It is not about excelling in human sciences and arts or being esteemed and renowned for noble courage and other commendable virtues.

True life begins with knowing that God is our Father, and that we are protected and preserved by the light of His Word. It involves being enlightened by faith to understand the path of salvation and to be assured that our entire well-being lies in Him. We must seek it from Him with humility and recognise the means to attain it – through our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of grace is offered to us.

This is the essence of spiritual life for humans – living in the light of God's Word and being transformed by His Holy Spirit to restore the image that was lost and utterly defaced in us by Adam's sin. Can such a life be found

among worldly individuals, even among those highly honoured? No, it cannot. Therefore, when our Lord Jesus Christ states that we are raised from death through the gospel, we should understand that no matter how flourishing and impressive we may appear to be, in reality, we are filled with corruption and filthiness in the eyes of God. We are condemned, wretched, and detestable before Him. All creatures curse and reject us because we have defiled them with our sin.

The corruption within us is so deep that it taints Heaven and Earth until God transforms us. Our Lord's message is clear: until we are renewed by the gospel through faith, we are spiritually dead, devoid of true life. We are akin to being buried in our graves, signifying our separation from God's kingdom. Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is nothing good in us, and we need God's grace to be united with those who trust in Him, which becomes our resurrection.

there is nothing in us but rottenness and filthiness. God regards us with condemnation, and we would be damned and forsaken before Him. The angels abhor us, and all creation curses and condemns us. Everything cries out for vengeance against us because we defile them. The corruption in humanity is so profound that it infects both Heaven and Earth until God transforms them.

The message that our Lord Jesus Christ conveys is essential: until we are renewed by the gospel through the preceding faith, we are like dead men with not a trace of true life in us. In essence, we are like the buried dead, and we must experience a resurrection. This signifies that we are separated from God's kingdom, and consequently, we are filled with nothing but filth. Nevertheless, despite our wretchedness, God graciously unites us with those who place their trust in Him and His goodness. This union is our resurrection.

In summary, we must always recognise that humanity carries death within itself from birth. This is not merely because of our mortality, but also because we are separated from God. We are mortal beings, not just in terms of our eventual passing from this world, but because we are inherently sinful. In us, there is neither thought nor inclination that does not tend towards evil. Everything in us resists and rebels against God and His righteous rule. When we entertain thoughts or desires, they invariably lead to sin and unrighteousness, just as it is stated in Genesis, where God acknowledges that every inclination of man's heart is inclined toward sin.

Given this condition, we should not be surprised that God, through His Word, declares that we are dead. Nevertheless, due to our own excessive pride, we often delude ourselves into thinking that there is some life in us. This is precisely what the simple Treatise is pointing out. The Ephesians, despite being dead in their sins and iniquities, were participants in the grace mentioned. It's as if to say, in order for you to better appreciate the value of God's grace and what it entails, consider not only your present state but also ponder what you were like by nature. You were dead, and there was no hope of being made alive again through the power of human free will once you were dead.

Therefore, acknowledge that God drew you out of the depths of utter destruction, indeed, out of the very pit of hell when He graciously chose to adopt you as His children and called you to the knowledge of His gospel. We can see that this statement by St. Paul aligns with the teachings and accounts of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, whenever we are tempted to boast about our own virtues and believe that we have achieved something to elevate ourselves, let us return to our true, natural state. Let us reflect on the fact that we were lost and would still be lost today if it weren't for God's infinite mercy, which rescued us from the confusion we were in and delivered us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's worth noting that St. Paul intentionally uses both "offenses" and "sins" to prevent anyone from escaping the gravity of our condition. No one should be able to separate themselves from this common state or think that anything is more serious than the corruption of our nature, which can only be rectified through death. If St. Paul had chosen only one of these words, "offenses" or "sins," there would have been debates and objections. Some might have claimed to be exempt from the common guilt, while others might have argued that even with some sin or fault, we are not entirely condemned or cursed by God.

By using both words together, St. Paul makes it abundantly clear that there is nothing in our nature but wickedness and sin. He emphasises that not even a drop of life can be found in our natural state. His intention is to accentuate the severity of our condition, which people tend to downplay. If we possess even the smallest fragment of virtue or a shadow of it, we immediately elevate ourselves above all the mountains of the world. Yet, if there are any vices in us, no matter how gross and evident, we tend to trivialise them. Thus, St. Paul and his fellow ministers diligently strive to shatter this misguided presumption of human righteousness and to show that we are entirely sinners.

Although St. Paul is addressing the Ephesians here, he is speaking generally to all people. In truth, he underscores this by saying that they "walked according to the course of the world." Evil remains concealed until it reveals itself through its deeds. The reason people cannot humble themselves before God as they should is that they deceive themselves until they are confronted and compelled to acknowledge their sins. We are often hypocritical, convincing ourselves that we are faultless as long as our wrongdoings remain hidden from our view, and no one confronts us about them. We think lightly of having wicked thoughts or being tempted to commit various sins.

St. Paul rightly states that the Ephesians walked in their sins to emphasize that he is not revealing something unknown to them. When they consider their own lives and the path they followed, they should be driven to confess that they were utterly lost and cursed before God. Therefore, whenever our hypocrisy prevents us from submitting ourselves to God and admitting our sins, we should examine our lives. Even if we recognize a multitude of faults we have committed, it pales in comparison to what God knows about us. To avoid deceiving ourselves, as we are prone to do, let us always judge a tree by its fruit.

Since we are guilty of offending God in countless ways, we must conclude that our nature is utterly corrupted. To emphasize that St. Paul is not speaking only of a particular group but of all humanity, he adds that it was "according to the course of the world." He uses this phrase to refer to the passage of time, as if to say that just as we witness the daily rising and setting of the sun and the changing of seasons, it is the habitual custom, even the nature of humanity, to be obstinate, spiteful, and rebellious against God. There is nothing in us but wickedness and corruption. People should not argue that evil customs have prevailed or that some are more sinful or stubborn than others. St. Paul's point is that all human beings, without exception, share this fallen nature.

Therefore, let us open our eyes and see what St. Paul is pointing out. We will realize that all our worthiness and nobility have been denied. Here are our true characteristics laid bare—that we are spiritually dead until God revives us by His grace. Furthermore, we should understand that this spiritual death is a consequence of our own sins. St. Paul states that we are all corrupt, filled with nothing but faults, sins, and offenses. Our entire lives bear witness to this, just as fruit reveals the nature of the tree. On the other hand, our inclination is not towards good, but rather towards evil. We are bent in that direction and driven with such intensity that we persistently oppose God until His Holy Spirit brings us under His subjection.

St. Paul believes that it's not enough to say this; he adds things that should make us tremble even more, stating that it is according to the prince of the air, who has all power in the world, and according to the spirit that rules all unbelievers. He speaks in this manner to emphasize that until God quickens us through our Lord Jesus Christ and gathers us to Him, the devil has dominion over us. Consider what the dignity of humanity is until Jesus Christ redeems them; they are spiritually dead and under the devil's rule. In short, he has complete authority over us and rules us with such tyranny that there's nothing preventing us from being subjected to him by force.

St. Paul uses the term "spirit" deliberately to demonstrate that the devil rules over all our thoughts, affections, and desires. He possesses us entirely, and we are utterly enslaved to him. We cannot move a finger or think a thought without the devil's influence, causing us to become deadly enemies of God. When we hear these things, it is no time to fall asleep or flatter ourselves. We should not be so presumptuous as to contend with God as if there were any goodness in us that He is bound to acknowledge. Those who continue in their hypocrisy after the Holy Spirit has proclaimed such a dreadful and horrible judgment upon us must be out of their minds.

So, when we consider humanity in its own nature, what can we say? Behold, a creature cursed by God, deserving to be cast out of the common order of all creatures. Even worms, flies, lice, and vermin have more worth than humanity. Man, originally created in God's image, has become so corrupted that there is nothing in him but sin. We are the devil's servants, and he not only rules over us but possesses us and is our prince. Once we are fully convinced of this in our hearts, we should have cause to run trembling to our Lord Jesus Christ and seek refuge under the shadow of His wings. On the other hand, we should not be so ungrateful as to fail to magnify God's goodness in drawing us out of such a pit to be fellow citizens and brethren not only of the angels in heaven but also of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of Glory. This removes all reproach and

transforms us from being hateful to all creatures to bearing His mark and being honoured and embraced by the angels as their brethren, members of Christ's body.

Now we understand St. Paul's intent. To prevent any objections, he shows us the power of the devil. He could have simply said, "You lived according to the ways of the world," meaning sinfully. But instead of naming the devil in one word, he says, "According to the prince who has his power in the air, and the spirit that now works in the rebellious children." By stating "the prince who has his power in the air," he removes any ambiguity. The devil is called the prince of the world, not because he reigns over the sun, moon, stars, skies, or earth, but because he holds us captive in his bonds, as we are not worthy to be governed by God.

Had Adam continued in the state in which God created him, we would have remained as God's children. But after our first father's fall, God left us, and Satan took possession of us. However, it's crucial to note that Satan cannot act without God's permission. When he is called the prince of the world, it doesn't imply that he fights against God in such a way that the outcome is uncertain – such an idea would be blasphemous. Some heretics have mistakenly interpreted such phrases in Scripture to suggest that the devil occasionally resists God, with God sometimes conceding to him. However, such notions are utter madness.

Nevertheless, this dominion of Satan is God's just punishment, as stated in the Bible when it mentions God delivering us into the hands of our enemies because we cannot endure His reign over us. This fate has befallen us all. Since God has imprinted His mark on us, we should be led by His Spirit. But our first father, in his pride, rebelled against God's rule. He was not content with his designated state and limits. Because he rebelled and could not accept God's sovereign dominion, he was handed over to the devil and

made subject to him. Thus, the subjection of all humanity to the tyranny of the devil serves as a just consequence of their sin.

Therefore, we should not imagine that the devil has free rein or liberty to do as he pleases, independent of God's control. Instead, he operates under God's authority. To help us understand this subjection better, St. Paul mentions that the devil operates in the air. Although the devil is not confined to a specific location – as we witness demons entering people's bodies or even swine – St. Paul uses the term "air" to emphasize that the devil is above us, beyond our reach. If we have an enemy, we can try to overcome them. But if the enemy already has the upper hand, there's little we can do. Likewise, the devil holds us in bondage, as St. Paul underscores. To make this clearer, he adds, "according to the spirit." We often fail to perceive this state because we are too preoccupied with the physical world. We are so focused on the things that affect our earthly lives that we overlook our spiritual miseries. Thus, St. Paul instructs us to look beyond the visible world and recognize the devil for the spiritual tyrant that he is, even though we cannot see him physically. Despite lacking physical attributes to harm us, he is the worst tyrant imaginable, and we must be aware of this.

For if there were a man who could enter into the thoughts and affections of others without any physical means, a man with the power to take a hundred lives without anyone noticing, such an enemy would be far more formidable than those who come with great force and noise. Indeed, the devil possesses these attributes. He is a spirit, and so we should not be too focused on the physical realm or rely on our own limited understanding when discussing this spiritual enemy. Instead, we should be deeply aware that the devil can inflict far more harm upon us, invisibly, than if we could see how he approached us and entered our lives.

Once we have received faith and have been enlightened by God's Holy Spirit, it may seem that our desire to serve God is sufficient. However, if a faithful person were to examine themselves honestly, they would discover many areas where they fall short. Even St. Paul himself admitted his imperfections, crying out, "Who will deliver me from this prison of death?" So, despite our best intentions and God's goodness within us, we often fall short. Therefore, it is essential to remain humble and acknowledge our own shortcomings before God.

To help the faithful come to this realization, St. Paul offers further confirmation of his point. When we receive faith and are enlightened by God's Spirit, we may be inclined to believe that we are on the right path. But if we honestly look at ourselves, we will realize that there is still much to repent for. St. Paul advises us to look at the unbelieving world. In the world, we can see various sins, such as greed, theft, dishonesty, adultery, drunkenness, and other immoral behaviors. We witness corruption, poisonings, treachery, and wicked schemes. In short, we observe people rebelling against God and engaging in sinful actions that should trouble us.

Yet, St. Paul reminds us that we must apply this reflection to ourselves. We must not only consider the sins and troubles we see in the world but also recognize the same sinful tendencies within ourselves. Just as we feel compassion for those afflicted by terrible diseases, we should pray and say, "May God have mercy on them." We should acknowledge that we carry the seed of sin within us, both in our bodies and souls. While physical health may vary among individuals, the corruption of the soul is universal. Therefore, we should see the sins around us as warnings to humble ourselves, feel our wretchedness, and turn away from our sins in self-abhorrence.

St. Paul uses the word "now" to emphasize that we should not merely find fault with others. Instead, we should recognize that if we look at our current

state, we will find the same sinful tendencies in ourselves. The behaviour of unbelievers serves as a mirror for us to reflect upon our own sins. It should lead us to say, "Is it possible that I could be like this?" and to consider the immense mercy God has shown us. We should refrain from condemning the sins we observe in others without acknowledging our own potential for sin. If God had not restrained us, we might have fallen just as deeply as we see others falling.

Let us be stirred to pray immediately that God does not lead us into temptation. Let us recognise God's infinite goodness in restraining us so that we do not fall into the terrible sins we witness around us. Even when we observe the most wicked in the world, or even those we consider monstrous, we must conclude that the same could befall us if God did not prevent it.

So, we should internalise this lesson. St. Paul specifically mentions rebellious children to illustrate that there will be no obedience in us unless God instils it in us and reforms us. He must change our wickedness and continue and increase the goodness He has begun. Satan has such a grip on us that he drags us like brute beasts. It is essential to understand that this applies not only to the heathen, in whom God's grace was evident, but also to the most excellent of men, including the Jews who considered themselves exempt from common human corruption until they were redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ. This reinforces the point that the Holy Ghost's condemnation extends to all, from the least to the greatest.

In conclusion, we must grasp St. Paul's teaching that God has quickened us. This means we do not bring life from our mother's womb, as we are born into this world in a state of spiritual death due to sin. We must acknowledge our own corruption and wickedness. It is only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can be renewed and brought to life. We must understand that God has rescued us from a wretched and cursed state,

setting us free from the tyranny of the devil. There is nothing more distressing than realising that the devil rules over us, not only over our bodies but also our souls and thoughts since he is a spirit that corrupts every aspect of our being with his poison.

Considering all this, we should also recognise that despite our wretchedness, God did not disdain us. He extended His mercy to us, seeing the countless miseries and confusion within us. Our wretchedness moved God to rescue us, not our own merit or ability to serve Him, for we are rebellious. Let us understand that God's motivation for saving us was solely the immense misery He found within us. Therefore, let every mouth be stopped in humility and gratitude.

Let us not presume to offer anything in this regard as if we had obligated God to us or had found something in us that merits His favor. Instead, we must understand that everything comes from His own infinite goodness. He bestows His grace upon us because He sees us as miserable, damned, and utterly lost. Let this realization motivate us to do good and seek remedies not only for our spiritual diseases but also for our spiritual death. If we were solely corrupted by sin and vice, the malady would already be incurable. Yet, beyond that, there is a spiritual death that cannot be healed by any worldly means or remedies. God must intervene miraculously to save us.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, confessing our sins. Let us pray that He enables us to feel our sins deeply so that we may forsake them and rid ourselves of them more and more each day. In the meantime, let His goodness be patient with us, not examining us too strictly. He should gently correct the wickedness that prevails in us, gradually liberating us from Satan's bondage through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, we obtain all our spiritual freedom. Let us pray, saying, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Tenth Sermon, the Second on the Second Chapter

> "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." – Ephesians 2:2-6

I began this morning to show you how Paul intended to extend God's goodness to all men, so that no one would have reason to boast about themselves as if they had individual worthiness. Indeed, if any nation in the world ever seemed superior to others, it was the Jews, as God had chosen them as His own people, calling them a holy lineage and His inheritance. In that regard, the Jews appeared worthy of preeminence over others. However, to ensure that no one diminishes the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul declares that they too were once children of wrath, emphasizing the necessity for them to be rescued from the pit of confusion, as I mentioned earlier. In short, Paul makes it clear here that even those who might be considered the most excellent have no grounds for boasting or earning themselves esteem before God. Instead, they are all recipients of grace, becoming heirs of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, a question may arise as to why Paul places heathens on equal footing with Jews, given the distinctiveness God had established between them. It

might seem that all God's promises were nullified, and that wrong was done not only to humanity but to God as well. If we acknowledge, as we must, that God's selection of Abraham's descendants was not in vain and that His declaration of them as His own people and church was not a deception, then they ought to be closer and more intimate with God. They should have some distinguishing mark by which they are drawn to Him. It might appear that Paul is undermining the Jews in this way. However, in another passage, he clarifies that this arrangement is entirely reasonable when we consider the Jews as God's chosen and special people on one hand, and on the other, consider their own state and their conduct before God. In the Epistle to the Romans, after Paul has passed judgment on the entire world, revealing that there is no one who is not condemned and lost, he raises a question. Given that God had chosen Abraham's descendants and dedicated them entirely to Himself, he wonders about their holiness. Does this imply that there is no sanctity in them? It would seem that God's statements in the Holy Scriptures, that He had not dealt in the same way with any other nation, were worthless. However, Paul asserts that people must acknowledge the grace that God graciously bestowed upon His people and therefore, to that extent, they are to be esteemed above the entire world. Yet, he immediately adds that since they are descended from Adam's race, they are sinners like all other human beings. There is nothing in their nature but corruption and weakness.

All men must humble themselves, and we must all acknowledge that none of us can be distinguished from another, as we have seen previously in the second chapter of Galatians. There, St. Paul told Peter, "Yes, we are Jews by nature, and it seems that we ought to separate ourselves, given that God is our King, and has sanctified us and chosen us to dwell among us. Well, at first glance, it might seem that we should reject the Gentiles as unclean and unfamiliar with God. But let us remember that there is not one among us who is not accountable to God and must recognize himself as a wretched sinner. Therefore, God must be the judge of all people, and we must all bow

before His Majesty, seeking reconciliation with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In short, Paul's intention in this passage is not to diminish God's grace but to emphasize that the Jews had no other means of attaining salvation and the heavenly inheritance except by being members of our Lord Jesus Christ. They must consider themselves, first and foremost, as cursed and condemned due to their inherent unworthiness. Their righteousness is like a windfall, and they are born in sin, just like all other people. However, God, in His mercy, has also chosen them.

By the way, we must note that under the term "nature," Paul is indicating not only that we are sinners by habit, inclined to follow evil more than good and often pushing each other aside, but also that there is a deeper aspect to it. Each of us carries sin from birth; eating and drinking accompany us, but sin is more deeply ingrained in us than all the things of this life. The pagans may find it strange that young babies, who cannot distinguish between good and evil, and lack discretion or will, should be considered sinners and damned before God, as Simple states when he calls them "children of wrath." Nevertheless, we must accept our condemnation, whether we like it or not. As soon as infants are capable of making any sign, they undoubtedly show enough, even too much, that they are deceitful and wicked, with a hidden poison within them. Although they may not immediately manifest it, they are like venomous serpents. Therefore, we should understand that Simple does not unjustly refer to us as "children of wrath," just as he does with the Jews, including even infants among them. To be fair, we should not rely on our own opinions or what we see before our eyes. Instead, we must give glory to God, who is the rightful judge, even when we find it incomprehensible.

No matter how the world may view us, we must always return to what is said in Psalm 51, namely, that we not only daily offend God in various ways

but are also abhorrent to Him from the outset, even before we have done or thought anything, because we are conceived in sin and corruption. By the phrase "children of wrath," St. Paul means that we are heirs of death, and God must be our enemy, even as soon as we are conceived. Yet God is not cruel, nor does He hate His own creation. If we had the purity of our forefather Adam, as stated in the verse that all things God made were good, then God would not hate His own handiwork in us. However, we must conclude that we have deserved God's hatred, even if sin cannot be physically pointed out, as it were, yet God knows it well enough, and we must acknowledge our guilt.

In essence, this is the main message we can glean from this text and apply it to St. Paul's meaning. If the Jews, who seemed to have some unique privilege, are still included in the general state of humanity, what can we Gentiles claim? If we dare to present any form of boasting before God, we have ample reason to be ashamed, especially since even the Jews, in comparison to whom we are nothing, have no access to the kingdom of God except through God's free mercy and reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, there remains one more question or doubt: How could the Jews be considered enemies when God had already declared Himself to be their Father? Some may argue that this is due to the fact that the fulfillment of the figures and the truth and substance of them had yet to be accomplished. Yet we must also note that although God had adopted the Jews through Abraham, they were received into Jesus Christ, and this grace was established upon them, as indicated by the promise that "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." We have seen in the Epistle to the Galatians that this seed refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, for without Him, there is no unity, but only dispersion. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the inclusion of Jews into the Church, just like the inclusion of

Gentiles, is attributed here by St. Paul solely to God's free and generous goodness.

There is another point that should not be forgotten, which is that even though the Jews received such grace, they still had to wait for the coming of the Redeemer. We know that there can be no atonement with God without the shedding of blood. The sacrifices of the law could not remove sin or appease God's wrath and curse. Offering the blood of an ox or lamb had no power to make atonement with God; there was no such ability in these animals, as they are corruptible and unable to reach the soul. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Jews were God's children in hope, but they were still separated from Him until the atonement was made by the Redeemer. In this way, God showed favour to them, just as He did to the rest of the world. For this reason, Paul adds that God, rich in mercy, quickened them just as He did with the Gentiles, according to His great love for them.

As I mentioned earlier, the main point that St. Paul is addressing here is that we should learn to be ashamed of and detest our own wretchedness by considering our origins and recognizing the state in which God found us and from what dungeon He rescued us. The second point is that we should magnify God's goodness even more because it is incredible that He deigned to bring the doctrine of life down to our lowly condition to give us life. We had sunk to such depths that we must pay close attention to these words: "God, being rich in mercy, quickened us when we were dead, according to the great love which He bore for us." Indeed, this title may always suit God, as His riches and goodness do not diminish, and He remains ever richer in mercy. However, we must take into account the specific context and subject matter here, which is that God has lavished the immeasurable treasures of His mercy upon us in proportion to the greatness of our miseries. For this reason, Paul adds, "according to the great love with which He loved us." There must indeed be such goodness in God that it can ravish us, surpassing

all our capacity to comprehend. Even if we were to fully devote ourselves to it, we would only taste a fraction of it.

But why does Paul say that God loved us? He speaks specifically of himself and others chosen from among that people, even though the majority of them have been cut off. Although the Jews had the privilege of being the firstborn and had preeminence over us, as rightful heirs, and we were like unseasonable birth, Paul speaks of himself as well as others who were chosen from among the Jews. We can see that they are now cast out from God's kingdom, becoming an example that should make us shudder when we witness God's wrath and vengeance upon them. Therefore, St. Paul, along with a small number of others chosen from among the Jews, can only attribute this to God's love, which was more prominently displayed towards them. Similarly, in the present day, if the Gospel were preached purely throughout the world, with faith given impartially to all, so that none would lack the immediate touch of the Holy Spirit, and if we were all equal, it might seem natural and commonplace. It would appear as though we possessed this through our own natural efforts, and that it was not a special grace from God. However, when we see many countries suffering from spiritual famine, with no drop of good doctrine to nourish them, but rather, the wretched people are fed with lies and delusions from Satan, while on the other hand, God has enlightened us here and watered us with His Word, we can only conclude that this is an effect of His great love. Once again, Paul states that many people have heard the Gospel, but it is evident that they have become hardened by it and grown worse over time. For one will not find such horrendous monsters as those found in the Papacy. Instead, we can witness them where the Gospel is preached and professed, for these individuals claim to be reformed but appear to be devils incarnate. We do not need to look far to see such examples. Therefore, we should observe that we should not assume that any of us possess anything more than our fellow human beings, nor should we presume to elevate ourselves. We should always acknowledge the infinite fountain of God's grace, rather than

turning to pits that are full of holes and cannot hold water or, even worse, contain nothing but mud and filth, despite all the outward appearances and grandeur. All the glory and splendour of humanity is no better; it draws from the same wellspring of God's love. We must confess that God is not swayed or influenced by the actions of others but loves us freely, accepting us under His wing and enlightening us with His Holy Spirit through faith in the Gospel. This is what St. Paul intended to convey here.

Now, on the other hand, to prevent those who are always clever in seeking excuses and ways to avoid blame, from absolving themselves by claiming they are under the tyranny of the devil, and arguing that they should not be held accountable for it, Paul demonstrates that this bondage is not voluntary. I explained this earlier today: despite having free will and reason, we are inclined towards serving Satan, and we are inherently inclined towards evil. We are not naturally any better. Therefore, there are real thieves in the world. If God had not shown us mercy, as St. Paul explained, we would be just like those who are outside of God's grace and are driven by Satan to commit all kinds of wickedness. This shows that we would be the same as them if God had not been merciful to us.

However, many people resent God and even accuse Him of being the cause of their damnation. But to counter such accusations, Paul says that those who are under the bondage of Satan and sin are still rightly condemned by God. They are not compelled by external force but are subject to their own will. That is why he says that even those who have been brought back to our Lord Jesus Christ previously lived according to the lusts of the flesh. In other words, before God changed them and brought them under His obedience through His Holy Spirit, they followed their own wicked desires.

It is true that people acknowledge their sinful nature, but they still argue that they can be different. Everyone agrees that the will makes the difference between vice and virtue. But when philosophers spoke in this

manner, they believed that we had a free and unhampered will, which is what deceived them because they did not understand that we were corrupted by Adam's fall. Yet, despite our corruption, we are still justly cursed by God because we sin willingly. Therefore, he adds that we do the desires of our flesh and thoughts, meaning that those who are in the grip of Satan and enslaved to sin cannot claim compulsion as an excuse, as it is their own will that drives them.

So, you can see how Paul intended to silence all those who speak falsely and avoid responsibility, so that they cannot claim they are not guilty for their wickedness, as they are naturally inclined towards it. Let us note, however, how Paul couples thoughts with the flesh so that we may understand that sin pervades our entire being, and there is nothing pure or clean within us. Our infection is not limited, and sin is not confined. Some may confess that they are corrupt due to Adam, but they argue that they can always tend towards good when tempted. They believe that if they listen to reason and control their desires, they can demonstrate their ability to do good. The opinion of the papacy is that human free will, while wounded and impaired, still retains some virtue. But as I explained earlier, the unequivocal statement of the Holy Spirit is broader: we are not only sick but dead until we are raised by Jesus Christ. St. Paul confirms this by stating that our wicked desires and affections, referred to as essential appetites, are not the only things that control us; it goes much deeper. All our thoughts, decisions, and anything deemed virtuous in man are described as wickedness. If God were to allow us to follow our own thoughts, it would lead to unimaginable chaos. Therefore, we must recognize that we are not only acknowledging our weakness and need for God's help but also admitting that we are utterly condemned before Him. Our thoughts are labelled as wicked and corrupt, and there is nothing in us that does not provoke God's wrath. So, we must confess on one hand that we are justly deprived of all God's graces in Adam, and on the other hand, we should not use this as an excuse to avoid responsibility by claiming we are not slaves

to sin, or that we are not to blame because we have been ensnared and entangled since birth. Instead, we must always consider that each of us will find the source of our ailment within our own conscience. People can argue as much as they want, but when they turn inward and question their own conscience, they will find themselves condemned and confounded, with no room for argument. So, one word should suffice for those who claim they have no free will and no ability to resist God: What do they think is the cause of their inclination towards evil? Some may say it is the devil, but they should consider whether this fully excuses them.

Well, now, the word of God confronts us, driven by our own sinful inclinations. Do we not realize that the source and root of our wickedness lies within us? When we rebel against God to the extent that our thoughts are filled with falsehood and unbelief, and when they are completely opposed to God and His righteousness, even waging war against Him, we must recognize this. We should not seek excuses because we already carry an inner judge with us, namely our conscience. This is the main point emphasized in this passage. It also serves as a warning not to be too self-reliant but to restrain our senses, imaginations, and even our reasoning, which we often consider our own. Until we renounce ourselves in this way, we cannot fully devote ourselves to serving God.

Paul explicitly states that those whom God has quickened have become partners with our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Him that they find their life. However, since understanding God's essence is beyond our reach, and we cannot comprehend it, Jesus Christ is referred to as the way. He offers Himself and does not hide from us but extends His arms to draw us towards Him. In His Gospel, He invites us, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." This invitation is fulfilled in His person.

Therefore, take note of St. Paul's words when he says that those who were dead were made alive again by Jesus Christ. This highlights the point I

briefly touched on this morning, namely that our death is not a visible one that can be judged by outward appearances. Instead, it pertains to the corruption within our souls, for we all share in this fault. Then, how can we attain to the heavenly life? How can we be resurrected and made alive again to inherit the promised heritage? On the contrary, we are subject to countless miseries.

It is essential to understand that this new life he speaks of is not yet perfect within us; it is only a small foretaste that guides us towards our ultimate destination. This perfection will be realized when we attain the full glory mentioned here. St. Paul uses himself as an example, stating that he has forsaken everything for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, even his former belief in his own righteousness. Although others may have esteemed him as almost angelic, he knew that his salvation came solely through God's grace in Jesus Christ. Despite the many honours and reproaches, torments, beatings, and imprisonments he has endured, he does not claim to have reached his goal. He acknowledges that he pushes forward, forgetting the past.

If he had dwelled on his past accomplishments, saying, "I have overcome so many challenges, I have preached the gospel tirelessly, I have borne much fruit, I have traveled across seas and preached among barbarous nations where God's message was previously unheard of, I have faced numerous obstacles and triumphed," he would have grown complacent. It is easy for us to become lax when we think we have done enough for our part, leaving the rest to others. Thus, each of us must heed the warning against complacency, recognizing that our ultimate glory will never be fully realized until the end. Therefore, we must continually acknowledge our wretchedness, grieve before God, and confess that we are indebted to His goodness for everything.

Now, regardless of our current situation, we can see that we are being renewed into a new way of life by the Holy Spirit of God. Even though we live among unbelievers and face numerous trials, and even though sin still dwells within us, none of us can deny that the gifts God has given us through His Holy Spirit are not in vain or unprofitable. When someone argues that before Jesus Christ worked in us, we had already sinned, as we can see, our response is clear: all that people have by nature cannot lead them to God; rather, it inclines them to rely on this world. So, even if people mock us from all sides, we are still dead, for when God restrains us and allows us to follow our own desires and inclinations, we are led astray. Man may have a reason, but what can it accomplish when it is still rooted in his sinful nature? It will always fight against God and truth. Therefore, we boldly conclude that we are spiritually dead until we become participants in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive the Spirit to the extent that He determines. Just as God's Spirit rested upon Him and was abundantly given to Him, He now distributes it to each of His faithful followers. Consequently, as our Lord Jesus Christ allows us to taste His Holy Spirit and provides strength through it, we are made alive in Him and with Him.

Furthermore, Paul adds that God has seated us in the heavenly realms with our Lord Jesus Christ to emphasise the grace we have been discussing. This serves as a reminder, especially since we are prone to being cold and lazy, that on one hand, we were dead and enslaved under Satan's dominion. These are truly terrifying conditions. On the other hand, God has not only loved us but also glorified us in Him. He has raised us from the depths to the heights of heaven, where He has positioned us alongside His angels. Considering this, we must not fail to glorify the immeasurable goodness of our God. We must recognise how deeply we are indebted and bound to Him. Even if we spent our entire lives preaching about the grace we have experienced at His hand, it would still not be enough.

In conclusion, St. Paul purposely states that we are already exalted to heaven with Jesus Christ. While this may not be apparent to our eyes, we should let our hope and faith guide us. We should remember that our life is hidden, and we must patiently await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, we must understand the various states of God's children after they have been called to the faith of the gospel. However, we must not expect an earthly paradise in this world where we will experience no trouble or grief. Instead, we must make room for faith, as mentioned earlier. When the Holy Spirit, through St. Paul, tells us that we will be exalted on high, we must be prepared to endure trials, oppression by enemies, and even being overpowered by them with humility. Nevertheless, we should remain fully convinced and resolved that, despite these hardships, we will ultimately inherit the kingdom of heaven. The head cannot be separated from the body, and our Lord Jesus Christ did not ascend for His sake alone. We must always return to the foundational truth that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and this confession not only glorifies Him but is also a precursor to every knee bowing before Him and every creature, both in heaven and on earth, giving Him homage.

However, the union we have discussed is fulfilled in this way: Jesus Christ, by gathering us into His body, has initiated what He intends to accomplish in us at the appropriate time. Thus, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to open the gates for us in these days, which were closed to us due to Adam's sin. This is the essence of our present seating with Him. To put it simply, it can be summarised in one word: we are saved by grace, and no one can claim anything of their own.

Nevertheless, merely confessing in a single word that our salvation comes from God's free favour and experiencing it within ourselves is not enough. We must also be deeply moved by the infinite greatness of this grace. We must reflect on our own sinful state and realise that we are entirely at fault.

Our many faults convict us, to the extent that if God were to deal with us a hundred times more severely than He has, we could not argue or dispute with Him. Our consciences would always bear witness that we are deserving of death and that it is our due punishment.

Therefore, let us hold firmly to this doctrine. It will greatly benefit our lives. Once we understand that there isn't just one flaw but an infinite number of evils within us, we can learn to humble ourselves, hate and abhor our sinful nature. Then, when we contemplate the grace shown to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, we realise that without it, the devil would hold complete sway over us, as he had done before. We should also recognise that we are enriched by this grace, allowing us to abandon our old ways. Rest assured that not only will our miseries be turned into blessings through our Lord Jesus Christ, but He will also grant us the strength to glorify in our state. Even though we must contend with many temptations and are frail in ourselves, we will overcome them. We will have cause to thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ because, joined to Him, we cannot fail to attain the full perfection of all good things.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our gracious God, confess our faults, and pray that He makes us fully aware of them. May we not only confess a few but go back even to our birth and acknowledge that sin pervades us entirely. We must understand that the only way to reconcile with God is through the blood, death, and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever we feel condemned or drawn away from God's grace, let us have no refuge other than the sacrifice made by our Lord Jesus Christ. Even in our weakness, let us desire the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, the means ordained by God to partake in His gracious gifts. Let us continue in this manner and set an example for others, labouring to draw them to faith and unity in our doctrine. Through our lives and good conduct, let us demonstrate that we have not studied in vain but have learned in the

excellent school of the Son of God. May it please Him to bestow this grace not only upon us but also upon all people, etc.

The Eleventh Sermon, the Third on the Second Chapter

> "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." - Ephesians 2:8-10

St. Paul has previously shown us that our salvation serves as the true Mirror through which we may behold the boundless glory of God. It is His divine desire to be recognized primarily through His unfailing goodness. In pursuit of this, He revealed that God chose us even before the foundation of the world, not on account of any merit within us but to manifest His own boundless mercy. In this passage, St. Paul reinforces this concept, elucidating the profound meaning when he informed us that our adoption and God's selection of us within His eternal purpose serve to efface any semblance of self-glory. We are to acknowledge that whatever we are and any goodness we possess emanates solely from God and His benevolence.

Hence, he asserts that our salvation is a product of grace, a gift from God, and not the result of our own actions. This declaration serves to exclude any vestige of human achievement or virtue. Yet, because it is a challenging task to quell the pride that often besets us, he reiterates this point to enhance our comprehension and reaffirm its veracity. We must internalize the fact that whatever we possess or enjoy must be sought from the benevolent hand of

God. Faith, a potent humbling force, obliterates any pretense of human merit, as aptly expounded in the Epistle to the Galatians. In this passage, St. Paul illustrates that faith supplants works due to our collective state of condemnation. True righteousness entails perfect obedience to God's commandments, an unattainable feat for any human. Consequently, we all stand condemned before God. Therefore, we must rely on God's grace, and as we receive it through faith, we acknowledge our profound need for Jesus Christ, recognizing our intrinsic lack of inherent goodness.

Furthermore, when St. Paul emphasizes faith in this passage, he underscores the stark reality that when we stand in the presence of God, we appear utterly bare, devoid of anything but shame and humility, awaiting God's merciful embrace. To fortify this notion, he appends that we are God's handiwork, divinely crafted in Jesus Christ for the purpose of performing good deeds, which God has preordained for us. This signifies that God, out of His boundless grace, has breathed new life into us through the agency of His Holy Spirit, rescuing us from the state of decay akin to lifeless carcasses. Thus, for anyone seeking traces of goodness within themselves, the inquiry should not center on their inherent nature or former birth, for both are ensnared by corruption. God must undertake a profound transformation within us before even a solitary drop of goodness can find its dwelling place within our souls. Consequently, we must firmly conclude that the wellspring of our salvation originates solely from the well of God's mercy, for we are utterly incapable of self-redemption.

In essence, St. Paul's message transcends a mere acknowledgment of our reliance on God's grace to ameliorate our frailties and imperfections; it pronounces our fundamental unworthiness. Our salvation is not merely augmented by God; it is initiated, sustained, and perfected by His divine hand, with no contribution required from our end. This is precisely what he conveys when he proclaims, "You are saved by grace, not of yourselves." St. Paul seeks to firmly establish that all honor and merit belong exclusively

to God, cautioning against any human attempts to add to or claim credit for salvation, as such endeavors lead only to perplexity and emptiness. His ultimate aim is for us to grasp that God is the true Author of our salvation, deserving of every iota of glory and praise.

However, when he employs the term "grace," signifying God's unmerited favor, he clarifies that he seeks no rationale outside of God Himself. Thus, in the latter part of the sentence, he accentuates the word "gift," and conversely, he underscores that our endeavors contribute naught. It becomes evident, then, that since we stand impotent in isolation, it is God, in His sheer benevolence, who constitutes the fount of our salvation. Should we harbor the belief that we have made some meaningful contribution or assistance, we would unjustly strip God of His rightful domain, a grave injustice that merits forfeiture of the bounties bestowed upon us. In no manner can we offset our sins against God; at the very least, we should humbly acknowledge the blessings received as manifestations of His sheer kindness. His satisfaction lies in our humble and unadorned confession. However, should ingratitude pervade us to the extent of purloining His exclusive entitlement and acclaim, we justly warrant His total abandonment. Just as one who refuses to pay homage for his land forfeits rightful ownership. Whether in the transient realms of the world or in matters of profound import, the party that defaults on its obligation to the entity to which it is beholden incurs retribution. What then befits us when we endeavor to supplant God, usurping the credit for our salvation and arrogating His due glory? Is it not a blasphemous atrocity that renders us deserving of utter damnation? Hence, it assumes paramount significance to grasp the import of this passage: we are saved by grace, contributing nothing to it; God furnishes us with all the prerequisites for our redemption. Why, you may inquire? Because we are bereft of capacity. We possess neither virtuous deeds nor merits for self-vaunting. Furthermore, when he avers, "lest anyone should boast," we must comprehend that apportioning only a portion of our salvation to God falls short; we must extend to the

point of ascribing nothing to ourselves and willingly cede all honor, reserving sole preeminence for God. This echoes through other scriptural passages, particularly Jeremiah, where it bemoans that God is not glorified as befits Him. Should we deem ourselves possessed of any intrinsic goodness, we must abase ourselves, renouncing any notions of virtue, wisdom, capability, or righteousness. None of these warrants elevation, should we aspire to preserve God's domain inviolate and consecrated to Him. Hence, the myriad alliances the world endeavors with God, predicated upon delusions and Satan's wiles, which seek to persuade us of our capacity to act independently of God, prove futile. For so long as an individual believes even a modicum of inherent goodness, utter submission to God remains elusive, and they will inflate with baseless hubris and self-reliance. Thus, Satan exacts a heavy toll when persuading us that self-sufficiency or self-attainment of salvation holds promise. His aim is to divert us from the treasures God proffers, leaving us bereft, echoing the refrain in the Virgin Mary's canticle: "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." We can only embrace God's grace when we yearn for it and concede our own insufficiency, as affirmed in the Psalm: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." It becomes imperative to understand that we are prepared to receive all essential for salvation from God solely when we withhold nothing for ourselves, acknowledging that every semblance of self-exaltation warrants abandonment.

As I alluded to earlier, the world's endeavors to forge alliances with God prove fruitless. People may concede their helplessness without God's intervention, acknowledging their vulnerability in the face of Satan's temptations, even recognizing their inability to merit anything without God's provision or their desperate need for forgiveness of their sins. However, they remain hesitant to relinquish their free will entirely. They persist in the belief that they can somehow contribute, perpetually clinging to the concept of their own deservingness. While they concede that God's grace initiates their salvation, they invariably blend in a measure of their

own exertion and goodwill. When they beseech God for forgiveness of sins, they come bearing their own recompense. Thus, individuals fail to accord God full and unreserved credit for their redemption. They withhold some portion, often a substantial share or more, for themselves. St. Paul advances a step further, demonstrating how we wrongfully deprive God of His due glory until we divest ourselves of all the fallacies with which the world beguiles itself. To extol God, we must acknowledge our inherent insignificance. Authentic humility or abasement does not involve the pretense, as some may misconstrue it, of designating oneself a wretched sinner and feigning utter feebleness to appease God. Instead, we must steadfastly affirm that any notions conceived within the human psyche regarding merit, free will, readiness, assistance, or atonement are utterly vacuous and diabolical delusions. Once we apprehend this verity, we can proffer the submission befitting us, and God will receive the reverence rightfully His. This transformation can transpire solely upon unequivocal abandonment of all considerations of good deeds as a means to merit God's favor.

Moreover, we must grasp that if we aspire to partake in God's proffered salvation, we must present nothing other than faith. As I have elucidated elsewhere, faith does not rely on good deeds, although it acknowledges the law. It does not proffer these as a means to bind God to us; instead, it attests to our utter emptiness, our sole reliance on His unfettered benevolence. Just as an individual in dire straits can scarcely raise a finger and possesses naught save their voice to cry out, "Help me, have mercy on me," faith dispels all self-assurance, that we may accept whatever God bestows. Thus, all adulation accrues to Him. We must remain vigilant, lest ingratitude deter us when God beckons and allures us with such gentleness. We should hasten toward Him as destitute, famished souls, eager to receive His succor because it pleases Him. Christ appeared as a prophet to many, yet their deaf ears precluded their approach to Him. Some are so immersed in the carnal pleasures of this world—wealth, honor, and indulgence in sin—that they

remain indifferent to heavenly life. Others labor under the delusion that they can place God in their debt, akin to numerous hypocrites who are unable to divest themselves of their bloated self-confidence and arrogance. To safeguard against the allure of worldly pleasures and comforts that may divert us from turning our hearts to God, we must exercise faith. It constitutes the anchor to heaven. We can scarcely savor the substantial joy of faith, as expounded by St. Paul, unless we promptly traverse this world, recognizing that our true inheritance and repose await us elsewhere. We must also cast aside all frivolous imaginings that could deflect us from Jesus Christ, preventing His entry into our lives. This constitutes the salient lesson to glean from this passage.

For a deeper understanding, let us contemplate the notion that we are God's handiwork. This does not imply that God merely fashioned us and placed us in this world. Rather, it signifies that, as individuals born in the lineage of Adam, we are inherently unfit for heavenly life. Anyone who believes they can achieve salvation through their own endeavors is gravely mistaken, for in our natural state, we are akin to lifeless, decaying creatures, tainted by sin and moral decay. This truth is eloquently elucidated in the passage where we are described as being "created in Jesus Christ."

Here, St. Paul draws a parallel between the dual births experienced by all believers. We all share a common origin, a universal creation that ushers us into this world. Yet, God performs a profound renewal within us when, through His boundless grace, He bestows upon us the gift of new life via His gospel. This spiritual transformation is imprinted upon our hearts and minds through His mysterious workings, for it cannot be attained by the mere proclamation of the Word. In this context, there exists no distinction between Jews, Gentiles, pagans, and ourselves when it comes to our initial creation. We all emerge from the same primordial source, all descendants of Adam, and all inheritors of God's righteous indignation. By nature, we are burdened by a curse, a topic we have previously explored in detail. A

thorough self-examination will reveal that our first birth offers nothing but a core of sin and iniquity. The wisdom we believe we possess is, in reality, folly, and the light we perceive as illuminating the path between good and evil is but obstinacy and rebellion against God's divine guidance. Our very souls are tainted and corrupted in every facet. Thus, we are compelled to ask, what can we do to earn God's favor and place Him in our debt when our every inclination is steeped in wickedness? Our helplessness merely fans the flames of His righteous wrath, and we are already deserving of eternal damnation from the moment of our birth. Even though we may perceive an infant as free from sin, the seeds of transgression dwell within them, and we are all justly condemned by our inherent guilt. Therefore, if a newborn can be rightfully condemned prior to ever glimpsing the light of this world, what judgment awaits us as we mature? St. Paul's intent in this passage is to underscore that we are the handiwork of God. In essence, he is conveying this message: "O humble creature, should you entertain the notion that you can present yourself as a valiant hero, laying claim to some measure of merit to approach God, believing that He is obligated to you, you are sorely mistaken." If you propose that your pursuit of God commenced prior to your birth, you essentially invite others to spurn you. If you argue that this pursuit occurred later, perhaps between the ages of seven and thirty, when you were illuminated by the gospel, you remain refuted, for you harbored no inclination toward goodness, and your thoughts and desires were entrenched in rebellion against God, akin to warriors waging war against His righteousness. Thus, you have contended against God from the moment of your birth. Should you trace your journey back to infancy, when you lacked the discernment to distinguish between right and wrong, yet were still a part of the cursed lineage of Adam, reason compels you to recognize your utter incapacity to turn toward God by your own volition. Consequently, any act conducted for your well-being or ascribed to your credit must be unequivocally attributed to God, devoid of any personal contribution. This is why St. Paul designates us as the handiwork of God in this passage, just as it is declared in the Psalms that those who belong to His

church are also His flock. The Prophet referred to the children of Israel, whom God had chosen solely out of His boundless mercy, setting them apart from other heathen nations. God's choice of them held no other motive or justification except His own mercy, and the same principle applies to us today. When St. Paul further elucidates that we were created in Jesus Christ, the significance becomes even more pronounced. He emphasizes that our creation in Adam inexorably leads to our downfall, underscoring the imperative need for us to be entirely re-fashioned and recreated anew, specifically in the likeness of Jesus Christ, who serves as the second Adam. This nomenclature is employed by St. Paul himself in his writings, notably in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Therefore, the term "created" should serve as a resounding rebuttal to those who dare to boast of any inherent worthiness.

When individuals lay claim to their own self-determination and presume the capability to perform good deeds independently, they essentially position themselves as creators, inadvertently suggesting that they are self-made. This assertion is inherently blasphemous. Even those in the world who may be blind, unlearned, or physically feeble recognize the act of creation as sacred and divine, unanimously acknowledging God as the ultimate Creator and Maker of all things. Hypocrites may utter the same confession with their lips, but their true beliefs betray them as they secretly harbor the notion that their free will allows them to contribute to their own well-being and salvation. In doing so, they inadvertently deny the very first tenet of our faith, reducing God to a partial Creator. While they may verbally acknowledge God as the Creator, particularly concerning worldly life, they elevate their perceived role in securing heavenly life, imagining themselves as co-creators through their autonomous will. In essence, they arrogate the position of creatorship to themselves.

In response, some within the Papal tradition may vehemently protest that they have never harbored such blasphemous beliefs and would willingly

sacrifice their lives rather than articulate such notions. However, it is essential to contemplate the relative significance of the two scenarios: the act of self-creation as mortal beings in this worldly realm and the attainment of eternal life. St. Paul unequivocally conveys that if we claim any capacity for self-achievement through free will and personal power, God is not our sole Creator. He underscores that even in matters pertaining to heavenly life, we remain His handiwork. Therefore, if we aspire to partake in the grace procured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, we must divest ourselves of all self-assurance and acknowledge that our capacity to initiate virtuous deeds originates in God's summons, emanating from His intrinsic benevolence.

St. Paul's message is unmistakable: anyone who believes they have earned God's favor is essentially claiming to possess exceptional abilities, arrogating to themselves the role of creators. This notion is profoundly misguided, for we exist in a state of spiritual death until God quickens us through faith and the transformative work of His Holy Spirit. In our state of spiritual death, we are utterly incapable of performing righteous deeds or preparing ourselves for salvation. The term "create" in this context signifies that every aspect of our being is the result of God's creative act. Much like God brought the world into existence from nothingness, our existence itself is a testament to His divine initiative. Therefore, as we initially amounted to nothing, how can we presume to bind God into granting us this or that? Such beliefs run counter to the very fabric of our existence.

To grasp the profound truth that our salvation rests entirely upon grace, where we receive all things as manifestations of God's unmerited benevolence, we must first acknowledge that it is God who has bestowed upon us the gift of existence itself. This is exemplified in the case of Abraham, as recounted in Romans 4, where, despite his and his wife's inability to conceive, they were blessed with a son through their unwavering faith in God's promise. Similarly, we can only partake in God's

grace when we openly recognize our innate inadequacy, humbly yielding to the Lord's initiation, sustenance, and ultimate perfection of our lives.

Furthermore, St. Paul's mention of being "in Jesus Christ" serves as a poignant reminder of our inherited corruption from Adam. We can only fully comprehend the weight of our guilt when we confront it within ourselves. This phrase also underscores that the divine favor is not indiscriminately dispensed but rather reserved for those whom God has personally chosen, as previously discussed. It accentuates the imperative need for a remedy, for we were already ensnared in a state of loss and damnation. Yet, through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God rescued us from our perilous condition. This underscores the inextricable link between faith and divine renewal, highlighting that faith itself is unattainable unless God graciously renews us from within.

Hence, we receive every heavenly blessing and all the spiritual riches from Him. Our creation in Jesus Christ signifies that every ounce of righteousness, wisdom, virtue, and goodness within us emanates from this divine source. God has not scattered these gifts randomly; instead, He has concentrated the entirety of what is essential for our salvation within Jesus Christ. Consequently, when we become part of His Body, we also partake in the full scope of His blessings. Apart from Him, we are severed from all dimensions of our salvation, resembling decayed and putrid branches, bearing nothing but impurity.

This underscores why Paul not only underscores that we are God's handiwork but also created in Jesus Christ for the express purpose of engaging in good works already ordained for us to walk in. In highlighting good works, Paul exposes the folly and absurdity of those who presume they can present their self-cultivated virtues and merits as if they themselves had fashioned them. Paul effectively challenges them, saying, "Go ahead, lay before God the virtues and merits you believe you have

produced, as your pride remains unshaken. Display whatever you think can aid your cause."

To this, they retort, "Shouldn't we be saved through our own merits and good works? Haven't we diligently cultivated them ourselves? Haven't we labored to acquire them? Can't we elevate ourselves through their merit?" Yet Paul counters, "No, you have not prepared these works by your own hands; rather, God has prepared them for you. Would it be reasonable for you to contend against Him after He has showered you with such kindness and generosity? Can you dare to claim that you have paid your Host, even though He has supplied everything for you? It is akin to Him generously hosting you and then declaring, 'To prevent any misconception that I made you dependent, I shall accept payment from you.' In truth, the payment originates from His own benevolence. Similarly, those who put forth their good works to suggest that God did not save them freely, but that they contributed to it, are mistaken. Where could they possibly acquire these good works?"

God prepares our conduct through the law, offering us a clear and righteous path to follow according to His divine will. It's as if He paves the way for us to walk upon. However, this guidance would be ineffective if we did not also receive the very ability to perform these good works from God. When God issues His commands, we may hear them, but they often do not penetrate our hearts, as our inner selves are often tainted with pride and obstinacy. In essence, we are unable to wholeheartedly obey God's commands until He tenderly transforms and renovates our hearts. This fundamental truth is evident throughout the words of the prophets and the pages of Holy Scripture. Thus, God must make yet another form of preparation, imparting to us the knowledge of what is good and just and then gently leading us through the work of His Holy Spirit to align our lives with His divine law.

In the absence of God's preparation of good works for us by revealing His divine will and empowering us to carry them out through His celestial strength, we remain utterly impotent. Therefore, it is imperative for us to humble ourselves before God, both for what has already transpired and what lies ahead. In retrospection, we ought to acknowledge that God has plucked us from the brink of damnation. By our very nature, we were condemned, yet God has chosen us to be His beloved children. We must not be so presumptuous as to assume that our salvation is the result of our own deeds. Instead, let us exalt Him as He rightfully deserves, understanding that He has saved us solely out of His boundless and gracious benevolence.

As we contemplate the future, we should recognize that without God's guidance and the bestowal of good works through His Holy Spirit, we are powerless to accomplish any righteous deeds. Therefore, whenever we are confronted by our own weaknesses, we should seek refuge in Him. Even when we manage to perform acts of goodness, we must remain vigilant against the poison of pride and continuously acknowledge our indebtedness to God. Those who perceive themselves as weaker should openly confess their profound reliance on God's forbearance, while those who might appear more righteous must recognize an even greater dependence on Him. In truth, they possess nothing intrinsically, receiving everything from the wellspring of God's boundless and unmerited goodness.

Throughout the course of our lives, it is imperative that we maintain this unwavering awareness, continually expressing our profound gratitude to God for His boundless kindness and generosity. We should consider ourselves forever indebted to Him for all that we have received. It is vital to emphasize that the purpose of this reflection is not to compile a comprehensive list of the causes of our salvation. Rather, it is to extinguish any seeds of pride that might tempt us into thinking that God is somehow obligated to us. Therefore, St. Paul's true intent is to silence any arguments

that might lead someone to believe they have earned or deserved anything from God.

God indeed showers us with good works, although they are born solely from His pure and abundant goodness. Nevertheless, these good works should never be perceived as a currency with which to purchase something from Him. Instead, our anchor should always be firmly set in the forgiveness of our sins. Our righteousness is a product of God's pardon, even though by all accounts, we rightly deserve condemnation. In essence, when we are told that human free will and any other attributes are utterly insufficient, it serves as a powerful reminder for us to channel all glory towards God and refrain from attributing anything to ourselves. This profound understanding should naturally lead us to acknowledge our perpetual reliance on God's grace and unwavering mercy.

In closing, we should eternally humble ourselves and feel a deep sense of contrition for our flaws, offering unceasing glory to God and openly confessing that, were it not for His ceaseless and boundless mercy, we would be plagued by perpetual doubt and inner turmoil. It is the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ that serves as the sacrificial offering reconciling us with God. This is the authentic path to exalt God as the true Savior of the world and to credit His grace for every blessing. We must divest ourselves of all pretensions to personal glory and wholeheartedly acknowledge that every ounce of goodness within us is a direct result of God's unwavering influence. Furthermore, we must readily admit our continual need for God's forbearance, especially considering our recurrent provocations of His righteous anger, until ultimate satisfaction is achieved through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let us bow in humble reverence before the boundless majesty of our benevolent God. In this sacred moment, let us bare our souls, openly confess our transgressions, and implore Him to illuminate our

consciousness, revealing the depth of our sins. Through this self-examination, may we be humbled to the point where sin finds no dwelling within us. In the interim, let us beseech the assistance and guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has already graced us with His Holy Spirit. May His grace continue to flourish within us, saturating our very being. May His divine Spirit govern our every pursuit, ensuring that our existence aligns harmoniously with His divine law. Although we find ourselves entangled in a web of ceaseless transgressions, may His hidden strength restrain us, preserving us until that sacred day when He calls us forth from this earthly realm to unite us eternally with our Lord Jesus Christ, the wellspring of all perfection. In these profound moments, let us lift our voices in prayer: "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Twelfth Sermon, the Fourth on the Second Chapter

> "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.." - Ephesians 2:11-13

Although the general teachings about God's grace should inspire us to praise His name and acknowledge the blessings we have received from Him, when something is done specifically for us, we should be even more deeply moved. In the morning, we heard how Paul stripped away all aspects

of human nature to reveal only one foundation for salvation: the pure goodness of God. Now, he applies this principle directly to the Ephesians, urging them to reflect on their own condition when God found them. It's as though, after speaking about all of humanity, he directs each one of us to examine our own experiences.

Indeed, what he speaks to the Ephesians applies to us as well. Imagine someone telling us about the abundant blessings we inherited due to Adam's fall, and then asking us to consider what we were like and how we lived in our beastly ways before God called us to know Him. The key point here is that although the circumstances might differ from our time, Paul's message remains relevant and serves a meaningful purpose. While we may have been baptized since infancy, we must acknowledge that we, like the Jews who were set apart as God's chosen people, were once heathens in terms of our forefathers, before the gospel was preached to the world.

However, the confusion that has arisen among us through the ungratefulness of those called to the truth of the gospel is evident. Many have strayed from the path and, in essence, have been cut off from God's church. Our childhood baptism did not save us from double guilt, for those who fell into the superstitions of popery essentially renounced their baptism and became renegades. We cannot excuse ourselves by claiming we were forced to swear to God when we strayed from His commandments. Instead, we must humbly confess that we were once God's deadly enemies, deserving to be wholly abandoned by Him. His reaching out to bring us back onto the path of salvation is a testament to His mercy. Therefore, we should refrain from boasting or seeking excuses to mask our wretchedness but freely admit that we were unworthy enemies of God, saved only by His outstretched hand. Thus, we first apply this text to the Ephesians and then extract its lessons for ourselves.

Now, let's delve into the content and essence of these words: "Remember how you were sometimes Gentiles." Firstly, Paul draws a distinction between the Jews and those whom God allowed to continue in their ignorance. It was a unique privilege for Abraham's descendants when God adopted them, saying, "You shall be My people, as though you were of My own household." Those who did not come from Abraham's lineage were effectively exiled from God's kingdom and church. Paul goes on to emphasise that this separation was not merely a spiritual one; it was also visibly evident. Circumcision served as a ritual to cleanse people of their impurity and highlighted that all human seed was cursed. It demonstrated that true holiness and purity could only be attained by cutting away the natural elements. In essence, just as baptism today teaches us to renounce our natural state, circumcision was a sign that everyone was unclean and impure until they rejected their inherent nature. Paul's message is clear: this physical sign made it evident to all heathens that they were unworthy to approach God and that He did not receive them into the community of believers. The Jews had not created circumcision on their own; it was instituted by God to distinguish them from the rest of the world. This separation was due solely to God's grace and goodness.

Paul adds that at that time, they were without Christ, underscoring that mankind was lost and helpless until God united them in the body of His Son and adopted them as His children. For Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the source of all righteousness, and our redemption and life.

As long as we remain unfamiliar with God, we are like blind individuals stumbling in the dark, akin to the spiritually dead, stripped of all holiness, righteousness, power, and goodness. Since our freedom depends on Him, we are subjected to the tyranny of the devil and sin until He redeems us. This is why both Paul and I implore you through the voice of the Ephesians to turn to Jesus Christ. Those who are not partakers of God's Son should understand that it would be better for them to be drowned a hundred times

than to persist in such a state. Why is this so? Because we can possess neither life nor spiritual well-being, righteousness, nor anything commendable apart from Jesus Christ. In essence, we possess nothing but sinfulness and destruction within ourselves.

Furthermore, he alludes to the commonwealth of Israel, underscoring that all the promises made to the Jews were rooted in Jesus Christ. Consequently, those who do not belong to His body are immediately excluded from God's promises and cannot harbor hope of life except through delusion, which only deceives them. He also mentions the instruments, covenants, and conveyances of these promises, signifying that God did not choose the Jews haphazardly; rather, He established a formal covenant, a binding document, which placed all others under condemnation. Thus, when God exalted the lineage of Abraham, it necessarily meant that the rest of the world was left in greater confusion. It is as if some princes or cities were to form an alliance, leaving all others outside, effectively depriving them of the benefits contained within.

When God declared that the Jews were His chosen people, His flock, and that He would be their Father and Saviour, He simultaneously conveyed that no part of this privilege extended to the Gentiles, whom He had forsaken and not shown a similar mercy. Lastly, He states that they were without God, the ultimate measure of all calamity. When one's God has cast them off to the point of no return, they descend further into the abyss of hell, waging war against God as if in defiance. This rebellion arises from their stubborn and rebellious nature, opposing all that is good. Thus, what St. Paul emphasises here, to aid the Ephesians in benefiting from his morning discourse regarding the sole cause of our salvation, is that there is nothing for us to rely upon except God's sheer grace.

Now, let us turn our attention to ourselves. I've already briefly stated that our forefathers were in the same condition that St. Paul describes here.

Therefore, we have no reason to boast, considering our lowly origins. If the Jews, who were chosen by God, stand as a testament to His wrath and terrible vengeance for their unbelief, then we, as those grafted into their place, should have even greater cause for humility. If God did not spare the natural branches, how much more should we, who have been grafted in contrary to nature, humble ourselves? Paul encourages us to humility so that we may always submit ourselves to God's goodness and freely acknowledge that our well-being depends on it.

I also mentioned earlier that not only were our forefathers estranged from the hope of salvation because they were not adopted like the Jews, but also the widespread scattering of humanity, which still persists today, was intended to crush all pride and presumption. This allows God's grace to shine more brightly upon us. Therefore, although we have been baptised and bear the mark of God's goodness and free adoption, we have been wretched idolaters who strayed from our Lord Jesus Christ. The things we held in high regard turned into our greater damnation rather than contributing to our welfare. Hence, we have ample reason to consider ourselves further. Even though we may lack the wisdom to fully magnify God's grace, let us carefully ponder the word that St. Paul uses here to remind us of what we might forget.

When we are endowed with God's grace, when He grants us good desires to walk in His fear, and when He works in us through His Holy Spirit, demonstrating some goodness within us, we may quickly forget what we were before. This can bury God's grace, preventing us from continually praising and appreciating His goodness and grace as they deserve. Despite the transformation in our present state, reducing us to mere mortals, we must always remember that before God had mercy on us, we were like lost sheep and utterly doomed creatures. Without His intervention and the remedy He provided for our cursed state, we would have been damned countless times. Therefore, we should reflect on St. Paul's words, which he

used to remind the Ephesians of their past, because even though God has removed the cause for their shame and marked them with His Holy Spirit, making them as precious pearls, He still wants them to remember their former sins.

This remembrance is a sign of repentance, as Scripture emphasizes that when God reaches out to us and brings us back from our straying, we should continue to recall our past sins, feeling sorrow, shame, and remorse for them. When he mentions that the Gentiles had good reason to lower their heads because they were once without assurance of God's goodness and love, he reminds us that we receive a unique blessing from God when we partake in His sacraments. These sacraments serve as tokens that God acknowledges and accepts us as part of His household and church. It is true that if we misuse them, we will pay a heavy price, but the outcome of this is yet to be determined.

When the sacraments are administered for their intended purpose, they are truly invaluable treasures. As I mentioned before, although God has promised to consider us His children from the moment we emerge from our mothers' wombs, our flesh remains tainted with impurity. Baptism, however, reveals that God washes and purifies us from all our filthiness, rescuing us from the confusion in which we existed in Adam and clothing us with Jesus Christ, allowing us to share in all His blessings as if they were our own. Therefore, we must recognise the importance of baptism and how greatly we should esteem this gracious act of God's approach to us. The same applies to the Lord's Supper, where it is visibly demonstrated that Jesus Christ is the true sustenance of our souls, just as our bodies are nourished by bread and wine. We find our spiritual life in the very substance of God's Son, as our Lord Jesus presents His body and blood to us as spiritual food and drink. Is this not far more valuable than all the things in this world?

Unfortunately, many people are ignorant or malicious when it comes to the Lord's Supper. Some approach it thoughtlessly, not understanding its purpose, while others treat it as a mere custom. Even if they have been taught its significance, they do not fully comprehend it, treating it lightly once it is over. Some even profane it deliberately. As for baptism, it is similarly disregarded. Instead of meditating on it daily, or even hourly, and using it to strengthen ourselves in God's grace, people rarely think about it. When baptism is administered in the church, it hardly registers with most. It is difficult to find even one person among a hundred who can properly articulate the significance of this sign of our adoption. This disdain and ignorance should not go uncorrected. God, in His patience and long-suffering, cannot tolerate such dishonour when His grace is treated so lightly among us. Therefore, it is crucial for us to pay close attention to what St. Paul tells us here – that the Gentiles, deprived of the sacraments given to God's children as tokens of His goodness and love, are in a pitiable condition. This should prompt us to cherish the privilege we have been granted, not to boast arrogantly, as hypocrites often do when they misuse God's name, but to encourage us to better appreciate this invaluable gift. We should recognise that we are no better than those poor, starving souls against whom God has closed the gates and to whom He has not given these tokens of His grace and witness that He will be our Father.

Consider that the Turks also practice circumcision, just as the Jews did, yet it holds no value because it lacks the accompanying promise of God. Despite our common ancestry with them, we have baptism, but only because God intended to demonstrate greater compassion towards us and display the abundance of His goodness. Similarly, there are others, like the Papists, who are called Christians and also have baptism, yet they have rejected the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ in favour of an abominable mess. What sets us apart from them? It is because God intended us to be mirrors of His boundless mercy. Therefore, we should walk in reverence and awareness and hold in high regard the things that God has

shown us to be so precious and excellent, so that we may derive greater benefit from them. This is why St. Paul emphasises circumcision and uncircumcision here. Although he states elsewhere that circumcision is nothing, this is because it has been abolished, and its use has ceased, along with all the other Old Testament figures. However, when God ordained it, and as long as the Jews used it correctly, it was a reliable token of their adoption by God, as if He had cleansed them from all the impurity inherent in Adam's race and set them apart for Himself.

After he made this statement, he added that they were without Christ and without promises. Here he demonstrates that the sacraments derive their power from God's Word. If they were mere empty signs, they would hold little significance. If circumcision had been given to the Jews without any doctrine or instruction, what purpose would it have served? Surely, it would have been of no benefit to them. However, when God said, "I am the God who sanctifies you; you shall be my children, I will receive you and, with all, take you for my heritage," and on the other hand, "I give myself to you and will be your life," circumcision had such promises attached to it. Therefore, it became an invaluable treasure to the Jews because it was the foundation upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was laid, and upon which the promises were established and confirmed. This is why St. Paul here joins the commonwealth of Israel, the instruments of God's promises, and our Lord Jesus Christ all together.

However, in speaking of the commonwealth of Israel, he shows that God had chosen one particular lineage, which He intended to be holy. This implies that all others were considered unholy. When speaking of the instruments of the promises, he emphasises that we must not view circumcision in isolation; rather, we must understand its intended purpose. It is necessary for us to know why God ordained its use among the Jews. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than a meaningless toy, just as the Gentiles had countless superstitious practices that they believed would

bring them holiness, all in vain since they lacked God's promise. Similarly, in the papacy, they claim to have many sacraments, but without God's word to sanctify them, they are but worthless trinkets.

Therefore, we must understand that to benefit from the sacraments, we must always be taught by God's doctrine. This leads us to the conclusion that many who are considered high in the Church today are, in fact, cut off from it because they lack the necessary instruction to partake in God's offered blessings. They may point to their baptism or claim to have received the Lord's Supper, but if they do not understand their purpose, it renders the sacraments powerless. Therefore, it is crucial for us to return to the Gospel to learn the purpose of baptism, the fruits it yields, and its proper use. We must also understand the significance of the Holy Supper. Without God's Word, as our Lord Himself has said, the sacraments we receive are mere empty symbols, containing nothing but falsehood.

Additionally, we must note that Jesus Christ is associated with the commonwealth of Israel, the sacraments, and the promises to illustrate that we all depend on Him. It is certain that God never approaches humanity without a mediator. Since He abhors unrighteousness and all humans are cursed in Adam, it was necessary for our Lord Jesus Christ to intervene, providing us with access to God. This is why St. Paul also states that Jesus Christ is the "yea and amen" of all God's promises. There can be no certainty in God's promises without Jesus Christ.

For the same reason, all things in the law were consecrated with blood, including the book of the law itself. When the covenant was publicly read and solemnly proclaimed to the people, the book was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice. This signified that all the teachings contained in the law and all the promises by which God adopted those whom He admitted into His church must be confirmed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we desire the promises to be sure and infallible, and if we want to be assured of them so that we may freely call upon God and resist all temptations, we must always turn to Jesus Christ. It is significant when God, with His own holy mouth, tells us that He will reserve us for His own. Still, we must continually tremble in His Majesty's presence until we cast our eyes upon our Lord Jesus Christ and understand that God, for His sake, regards us as forgiven, burying our sins so they will never be held against us.

Therefore, you can see that the promises, the sacraments, and everything we have must be ratified by Jesus Christ. In short, to make a human comparison and speak plainly, He is the true source that imparts savor to everything related to our salvation. Without Him, we would remain as if in a stupor, unable to hope or have our minds settled enough to turn to God for refuge. Therefore, St. Paul tells us that those without circumcision, or other sacraments by which they are consecrated to God, or any promises of salvation without Christ, are without God.

Now, he adds something that may seem challenging and strange at first glance when he says that the Ephesians were without God. It is certain that even though they were wretched idolaters, they held a certain belief that the world did not create itself. All humans have continuously possessed some semblance of religion, and even those who attempt to bury all knowledge of God in the depths of their minds are still pricked by the conscience. They cannot escape God's hand. However, when it comes to this matter, they are naturally inclined to acknowledge the existence of a God. But those who are not taught by God's word, the law, the prophets, or the gospel are led astray, wandering aimlessly and bewildered. They create distorted images of God based on their own misguided imaginations.

So, when St. Paul says here that they were without God, it means that they wandered in their own imaginations and erroneous beliefs. This is why

Simple says that those who desired to worship unknown gods were merely worshipping idols and fanciful delusions, and God had no part in it. They had utterly forsaken Him, renouncing Him in the process. Therefore, it is essential for us to strive diligently to know which God we should worship. It is not enough for someone to claim they had good intentions and meant to worship God; this will not suffice. We must approach God with humility, allowing Him to show us the way to come to Him, lest we go astray and suffer harm.

Furthermore, since God has given us a testimony of His Majesty in Holy Scripture, we must focus our attention there and not seek to know anything beyond what is revealed. Our guiding star to know God should be His Word, and we must be wise enough to accept everything it contains without contradiction. We should not presume to add anything to it. Moreover, because we know that whoever has the Son has the Father, we should seek to know God through His Word. Therefore, as I mentioned before, because God has revealed Himself in His Word, we must seek Him there. Likewise, since our Lord Jesus Christ is His living image, we should not engage in excessive speculations to comprehend what God is. Instead, we should turn to Jesus Christ, acknowledging that it is His role to lead us to God the Father, and He is the one who will guide us. By doing so, we can be certain that we will not be without God in this world.

Now, if those who exert great effort to serve God are condemned here as being without God because they have not adhered to the true path and have been deceived by their superstitions, what shall we say of the dogs and swine who have no knowledge of God, especially when they have deprived themselves of all understanding and have descended into a beastly state after having some exposure to the truth, with their ears exposed to Holy Scripture? We see a great number of such people in the world today. They take advantage of the times, indulge in worldly pleasures, and willingly extinguish or obscure the light that God has caused to shine upon them.

They openly defy God's majesty, as if there were no instruction at all. This cursed seed is now scattered throughout the entire world. However, as I mentioned earlier, if the poor and ignorant, who never had any clear direction but have wandered aimlessly, are condemned by God for not having a true foundation, what shall become of the wealthy who reject God in this manner and rebel against Him, claiming not to understand the true doctrine and religion?

Therefore, we must humble ourselves and acknowledge that since God has revealed Himself to us, joined us with an inseparable bond, shown Himself as a Father to us, and deigned to make us members of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, uniting us with Him, with the condition that everything belonging to Him now belongs to us, we should learn to magnify this grace and recognize what we were and what we would still be if God had not shown us mercy. It becomes us to give thanks for His grace.

One might wonder what St. Paul meant by the word "world" here. It would seem that those outside of the world were not without God. However, St. Paul uses this phrase to emphasize that the Ephesians had enjoyed the benefits of the world: the light of the sun, the service of all the elements, and the many blessings of God's creation. Yet, they did not know Him. The world serves as an open stage where God intends His Majesty to be seen. When we look up at the sun, the moon, and the stars, do they not lead us to the One who gave them their virtues? Consider the sun, so distant from us, yet it provides us with light. It calls forth fruit from the earth. It follows its appointed course, shifting from one side to the other, maintaining its path without fail. Though immense in size, it is upheld by the secret power of God. Its vastness surpasses that of the entire earth. It rises and sets, never missing its course. When we gaze upon the heavens, our hearts should be filled with a longing to approach God.

Moreover, when we contemplate the things near us—the variety of God's blessings poured upon us—we should feel the same desire. Without venturing far, if we simply examine our own bodies, we can marvel at the workmanship and goodness of God. We live in a world where God displays an abundance of miracles, intending to be known and worshipped. However, many of us behave like beasts, lacking understanding and failing to recognise the God who created and fashioned us, the same God who reveals Himself in all His creatures, both above and below. Isn't this enough to strip away all excuses for those who act foolishly in their ignorance, living solely to consume God's blessings and failing to honour Him or offer Him their service? Therefore, it is not without reason that St. Paul adds further that those who were destitute of the knowledge of the gospel were without God in the world.

Now, on the other hand, he presents the grace of God that they had received so that they would understand it was not obtained by their own efforts or wisdom. They ought to recognise how greatly they are indebted to God for lifting them up from the depths of hell to heavenly heights. If God had not extended His hand to lift us up when we were prone to fall, we should acknowledge that we have no grounds for boasting.

So, let us consider our state; if we had been left alone, we wouldn't owe Him anything. However, when someone helps us up after we've fallen, we come to thank them. Likewise, we ought to do the same with God. Look, God has not only lifted us from the ground but also rescued us from the depths of hell. He hasn't done this to keep us crawling on the earth or to have us enjoy His blessings here alone. No, He has done it to elevate us to the kingdom of heaven. As we've seen before, we've already been put in possession of it through faith. We've been placed in Jesus Christ's glory, which He acquired for us by entering on our behalf. That being said, we should acknowledge and magnify God's grace all the more.

Now, let's understand what Paul means when he says that, through Jesus Christ, you who were far away have been brought near to God. To explain further, I should add a few words. Since I can't cover everything in one go, let's understand that those who seem to have some worthiness in themselves will inevitably wander to their own destruction as long as they are separated from God. This is because, by nature, they are strangers to Him and are completely cut off from Him. Let each of us recognise how we had forgotten God and turned away from Him until He called us back to Him. Knowing this, let us learn to magnify His grace for reconciling us to Himself, for removing all enmity between Him and us, and for transforming us from deadly enemies into His children. We should be assured that all of this is accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ, with the goal that we should draw everything related to our salvation from that source.

Additionally, let us consider the help God has provided us to come to Jesus Christ and be established in Him. This way, we can have a firm and sure doctrine. For example, when the gospel is preached daily, Jesus Christ is offered to us, and He calls us to Himself. His arms are outstretched to embrace us. Let us understand this. Moreover, let us add the sacraments to this, considering that Jesus Christ not only commands the open preaching of the Gospel, revealing Himself as our Shepherd who desires us to be His flock, but also confirms it through baptism and His last supper. We must be careful not to render these signs ineffective through our own malice and ingratitude. Instead, we should ponder why God has ordained them and use them in such a way that we may grow in faith and be inflamed with zeal to dedicate ourselves wholly to God since He has also given Himself to us.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying to Him. We should not only ask Him to reveal our vices to us but also to cleanse us from them. In particular, we should recognise that from our mother's wombs, we bring nothing but sinfulness, and we continue to increase our iniquity. When we realise this,

we should bless His holy name for granting us this knowledge and be spurred to turn to Him. We must maintain the right path in Christ, for without Him, we would be banished from the kingdom of heaven. Thus, let us persist on this path and call upon our good God incessantly, so that we may experience that His calling us to Him is not in vain. As we see the fruits of our prayers, we will be more encouraged to seek refuge in Him and offer Him thanks for all the benefits we receive from His hand. May He grant this grace not only to us but also to all people, etc.

The Thirteenth Sermon, the Fifth on the Second Chapter

> "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." - Ephesians 2:13-15

We have also learned that by our very nature, we stand as adversaries to God, having strayed far from the path of righteousness through the sin of Adam. Consequently, our essence is marred by wickedness and insubordination. Despite humanity's attempts to placate and flatter themselves, it is an undeniable truth that we cannot present anything before the Almighty that would not kindle His righteous wrath. God, therefore, may justifiably disown us as His creation. In light of this reality, we must turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is through Him alone that we may approach God.

In the days of old, the Jewish people enjoyed a unique closeness to God by virtue of His choice. It was not that they were inherently more virtuous than the rest of the world, but rather God's benevolence had singled them out. Thus, prior to the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, a distinction existed: one group stood nearer to God, while the other appeared more distant. This distinction, however, should not be interpreted as an intrinsic superiority of the Jews over the Gentiles. As previously discussed, it was purely due to God's gracious election that the Jews were considered a part of His divine household.

Turning our attention to the Gentiles, St. Paul emphasizes a profound transformation. Once distant from God, they have now been brought near through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This highlights the magnificence of God's grace. As previously noted, comprehending the depth of our wretchedness before God's intervention is vital. Without this understanding, we cannot fully appreciate the magnitude of our indebtedness to Him and the extent of His mercy. When we realize our condition—cursed from birth, under the dominion of the enemy, enslaved to sin, and seemingly facing a stern divine judgment—we can truly grasp the mercy that has rescued us from the brink of eternal despair and ushered us into the kingdom of heaven. Through Jesus Christ, our inheritance in this heavenly kingdom is certain. The boundless goodness of God is beyond our comprehension, making this topic worthy of revisitation. There's no need to fear repetition, for it serves as a reminder to honor God appropriately and maintain unwavering faith, allowing us to approach Him as our Father with confidence, assured of His acceptance, provided we are united with His only Son through faith in the gospel.

Furthermore, it's essential to recognize that it is through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reconciled us to God the Father through His sacrificial death, that we now draw near to the heavenly kingdom. We were once far removed from it, without hope of access or entry. Though Paul's initial audience was

a particular nation, the message is universal. Today, the Holy Spirit imparts the same doctrine to prompt us to acknowledge our own wretchedness, humble ourselves, and accept the immeasurable blessings offered through the gospel in Christ. Additionally, Paul underscores that Christ is our peace, unifying both Jews and Gentiles, including those who were far off and those who were near. Just as in his earlier statement, where he aimed to humble the Gentiles and emphasize their indebtedness to God, here he offers a caution to the Jews, urging them to restrain their pride. They should not consider themselves superior solely because of God's choice of their lineage. People have a tendency to exalt themselves, and some among the Jews, who misused God's grace, believed their ancestry, tracing back to Abraham, placed them on a divine pedestal. They perceived it as an injustice when informed that the Church would encompass both Jews and Gentiles without exception. They needed to be reminded frequently that God's selection of them was not based on their merits, nobility, or any personal qualities but solely on His love for their forefathers, irrespective of their merit.

Frequently, Moses and the prophets admonished the people, urging them not to claim any merit for themselves but to rely entirely on God's boundless goodness. They were to acknowledge that any superiority they might possess over others was not of their own making or for their own sake but solely because it pleased God to set them apart for His inheritance.

However, despite their proximity to God and the assurance of being regarded as His children, the Jews could not deny their desperate need for salvation. When they honestly examined themselves, they had to confront the fact that God was justly displeased with them. Their thoughts, desires, souls, and bodies were tainted by corruption, a sobering reality that should fill us with awe when we consider our own condition.

The Jews had the rituals and symbols of the law as tangible reminders of God's grace toward them. But these outward practices were insufficient; the blood of animals could not cleanse their sins or secure God's favor. Therefore, it was imperative for them to turn to Jesus Christ. St. Paul underscores that the Jews should not arrogantly exclude the Gentiles from the Church, deeming them unworthy. Instead, Jesus Christ serves as the mediator for both, leading them to God the Father. Without Him, every one of us, regardless of status, would be cut off from the hope of salvation. In this context, no one should disdain their neighbor; rather, they should embrace each other in unity of faith and love, recognizing that all of us, from the greatest to the least, would be justifiably excluded from God's Church if not for His grace.

In a similar vein, James urges the prominent figures of this world to find their glory in humility, recognizing that God has removed the veils that blinded them to their own wretchedness. Often, those in positions of power misuse their status, considering themselves exceptional, until they come face to face with God's truth. Consequently, the worldly elite have their vision clouded, leading them astray and allowing them to act without restraint. James advises them to take pride in their lowliness because the Lord reveals their utter helplessness on their own, yet extends His boundless mercy to them.

Therefore, the key to forging the unity we need is for each of us, in our unique way, to acknowledge our wretched and pitiable state. As we surrender ourselves to God's mercy and grace, we must understand that His mercy is all-encompassing and not subject to our limitations or restrictions. Instead, since He has chosen us, it is our duty to embrace those whom He has gathered into the same fellowship with us. This underscores the notion that our Lord Jesus Christ is the peacemaker for all people, encompassing both those who were once close and those who were once distant. Yet, as previously mentioned, this is a reminder to counteract the excessive pride of

the Jews, who sought to exclude the Gentiles from God's kingdom. It reinforces the idea that if we desire Jesus Christ to be our mediator, providing us access to God the Father and guiding us, it must all rest on God's sheer mercy. We must avoid foolishly asserting superiority or preference over others and recognize that we all depend on God's infinite mercy, for we were all ensnared by sin, as St. Paul states elsewhere.

Now, we must apply these lessons to our own lives. At times, people may think themselves more esteemed by God because some have lived honorable and virtuous lives, while others were born into humble circumstances. Some may possess outstanding virtues or talents, and each person seeks to present something they believe God might favor in them over their neighbors.

Yet, let us understand that even if we appear close to God outwardly, the only way to truly have His favor, to call upon Him with hope, and to trust that He will embrace us in His fatherly love is for Jesus Christ to be our head. How can this be? It is certain that He came to save the lost. As stated elsewhere, it is an undeniable truth that our Lord Jesus Christ came to call back to salvation those who were condemned. Therefore, let us learn to humble ourselves with genuine modesty, not just a superficial withdrawal, but a complete abasement and lowering of ourselves, that God may receive the glory He deserves. None of us should exalt ourselves above another but should become one body, for this is the condition upon which we are called.

Furthermore, let us contemplate the title given to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He is our peace. Without Him, we would forever feel like straw or blocks, for those with any awareness of their sins cannot find peace without profound inner turmoil. They are so restless that it would be better for them to be buried underground than to feel eternally exposed before God's judgment seat, tormented in such a manner. Therefore, if we do not have Jesus Christ as our peace, the awakening of our consciences will surely

distress us, making us feel that God stands against us as an enemy, or it will completely numb our senses, rendering us like brute beasts. We will not only fall into a sinful slumber but also be ensnared by the devil, feeling no more sorrow or remorse for our sins.

The importance of recognizing that Jesus Christ is our peace cannot be overstated. Firstly, it should deeply move us, making us acutely aware of our sins and leading us to sorrow for them when we consider that God's judgment awaits us. Thus, He calls none but those who are burdened and weary to Himself. Furthermore, we come to realize that we can dispel all doubt and mistrust because, despite provoking God's anger, it is appeased through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas we once waged a constant war against God, Jesus Christ has reconciled us. Where God once disowned us for our sins and our wicked, corrupt nature, Jesus Christ has removed all such barriers so that God may accept us not only as His creatures made in His image but also as His beloved children, whom He has adopted to be heirs of His kingdom.

When we grasp this truth completely, the restless world will no longer sway and stagger as many do today, shifting from one extreme to another. Their actions often revolve around their pride, preventing them from coming directly to God. They rely on their own free will and merits, oblivious to the grace of Jesus Christ. They distance themselves from it as much as possible, and in the meantime, God deals with them according to their deserving. Those so infatuated with self-righteousness that they believe they can lead a life worthy of approaching God and earning something from Him will find their merits and satisfactions dissipate like the wind when they need them most. They fall into another extreme, wondering how they can come to God without intermediaries and advocates. They invent so many mediators that it becomes astonishing. In the process, they continually overlook Jesus Christ and create their own paths instead of turning to Him, who is the true way. Consequently, as they abandon the correct path that cannot lead them

astray, they wander aimlessly in various directions. After much exertion, they end up breaking both their arms and legs, only to discover that the further they progress, the farther they move away from God.

Therefore, it becomes all the more crucial for us to grasp the significance of these words spoken by Paul. In them, we find the assurance that our gracious God will lovingly welcome us if we have Jesus Christ as our peace and refuge. Thus, let us contemplate the remainder of the text I mentioned earlier: "Find rest for your souls." Through these words, our Lord Jesus Christ desires us to comprehend that anyone who separates themselves from Him, not finding contentment in Him as their mediator, will remain in a perpetual state of restlessness. Even if they attempt to reassure themselves and deceive their own hearts with various assurances, they will be plagued by anxiety and will not find solid ground to stand upon. They will lack a safe harbor to shield them from life's storms. Therefore, it is our duty to turn to our Lord Jesus Christ and firmly resolve that He alone is our peace if we wish to approach God freely and without hesitation.

In conclusion, every individual, without exception, whether they are near or far from God, must come together in unity. If anyone believes there is inherent value or worthiness within themselves, they will never turn to our Lord Jesus Christ until they forsake such notions. Conversely, even if we find ourselves beyond hope in the eyes of the world, we can be assured that our Lord Jesus Christ is entirely capable of erasing the memory of all our iniquities. In doing so, God will embrace us in His favor. St. Paul, after affirming that Jesus Christ came to save wretched sinners, serves as an example himself. Despite his past as a persecutor of the church and an enemy of the truth, even shedding innocent blood, he was not only welcomed into the congregation but was also chosen as an apostle to spread the message of salvation throughout the world. God lavished the riches of His goodness upon him. Therefore, if we place our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and seek reconciliation with God the Father through His sacrificial

death, even if we were in the depths of despair, Jesus Christ would draw us out from there. He would vividly demonstrate that the title bestowed upon Him is not mere imagination.

Furthermore, Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ has torn down the barrier that once separated them. He employs this analogy to elucidate that the rituals and symbols of the law have been abolished. There is now nothing obstructing our unity in peace and brotherly love. Shortly thereafter, he likens the rituals of the law to a dividing wall. Just as we now have baptism as a distinguishing mark from the heathen, God instituted circumcision for the Jews when He chose them. Once we receive baptism, we bear the sign that identifies us as part of His church and the flock of His Son, Jesus Christ. Similarly, during the time of the law, circumcision served this purpose, and sacrifices attested to God's forgiveness of their sins. As a result, since this privilege was exclusively bestowed upon the descendants of Abraham, it acted as a dividing wall, like a fence or enclosure for livestock. God, as evidenced in the Song of Moses, extended His divine protection to the lineage of Abraham, setting them apart from the rest of the world. They were God's treasured possession, and the rituals served as walls or boundaries to maintain this distinct relationship, safeguarding this people under God's care and guardianship.

Concerning the Gentiles, they were left to their own ways, even to their own detriment. God did not grant them the privilege of revealing His righteousness to them. St. Paul explicitly highlights that God allowed them to persist in their errors, and in this aspect, they were akin to wretched beasts. St. Paul's point about the ceremonies acting as a wall to separate the Jews from the Gentiles becomes clear in this context. However, these barriers have all been dismantled because Jesus Christ, who embodies truth and substance, has come to dispel these shadows. The ceremonial law wasn't given to consume the people with itself, as hypocrites often do,

distorting God's intention. It was given to sustain them in hopeful anticipation until our Lord Jesus Christ was manifested in the world.

It was not without reason that all these things were abolished by His advent. For Christ, as the Son of Righteousness, has illuminated us. Hence, there's no need for us to remain ensnared by dark shadows any longer. Through Him, enmity has been eradicated because we are now joined with the lineage that God had consecrated for Himself. There is no longer any division, for we, by faith, have become the descendants of Abraham, forming one spiritual family. Unlike the ceremonies of the old law, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the sacraments established by Christ, do not engender divisions. While we remain separate from unbelievers and those who have not entered God's Church, no single nation is favored by God as unique to itself. His grace is extended to all. The distinctions that once existed, asserting that we were descendants of Abraham while excluding others, have been abolished. As attested in numerous passages in Scripture, there is now neither Jew nor Gentile. Therefore, anyone who calls upon the name of God, regardless of their nationality, is equally cherished and embraced by Him, as St. Peter observed in Acts 16 and his first epistle.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper now serve to unite the entire world. Even the most uncivilized peoples can approach God, and they will be received as baptism is conferred upon them, for it belongs to all who are incorporated into the body of the only Son of God. Let us apply this text for our spiritual growth. First and foremost, let us recognize that the abolition of the ceremonies, particularly their fulfillment, was the key to opening the gates of heaven to us. The realization of these ceremonies was entirely revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. They were not trivial or unproductive. Nevertheless, we must refrain from employing them as if we possess their full perfection in Jesus Christ. Instead, we should acknowledge how God has lavished His goodness on those He had once excluded. This is how we belong to Him today, and this is why the gospel is proclaimed to the entire

world. Even though the world may have been steeped in utter darkness and desolation, God fulfills what is proclaimed in His law: He continues His mercy for a thousand generations. This is the foremost lesson to imprint upon our hearts.

Furthermore, while baptism is not exclusive to any particular people, city, or country, it designates us as God's own when He bestows upon us the privilege of His sacraments. It serves as a seal of our adoption and nourishes the hope instilled in us through the gospel. It's true that those who later turn away from our Lord Jesus Christ render their baptism void. However, this forfeiture comes at a great cost because the pledge and guarantee provided by God to signify our union with Jesus Christ are too precious to be misused. Those who bear the name of the Church but lead lives marked by disorder and dissipation will eventually face the consequences of defiling their baptism, an ordinance ordained by God for their salvation.

On our part, let us exercise caution and conduct ourselves as individuals set apart from the contamination of the world. As articulated by St. Peter, Jesus Christ has gathered us to Himself for the very purpose of glorifying Him, acknowledging His deliverance from the darkness of this world and the grip of the devil into His divine light. As seen in the Epistle to the Galatians, Jesus Christ's sacrificial death is intended to draw us away from all impurity and moral filthiness of the world. Similarly, in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul underscores that our calling is not to impurity but to purity. We are called to consecrate ourselves to God in holiness, thereby genuinely honoring Him with all that He has bestowed upon us.

The vital lesson we should derive from these words of Saint Paul is that we must not wander aimlessly like untamed and irrational beasts, nor should we resist the yoke of God. Instead, we should bear it with genuine obedience and abstain from our own sinful desires, earnestly endeavoring to

walk as holy individuals wholly devoted to God, His cherished heritage. This is how we should embody the teachings of this text in our lives today.

Furthermore, Saint Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ accomplished these divine acts in the flesh, signifying His connection to our human nature. This provides us with the assurance that, in His person, we are counted as God's beloved children. Just as we were all ensnared in Adam's downfall, we are now restored to the hope of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, often referred to as the second Adam. We can confidently trust that God will forever be our Father for the sake of Christ. Notably, Jesus Christ did not assume the nature of angels; instead, He became a descendant of Abraham. While Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ commences with Abraham, underscoring the fulfillment of promises spanning generations, Luke takes us even further back, revealing that Jesus Christ preexisted even before Adam. It is true that He was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit in His mother's womb. However, He remains the genuine descendant of Abraham, David, and Adam. In Him, we discover ourselves as true siblings, united with Him in His humanity, as we shall explore further in the fifth chapter. Thus, we can be certain that through Him, God has adopted us as His cherished children, and there is no need to search far, for we are intimately connected with His very essence.

In essence, Saint Paul's assertion that Jesus Christ accomplished all these divine acts in the flesh conveys that despite His heavenly glory and divine majesty, He willingly assumed our human nature in every aspect, with the exception of sin. He bore our sufferings, needs, and wretchedness, fully embracing our humanity to extend His boundless compassion to us. We can rest assured that when we present ourselves before God, we become united with Him through His only Son. Jesus Christ, being both true God and kin to us through His incarnation, willingly humbled Himself and emptied Himself completely. Likewise, He will exalt us to share in His heavenly

glory. This is why He is referred to as our brother, and this single truth dispels all uncertainties. When we question whether God will accept us, we need not look further than this affirmation that Jesus Christ is our brother. What more profound realization do we require to comprehend the vast separation from defilement and the immense rescue God has wrought, affirming His fatherly love upon which our salvation firmly rests, all through the person of Jesus Christ?

However, it is truly disheartening that some misguided individuals among the Papists, in their lack of guidance and wisdom, find themselves in a state of perpetual indecision. They seek to venerate a multitude of saints, including the Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Peter, and countless others, depending on their superstitious inclinations. Yet, their devotion is marred by restlessness, for they lack the firm foundation of God's Word. When confronted with perplexity, they resemble lost captives, utterly bewildered, unable to find solace no matter how much they toss and turn.

In stark contrast, we possess the unshakable assurance that our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of our peace, reconciling us with God the Father. This is an invaluable blessing for which we should willingly endure even ten thousand deaths if necessary. Saint Paul elucidates that the law consisted of ordinances and decrees, signifying that God did not nullify the law of righteous living when extending salvation to the Gentiles. Instead, He abolished only the ceremonies that were intended for a specific period and the lineage of Abraham.

You can discern, then, what was truly abolished. Therefore, let us set aside the ceremonial aspects of the law, such as circumcision, sacrificial rituals, the observance of festival days in the manner they were previously practiced, dietary restrictions, ceremonial lights, incense, and all that was prescribed in written form by Moses. All these practices have faded away with the advent of Christ. However, we must steadfastly uphold the law that

God has bequeathed to us, which remains unaltered. This divine law requires us to worship Him with purity, call upon His name, place our unwavering trust in Him, offer Him our homage for the abundant blessings He has bestowed upon us, and hallow His holy name. Furthermore, it is my counsel that we lead lives of moral purity, maintain goodwill and a clear conscience toward our fellow human beings, causing no harm to anyone. Lastly, let us distance ourselves from the impurities and corruptions of the world.

In this passage, it becomes clear that the divine law, which God has bestowed upon us as a guiding light for our lives, remains unaltered. It has not been abolished; only the aspects of it that comprised traditions and rituals, serving their purpose during the time of Moses and the prophets, and destined to find fulfillment in Jesus Christ, have been set aside. Hence, it is evident that since we were required to leave behind these shadows, which held their full significance during the era of Moses and the prophets, it is even more fitting that the Christian church refrains from burdening itself with human inventions.

As illuminated by St. Paul's teachings, we must find contentment in God's law, which instructs us in the ways of faithful living. This involves the pursuit of righteousness, justice, faithfulness, and mercy, with a particular emphasis on genuine and spiritual communion with God through prayer. Take note of this crucial point. Furthermore, he asserts that the shadows of the law in these times are not just unnecessary but act as a veil that shrouds us in darkness, obscuring our perception of our Lord Jesus Christ as we should see Him, reflected in the gospel. Therefore, we must conclude that the righteousness demanded of us differs from the misguided perceptions held by the Papists. All the practices they uphold as divine service are nothing more than hollow rituals, serving merely to obscure the profound work of our Lord Jesus Christ. These unfortunate souls are entrapped by such rituals, placing their entire reliance upon them.

When I speak of misguided souls, I refer to even those who consider themselves highly knowledgeable, for they too find themselves ensnared like lost animals. Therefore, let us learn to hold steadfastly to the simplicity of the gospel and look to our Lord Jesus Christ within its sacred pages. He has drawn near to us, allowing us to be uplifted by Him, and granting us the confidence to address God as our Father, seeking refuge in Him without hesitation when we approach Him sincerely. Let us now humble ourselves before the majesty of our benevolent God, confessing our shortcomings. We earnestly pray that as He grants us an ever-deepening awareness of our sins, it will lead us to sincere repentance, righteous living, and a holy way of life. Recognizing our frailty and the presence of many vices within us, may it please Him to sustain us until He calls us from this world and brings to completion the transformation of our image, conforming it to His own likeness, in accordance with the divine work that He has initiated within us. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Fourteenth Sermon, the Sixth on the Second Chapter

> "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." - Ephesians 2:16-19

We have seen this morning how St. Paul has spoken to those who were without hope of salvation, emphasizing that they are even more bound to

God for His calling them to be among His children. This calling was not common or expected. On the other hand, he humbled all pride so that the Jews would not think that the privilege of adoption was something they had earned. Even though God had chosen them above all others, they should not boast in their own merits.

Continuing on the same theme, St. Paul states that we were reconciled, both on one side and the other, by the death of Jesus Christ. Through His death, He has united us into one body, abolishing all enmity through His sacrifice on the cross. This serves to further express what we have already learned: that we must approach God through our Lord Jesus Christ, as without Him, both Jews and Gentiles remain far from God due to our sinfulness. God is our enemy until His wrath is appeased. This appeasement is achieved through Jesus bearing our sins on the cross, for it is His obedience that removes our iniquities, and His sacrifice that washes away our sins.

Indeed, without the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would remain bound by the debts of our sins, unable to plead our case before God or escape the deserved damnation. If we tried to justify ourselves, a thousand accusations would silence us. Therefore, when we pray or resist temptations, we must remember that we need encouragement to persevere, assurance of eternal life, and take refuge in the death and passion of the Son of God. It is through His blood and the work of His Holy Spirit that we are cleansed. Without this, God would rightly reject us, acting as a judge rather than a father.

It is not enough to know that Jesus Christ made amends for us and fully accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation through His death and passion. We must also receive this benefit as it is offered to us. The Jews, Turks, and others who rejected the Gospel will find themselves doubly guilty for denying the benefit they could have shared had they received the promises of the Gospel through faith. While some blessed the Lord Jesus

Christ, others scorned Him. The Papists sought to diminish His grace. These actions will increase their condemnation.

Even those who never heard the Gospel are excluded from this treasure. Paul adds that Jesus Christ preached peace to both those who were near and those who were far off. This shows that as the Gospel is preached, we are continually being made partakers of the salvation purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ. This happens when we lay hold of Him through true faith in our hearts, which then produces good fruit. Therefore, two things are required: that we understand the essence of our salvation is in Jesus Christ, and that this is declared to us through the Gospel. Paul emphasizes that Christ Himself has come to bring tidings of peace to all people, rather than sending apostles or numerous teachers.

Now it is certain that our Lord Jesus Christ has not personally carried out the act of preaching since His resurrection, except among His disciples, to prepare them to spread the doctrine committed to them everywhere. St. Paul, however, states that He preached to those who had been far from God. He did not do this in person, as it is evident that ordinary speakers continue the preaching of the Gospel, carried out by ministers appointed by God and Jesus Christ. Yet, despite this, he says that it was Christ Himself who preached. This is to emphasise the need for us to hold the Gospel in the highest reverence, regarding it as the truth authorised by God. Each of us should submit to it without doubt or dispute. If we have any doubts about it, we should not expect Jesus Christ to confirm it. Therefore, we must be certain of it. As we have seen in the first chapter, God's promises must be sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is referred to as the pledge of the life we hope for and the very seal God impresses upon us. This is to give us full certainty in our faith. We see Paul emphasising this in this text, stating that Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and having fulfilled the command of God, His Father, was our Redeemer and the one who delivered the same message to us. He did not preach it just once but continuously, so

much so that His mouth will remain open to testify to us that in Him, we will undoubtedly find everything we need for eternal life.

We should be deeply moved when we hear these words. It is true that the Son of God does not physically move from place to place or walk among us in a visible form. There is no need for this. However, the doctrine preached in His name should have the same authority as if He were speaking to us directly. He said, "He who hears you hears Me," and "He who receives you receives Me." When we believe the Gospel, God the Father is honoured. Conversely, it is a great dishonour and reproach to Him when the things that are so firmly attested are doubted. The Pope and his clergy often use this argument to maintain their tyranny. However, our Lord Jesus Christ intended to assure us of the message of the forgiveness of our sins, which would be continually heard, even if we were lacking faith. We would always be plagued by doubts if we were not completely convinced that everything in the Gospel is confirmed by Jesus Christ, who is the infallible truth itself. So, even though our Lord Jesus Christ abides in His heavenly glory, and we are physically separated from Him, and it may seem strange to say that He dwells within us, we must be entirely certain that when the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached, it is as if He Himself is speaking to us and is among us. In short, our faith must be directed towards Him as its true goal and anchor. Since God the Father has sent Him as a faithful witness, we must accept everything that is truly taught in His name without objection. Moreover, we are strengthened in true constancy of faith by this knowledge and armed against all the attacks and threats that Satan may pose.

It is a great shame for us when we are deaf to the preaching of the Gospel or disregard it as though it were a mere tale or of no value, leaving it hanging in the air without giving it due regard. And yet, despite all this, most people today either despise the gospel or are so misguided that they consider it insignificant. Some, having heard sermons or attended lectures, may say, "It

is possible that this may be true, but as for me, I am not well-versed in theology, so I will leave it be." Others may declare, "I'll stick to the faith of my ancestors; it's too risky to change." Some argue, "This is a new doctrine we've never heard before." And there are those who, dissatisfied with mere indifference, openly oppose it. They might even go as far as to wish to dethrone God and resort to shedding innocent blood to erase the memory of the gospel. However, we should understand that when the message of our salvation is presented to us, if we despise it, we are not just rejecting a benefit brought to us by a mortal creature, but also closing the gate against God's Son, who came to seek our salvation.

To motivate us to overcome our lethargy and confront the stubbornness that could hinder our full and obedient acceptance of the gospel, we must recognise that the preaching of the gospel is not a random occurrence. It is not something that people do of their own accord, as St. Paul tells the Romans. Instead, God Himself visits us, comes to us, and our Lord Jesus Christ carries out the duty of a shepherd, calling us to Him with His own voice. Even though we may have strayed in various directions, His intention is to gather us back into His flock. When this is firmly impressed upon our hearts, we will be better prepared not only to receive the doctrine of the gospel with humility but also to be filled with zeal and enthusiasm. We will consider God's word to be as sweet as honey, more precious than all gold and silver. This is because, even in His glory, the Son of God makes us hear His voice. This is not some distant or fading sound in the air or something about which we have no certain knowledge. Rather, it is as if He comes to us and preaches to us Himself. Therefore, as He has done this through the authority and commission given to His apostles, we should receive it for His sake, as I mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, St. Paul's intention here is to urge us to accept the gospel not only because of the worthiness of our Lord Jesus Christ but also because of what is contained in the gospel itself. It is a message of peace. Let us

consider what it means to be at war with the One who created and formed us. If we have an enemy in this world, even if they are weak and have little credibility, we still fear that they may plot against us or seek revenge by force. We would always be restless as long as we have enemies in this world. How much more foolish are we if we fall asleep when God shows Himself against us, armed to take vengeance because of our sins? If we truly understood what it means to be at odds with God, we would recognise the immense benefit of having peace and reconciliation with Him. This peace is offered to us through the gospel, and it should kindle within us a fervent zeal to embrace it wholeheartedly and to devote our entire minds to it.

Considering our own apathy and laziness, let us reflect on this statement even more. First, we must understand that the Son of God is willing to teach us and be our instructor if we are willing to be His students. Second, we have a doctrine that is more desirable than all the pleasures, honours, and riches of the world. It is the assurance of being at peace with God, knowing His favour towards us, and having access to Him as His children. We must also note that St. Paul intended to clarify what true peace is because many people believe they are at ease when, in fact, they have no peace with God. Some are puffed up with arrogant self-righteousness, such as the monks and friars under the Pope, who convince themselves that they have earned God's favour to the point where they believe there is no fault in them. Those who build their confidence on their own virtues and good deeds think God owes them, and they may easily be lulled to sleep by the foolish self-assurance Satan has bessotted them with.

And that is because they do not seek God but have fashioned an idol in their own minds. In all honesty, what they offer to God is trivial, like toys and baggage for infants. These hypocrites engage in various religious practices —sprinkling holy water, making the sign of the cross, fasting on certain days, embarking on pilgrimages, abstaining from meat on specific

occasions, performing prescribed postures, lighting candles for saints, attending numerous masses, and reciting numerous prayers. When you gather all these practices together, it becomes evident that they are merely indulging in the dregs and filthiness of superstition. Yet, to their perception, God is well-pleased with them, as if He were an idol or a little child. As mentioned earlier, none of these hypocrites, puffed up with presumption, can truly find peace with God. This is because they do not direct their attention towards God but rather gaze askew. Although they pretend to approach God, their offering of themselves is not done with sincerity and a wholehearted spirit. They deceive themselves with their empty flattery.

There are also those who scoff when told about their salvation, saying, "It is enough if we can manage a single heartfelt sigh." Yet, they do not cease to revel and be merry. Why should we spend our entire lives in such folly that brings us no good? Therefore, they revel and indulge themselves in various ways, each according to their own preferences, as they hasten towards their own destruction. They have a thousand ways to ruin themselves, all of which conspire against God as much as possible. There have always been, and still are, too many who lull their consciences to sleep. St. Paul, in this passage, as in Romans chapter five, outlines the true peace, which is that when we come before God, we must present ourselves before His majesty with the assurance that He will have compassion on us and not charge us with our sins but receive us as His own children.

Now, if we intend to experience this spiritual peace that surpasses all worldly goods, we must learn to wage war against ourselves. How is this done? First, we must recognise that we are damned and forsaken, with no hope of rescue unless we are saved through our Lord Jesus Christ. When we are stripped of all self-trust in our own merits and realise that we are empty and utterly naked, we must approach God like poor beggars. This is the necessary attitude to obtain true peace. Along the way, we should not think that being sluggish will gain us anything. Since we have no set time

appointed for us, we should summon ourselves before God morning and evening, examine our sins thoroughly, and be both sorry and ashamed of them. Once we have learned to wage war against our own vices and do so earnestly, without hypocrisy or pretence, we are on the path to the peace proclaimed and preached to us by our Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel.

That is why St. Paul specifically states that through Him, we have access to the Father. In other words, unbelievers, heathen worldlings, God-mockers, and those who do not think about their eternal salvation cannot taste the value of the peace offered by the gospel or comprehend how precious and desirable it is. This is because they place too many obstacles in their own path, preventing them from experiencing God's justice and fearing their own sins. In short, they deliberately intoxicate themselves, so their consciences become numb, and they convince themselves that they lack understanding, behaving like brute beasts. But when we realise that our well-being depends on our ability to turn to God for help and that we can confidently approach Him, we will forget all other concerns and yearn to be united with our Lord Jesus Christ. We will long for God to accept us and call upon Him with unwavering trust in our time of need. We will rest upon the love He has for us, knowing that whatever is offered to us in the gospel is as if God Himself has spoken to us.

Now, St. Paul, having spoken of the gospel being preached, emphasizes the importance of being united in one spirit. Although the gospel is proclaimed, many stubborn individuals and others are so engrossed in this world that they regard heavenly life no more highly than dogs and swine. Yet there are others who remain ensnared in their hypocrisy. Even though God calls and sweetly allures us to Him through His Son, the number of those who truly come to God is quite small. For this reason, St. Paul says that we must possess God's Spirit. It is certain that by nature, we are fickle. Not only does each of us have our own opinions, but we also change every minute of every hour. Because of this, we are far from being in agreement, and none

of us maintains a steady opinion from morning to night unless we are led by God. Therefore, when we hear the gospel preached, it is essential that we have God's Spirit to guide and govern us so that we may wholeheartedly embrace our Lord Jesus Christ and gain access to the Father.

It is important to remember that when our Lord Jesus Christ calls us through His ministers, as St. Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians, we should be eager to come to Him and run towards Him with all our might. Even when we have done our best, we will not be able to reach Him unless His Spirit guides us. Therefore, we must pray to God to touch us with His Holy Spirit and enable us to approach Him, as mentioned in Romans and Galatians. St. Paul distinguishes between God's children and the reprobate, stating that those with the Spirit of adoption can cry out, "Abba, Father." We, in and of ourselves, are too weak and feeble to call God our Father. Only when God has sealed the truth of His gospel within us through His Holy Spirit and enlightened us internally, allowing us to recognize that it is He who speaks, will we be able to freely and confidently proclaim Him as our Father. In essence, we must remember not to rely on our own understanding when the gospel is preached to us, but instead, considering our own ignorance and frailty, we must allow ourselves to be guided by God's Spirit. This Spirit is the primary key to opening the gate to Paradise.

Additionally, we must be cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, as mentioned in 1 Timothy. The apostle in Hebrews also states that Jesus Christ was offered up in the Spirit. This means that His sacrifice, which secured our righteousness, would be in vain if the Holy Spirit did not empower it. Continuing with the topic that has been discussed here, St. Paul reiterates that both those who were far off and those who were near heard the same message. This message is also relevant to us today, confirming and strengthening us in our faith. As I mentioned earlier, the Jews, who had some familiarity with God through the Law, which He gave them and by acknowledging them as His chosen people, were not fully united with Him

until their sins were forgiven through Jesus Christ. The Law could only bring them fear, anguish, and curses, as stated by St. Paul in Romans and 2 Corinthians. Therefore, the gospel needed to be added to the Law. Although the Old Testament faithful, including David, the holy prophets, and the kings, did not have the gospel as clearly as we do, God revealed to them the essence of salvation—that He, out of His goodness, received them in mercy for the sake of the Redeemer in whom they trusted. If the Law were separated from the gospel, it would not profit anyone but instead serve to condemn and terrify. True peace is found in the Gospel, and it was necessary for the Jews to partake of this doctrine. As for us, the Gentiles, as I mentioned earlier, we should all the more recognise the dual bond that binds us to God. He graciously made us partakers with His chosen people, bringing us, who were like those born out of time, into the company of those He selected and adopted. This fulfills the prophecies, as we are now able to glorify God together with His own people, both Gentiles and Jews, as foretold by the Holy Spirit. This unity and harmony is revealed when we are gathered together from our scattered state, as we have discussed previously. St. Paul's purpose in saying that the gospel was preached to all people, whether near or far, is to emphasize that we must have unwavering faith and not remain undecided and sceptical, as mentioned in Romans.

If we did not know that the preaching of the Gospel comes from God's authority and unchangeable decree, it would not be appropriate for individuals to present themselves unless God has sent them. In the past, God has taught the world not only through preaching or writing but also through the mere existence of the world itself. Therefore, it is evident that God's grace has been extended to all nations, making it known that He will be their Father. In light of this, the Jews needed to recognise the great necessity of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. They should not be deceived by relying on their birthright, circumcision, or any of the shadows of the law. Instead, they should turn to the only means I have previously discussed: that God receives them in mercy for the sake of the

eternal sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ. Likewise, we should magnify God's goodness, as He has allowed us to be a part of His household and church despite our prior exclusion and banishment. We must be careful not to let this blessing slip away due to ingratitude. We have no excuse if we do not eagerly and earnestly run to Him with our hearts, demonstrating that we understand all our well-being, joy, happiness, and glory are only achievable through His free goodness.

Furthermore, if we reject this peace, we must be wary that Jesus Christ may change His message. The gospel does not always bring damnation to those who do not conform to God's will. The Scriptures speak of both binding and loosing, as our Lord Jesus Christ intended to illustrate that the nature and duty of the gospel is to release us from the bondage and imprisonment in which we are held until He sets us free. He has declared this in the Gospel of John. However, there are bonds prepared for those who do not accept Him as their Redeemer or allow Him to free them. This is what He means when He says, "Whose sins you release, they are released unto them, and whose sins you withhold, they are withheld." Therefore, when we preach the gospel, our primary task is to proclaim the message of reconciliation, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians. We must continually declare that God, in the person of His Son, has been reconciled with us, accepting us to be cleansed from all our impurities and counted as righteous before Him. We are unbound, captives set free, and those once engulfed in the darkness of death brought back to the light of life.

On the other hand, we are also commissioned to withhold forgiveness from sins by warning those who despise God's Word of His dreadful wrath. We must inform them that when they disregard the doctrine they have heard, it will become ropes and fetters to bind them. Simple, in another place, expressly states that we have vengeance prepared for all who oppose our doctrine, even if they hold the highest positions in the world. If they raise

their defenses against God and disdain Him, they will not escape the threatened damnation, especially when the faithful have fulfilled their duty.

Indeed, when an enemy calls upon others, there is trembling for fear that they may find no mercy if reasonable conditions are refused. What, then, shall be done when God not only calls us to surrender ourselves to Him but also offers Himself to us, desiring us to possess Him and all His blessings in the person of Jesus Christ? What will become of us if we reject such grace when He shows such kindness towards us? Should we not expect terrible damnation to fall upon such villainous pride and scornful rejection? When people refuse to receive Him, even Him who procured not only their salvation but also created and sustains them, what punishment should they expect?

Therefore, let us learn to pay close attention to this doctrine which has been expounded, so that we do not further provoke God, nor make our bread vain and our food deadly poison. We must be truly enlivened by the grace that God offers us daily. For this reason, Paul concludes that those who were touched by God's Spirit obeyed the gospel with simplicity and substance. They are no longer strangers but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. This is so that God's name may be glorified as it deserves, and that we may not treat Him lightly as we are often wont to do.

Before the gospel was preached, the Gentiles were without hope of salvation, cut off from God's favour, without promises, without God in the world. They lived in the world, received sustenance, and enjoyed the light of the sun, yet they were without God. The same is true for all unbelievers. Therefore, when God makes us understand the incomparable good that He has given us by placing us among the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all the faithful, we must go even further and realise that He has made us fellow citizens with the angels of heaven. Many would labour greatly for earthly

citizenships, free dinners, or town privileges, even though these are temporary. What is this life but a fleeting shadow that quickly disappears? God invites us not only to sojourn in His church as strangers but also assures us that He has accepted us as His children. With true trust, we can boldly call Him our Father and harmonise our voices with all the saints. This is what we must remember.

Though we may not fully experience it yet, by faith, we can walk through this life as strangers to the world, knowing that God will not forsake His children and heirs. Even though we are wrapped in many vices and imperfections, all the saints in heaven acknowledge us as their brethren and embrace us for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that we may feel them deeply and desire to be more like the saints. On the other hand, let us focus on the infinite grace extended to us by God, who calls us to Him. May we not be spiteful, foolish, or blind to His call, but obediently yield to the doctrine He sets before us. Let this doctrine be our life, our well-being, and our salvation, pulling us away from the wicked desires of the world and the deceitful affections that lead us astray from Him. In this way, we can grow in His fear and love, being conformed to His image, until we attain His heavenly glory. He calls us to this, and may He grant this grace not only to us but also to all people, and so forth.

The Fifteenth Sermon, the Seventh on the Second Chapter

> "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are

> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." - Ephesians 2:19-22

We have already seen how the Holy Ghost, through the words of St. Paul, presents us with a mirror through which we can behold the infinite goodness of God. He pulls us back from the dungeons of death to make us His children and heirs of heavenly life. That's why it is said that when we are received into the church, it is as if we are made citizens, not of some earthly city, but of heaven itself. We become companions with all the patriarchs, faithful servants of God, and even with all the angels of paradise. Because the church is not only referred to as God's city but also His house, we are considered part of His household. This serves to highlight the grace and favor that God has extended to us. To be gathered into God's house, to have Him near us, and to have constant access to Him is of greater significance to us than if we were merely citizens of a city.

Sometimes, people fail to adequately value the spiritual blessings we receive through our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul aims to show that we should highly esteem the adoption through which God has gathered us together by means of our Lord Jesus Christ. This adoption allows us to have familiar communion with God through hope, which is far more valuable than the whole world. He uses another analogy, that of a temple. While the Holy Scripture sometimes refers to every faithful person as the temple of God because He dwells within us through His Holy Spirit, when speaking universally of the entire church, we are likened to lively stones. The building is closely bound together, with each of us contributing to its perfection. These concepts are not contradictory. Every faithful individual is a temple of God, living a life of holiness by the Holy Spirit's work. However, we must also be united in faith, just as stones come together to

form a building. This unity allows us to be joined to our Lord Jesus Christ through belief in the gospel, and it enables God to dwell in us and be worshipped purely. We are fully assured that whenever we call upon Him, He will be ready to hear us, and when we gather together in His name, He will always be among us.

This is what St. Paul conveys when he speaks of those who were once heathens, cut off from all hope of salvation, being built up by the gospel to become a temple for God. It is now clear that God considers us part of His household. This understanding arises from pure gospel doctrine, showing us that God desires to have His temples in us and is pleased with our worship. Until we have the gospel doctrine to grant us access to this invaluable benefit, we cannot be called citizens of heaven, children of God, or part of His household. Moreover, it is important to realize that we do not need to embark on arduous journeys to seek it. God offers us the privilege of entering His house, and the door is open for us, at least if we receive the promises He makes us.

We need not go about heaven or earth, for God tells us and assures us that He has adopted us so that we should cleave wholly unto Him. Therefore, we can have familiarity with Him, and He will be joined unto us. But with all this, we should also know where to seek His word. Faithless individuals are often so spiteful that they seek all sorts of loopholes to distance themselves from God. Indeed, we see that many act as if they are willing to serve God, yet they cast doubt on whether the law came from Him and whether the Gospel is His truth. Look at how people try to shake off God's yoke with all their might, shifting aside, creating excuses, and evading responsibility. They loudly proclaim their intention to humble themselves before Him, but in reality, they neither know God's word nor can they discern it. Why? It's due to their malice and ingratitude.

St. Paul, therefore, to eliminate all such trivial excuses, tells us that since God has spoken through Moses and His prophets, and finally through His apostles, we should be certain that everything contained in the law and the gospel is the truth itself. We should not fear being led astray or deceived. We may hear many objections, as every person imagines whatever suits their fancy, but God has sufficiently authenticated His words when He revealed His law. Furthermore, He gave ample authority to His prophets, and His gospel was confirmed and sealed with more than enough miracles. Therefore, we must not say, "We do not know if it is God's Word or not," for it is in our mouths, close at hand, and God deemed it fit to nourish us with it, sending mortal men to speak it directly to us.

Therefore, let us learn, above all, not to be overly skeptical when it comes to receiving God's word. We should be content knowing that He has provided sufficient evidence of His will through His prophets and apostles. In doing so, we can yield Him the obedience that pleases Him by accepting the use of these human instruments guided by His Holy Spirit. Our faith should not lack humility, and God has demonstrated His wisdom in choosing mortal men as the means through which He communicates Himself to us. Let it be a fundamental principle for us that agreement is not lacking between the law, the prophets, and the Gospel. We have indeed seen that the use of ceremonies has come to an end, but the substance of them persists. When God caused the gospel to be openly preached to the world, it was not due to His inconsistency or an intention to teach people in a new and unfamiliar manner. The law and the prophets continually bear witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we are reminded to benefit ourselves from all that is contained in Moses and the rest of the prophets. Nowadays, there are some eccentric individuals who believe that we only need the New Testament for all doctrine, considering the rest to be superfluous. It is true that the fullness of wisdom is thoroughly contained in the gospel, but this does not mean that

we should not be edified by the Law and the Prophets. We can see that even the apostles themselves confirmed their doctrine with their testimonies.

And here, when St. Paul says that we must be built upon the foundation, he sufficiently shows that whatever things are taught in the Law and Prophets, both in the past and today, are profitable for us. We must practice and apply them likewise. Peter also states that these teachings serve not only for their time but also for ours. They give us a taste of our Lord Jesus Christ and the good things imparted to us through Him. We have come to the fullness of time, as St. Paul mentions elsewhere. This verifies what St. Peter said, that the doctrine of the prophets pointed to us, and we have a more complete and abundant understanding of it than those who heard it spoken. We have a greater light in Jesus Christ, making things that were once dark now open and known to us.

Therefore, let us study the Law and the Prophets, knowing well that they lead us to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the focal point of our faith, as stated when it is said that Jesus Christ is the end of the law and also the pattern that Moses saw on the mountain. The law and the prophets bear witness to Him. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself rebuked the Jews for their boastful pride in the law, making their offense even more grievous because they rejected Him to whom the law pointed and through whom the law sought to restrain us.

To profit well from the Holy Scripture, we must always refer to our Lord Jesus Christ and fix our gaze upon Him. Sadly, many people exert great effort in reading the Holy Scriptures, but they merely skim the surface. After many years, they are as ignorant as if they had never read a single line. This happens because they wander aimlessly without a specific goal. Similarly, in worldly learning, you often see diligent scholars who, despite their effort, gain little because they lack order, measure, and purpose. They gather a collection of disjointed sentences but fail to gain any true

understanding. The same is true for those who read the Holy Scriptures laboriously but do not realize that the central point should always be our Lord Jesus Christ.

For just as it is said that all our perfection is in the gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ is also declared to be the wisdom of God His Father. As the law is referred to as the way to walk in, so our Lord Jesus Christ proclaims, "I am the way." Likewise, as the Word of the Lord is described as a lamp to guide our steps, our Lord Jesus Christ declares, "I am the light of the world." Thus, everything found in the Holy Scriptures points to our Lord Jesus Christ, and He is the sole anchor for all our senses and minds. It is not without reason that He is called the living image of God His Father, for although God is pure light, we would never reach that light until our Lord Jesus Christ descended to lift us up and grant us access to a place that was once closed to us.

In conclusion, what we should understand from St. Paul's words is that the prophets and apostles were chosen and ordained to bring us to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is His very image. Therefore, we should focus all our senses and minds on Him for our edification through the Holy Scripture. Conversely, those who indulge in vain curiosities, seeking to be wiser than God allows, will remain in confusion. Instead of progressing, they will regress, as evident in many examples throughout history. We must learn from these examples, for the corruption, errors, ungodliness, and superstitions in the world are caused by people being ensnared by their own foolish desires and carnal inclinations, never content with the simplicity of Jesus Christ as presented in the gospel.

So, all the more, we should keep in mind what is told to us here: we must always set our Lord Jesus Christ before our eyes and in our sight if we intend to have an infallible foundation in the Holy Scripture and progress in it. We also see that we need not search here and there for God's word. We

have the prophets and the apostles as our boundaries within which we must stay. Our faith should not stray to the left or right but remain obedient to God's word as contained in the Holy Scripture.

If this text had been well understood, the world would not be in such disorder as we see it today. Men have invented numerous paths to salvation because they have not known the power of our Lord Jesus Christ as shown here. There seems to be no end to superstitious beliefs and practices, and in the midst of it all, they have practically forgotten Jesus Christ. This is a corruption and distortion of God's truth because they did not know its purpose: to keep us dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may cleave to Him and find rest for our souls.

On the other hand, the papacy grounds itself on councils, decrees, and inventions of men's own minds, claiming that all perfection can be found there, while regarding the things taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles as mere basics. They consider the Holy Scripture as a catechism for children, and to attain perfection, they argue for the necessity of their own councils. They have been so bewitched and blinded that they sought to undermine God's word, leading people astray without proper direction.

Therefore, we should remember the importance of this text, which tells us to reject anything added to the Holy Scripture, believing that God charged His prophets and apostles with everything profitable and expedient for our salvation. We should not add any morsels or fragments of our own or borrow things contrary to the pure doctrine. We must reject all such practices and avoid any patching or compromising because God can demolish whatever men attempt to add to the law and the Gospel, from which we must not turn away. As it is said, "This is the way, walk in it." When Jesus Christ declares Himself as the WAY and the light of the world, it is to encourage us to remain steadfast in Him without swaying to the right or left.

Another important aspect of this text is that we should not consent to be taught by those whom God did not make privy to His will and whom He disavows when they attempt to add even a single syllable to what should be held without dispute. While the church relies on the daily preaching of the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, and those ordained to teach are called builders of God's house, we should understand that they are, in essence, builders of the church, and, in this regard, they are one with the prophets and apostles.

However, this does not mean that they can take whatever they wish from the law or preach their own inventions. They must draw their inspiration from the pure source offered to us in the Holy Scripture. We should always be held to the simplicity of the law and the gospel, not being entangled by any wandering opinions that divert us from the obedience of faith, contenting ourselves with the means that God has provided.

When St. Paul states that Jesus Christ is the fountain and the head cornerstone, he does not imply that it is permissible to mix anything with Jesus Christ, as if He only formed a part of the building, with the rest supplied by others. It is meant to emphasize that we must build upon Him. St. Paul encouraged us to do this in the third chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians when he declared that no one can lay any other foundation than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

St. Paul wants us to understand that no one can establish any other foundation for salvation. There is no safety apart from Jesus Christ, whose dominion extends everywhere. All of us, from the greatest to the least, must submit to Him and not forsake the countless benefits He offers us and that we possess through Him. To grasp how Jesus Christ is our sole Foundation, we must know why He was sent. In the four texts mentioned, Scripture states that He was given to us as our wisdom, righteousness, redemption,

and holiness. In other words, Jesus Christ is the source of all our well-being and contains everything necessary for our salvation.

To understand why Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church and why we should be established upon Him, we must recognize that God has fully revealed Himself to us through His only Son. He has placed everything required for our salvation or worthy of our desire into His hands. This enables us to draw from His fullness, as mentioned in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. Thus, Jesus Christ is like the cornerstone that supports the entire building, just as the cornerstone bears the greatest weight of the structure.

Nevertheless, it's worth noting that St. Paul did not intend to place Christ alone in a separate category and associate other stones with Him that would have equal authority and mastery. His intention was to illustrate that there is no fundamental difference between the law and the gospel in terms of their essence. Even though Jesus Christ is the culmination of everything and we should all be united and connected through Him, forming the temple of God and being part of the spiritual building in which God intends us to dwell.

However, if our faith does not rest entirely on our Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot build upon this foundation. The papacy, with its invention of patrons and advocates to gain favour, and its establishment of numerous means for merit, has essentially made itself separate from Jesus Christ. Those who turn away from Him, even by the width of a finger, are bound to fall into peril, for a foundation is meant to support the entire structure. If the building extends too far beyond its foundation, it will inevitably collapse. Similarly, if we do not build our faith upon Jesus Christ, aligning and fastening it to Him, sticking to Him without adding anything else, He will disown us and cast us away.

The papacy and its like-minded institutions, by introducing new means according to their own desires, commit an egregious wrong and affront to

our Lord Jesus Christ. They deserve to be dismantled and removed from God's Church. Therefore, if we wish to enjoy the benefits outlined here, we must ensure that our faith is so shaped by the law and the gospel that we reject anything invented by humans. We must be confident that this is the surest way to avoid destruction and that we can only be firmly grounded in Jesus Christ, standing firmly upon Him forever, if we accept all the things spoken and attested to about Him in the law and the gospel, without allowing men to add anything to it.

In essence, what St. Paul conveys in these words is that we do not truly belong to our Lord Jesus Christ or God's Church unless we adhere to the pure doctrine of the law and the gospel, forsaking all the impurity and abominations that people have concocted through their own fantasies and concoctions, no matter how appealing they may seem. If we desire to be united with Jesus Christ, we must remain in Him to the exclusion of all else. Furthermore, we learn that to be recognised as God's children, we must cultivate genuine harmony. As mentioned earlier, the pure teaching of God's word should lead Christians to receive it with one heart and one mind, and to maintain fraternal unity, speaking with one voice and making a singular, pure confession.

So, just as we have seen that we must build our foundation solely upon God's pure word, it is also evident here that each of us must not be attached to our own opinions but, instead, conform to the unity of faith. St. Paul speaks of this in Philippians 3, emphasising the need for unity, stating, "If you intend to be perfect, aim at one mark, and be truly united in one." We are all susceptible to ambition, and every individual seeks to elevate their own status. Indeed, the root of all heresies is this pride, deeply ingrained in the human heart, which leads people to desire always to know more than is permissible. As a result, they behave improperly, with each person wanting to act as a teacher. However, we are reminded here that instead of such conduct, we must be closely connected, speaking as if with one voice and

confessing that we have but one God and one Father, demonstrating that we acknowledge no other masters except Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, it is indeed true that such concord alone would not be sufficient. I have already explained the starting point, which is the pure instruction we receive from the prophets and apostles. The papists boast excessively about their unity, and they may indeed appear to have unity, for the devil possesses them in such a way that they are completely entangled. There is certainly enough discord and quarrelling among them, like barking dogs within their own synagogues. Yet they stick together in promoting all manner of ungodliness. Their devilish madness and wilful stubbornness become evident when they argue for the preservation of their own falsehoods against God's truth.

However, they show us how we should truly achieve unity, not through dreams and fancies, nor in the things concocted by men, but in the doctrine of the prophets and apostles. Since the papists have banished the Holy Scripture, and even when they claim to accept it, they distort and corrupt it with their own inventions, they are far from achieving the unity they proclaim. Without the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, they possess no mark of the true church whatsoever.

Even if people were willing to accept everything contained in the Holy Scripture without objection, if they then mix in their own fantasies, they corrupt and confuse all of Christianity. The papists not only entangle God's truth with their own inventions but also completely overthrow it. Consequently, God's service is corrupted by them, and poor souls are tossed about. Our Lord Jesus Christ is so misrepresented that He becomes a mere figment, and His offices are attributed to various individuals as if they were plunder. Therefore, when we witness how the papists turn God's word upside down in this absurd manner, we can conclude that despite their claims to be the true church, God disowns and rejects them. If one does not

flee from this den of thieves, it is impossible to be united with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The key lesson here is that to be united with God through His only Son, and to be counted among the angels of heaven, and the brethren of the patriarchs, holy kings, and prophets, one must separate from the hellish synagogues present in the Papacy. It is clear that Antichrist reigns there, and Jesus Christ is wholly deprived of His rightful sovereignty. Their audacious assertion that the See of Rome is the foundation of the church is a grave misuse of Christ's words in Matthew 16:18, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church." In reality, Jesus Christ meant that Peter would be built upon Himself, not that Peter should pass on his office to someone else. This demonstrates a complete lack of reverence for the Holy Scripture among the papists and their desire to establish a tyranny to suppress the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a shocking disregard for the Holy Scripture, manifest blasphemy, and moral decay among them. Even children would be disgusted considering the great abominations that have prevailed. Despite the fact that the Holy Scripture used to be their nourishment, it was buried, defaced, and the world was left desolate for a time, all in the darkness of the devil's reign. Therefore, we should reject all these blasphemies, knowing that we cannot be firmly grounded except in our Lord Jesus Christ. Once we are faithfully instructed in Him, we need not seek assistance elsewhere, as He has provided everything necessary for our salvation. It is not fitting to dishonor Him by seeking other sources; instead, we should wholly commit ourselves to Him.

Therefore, the meaning of what Paul is conveying here is that we should all be constructed and developed into a spiritual building, reaching toward God in the spirit. First, when he mentions that we must be "built," it is meant to encourage us to grow continuously in faith. He also uses the word "grow,"

signifying two important aspects. Firstly, we should not consider ourselves so perfect that we become like those arrogant individuals who are so puffed up with pride that they believe they are already wise enough and too important to engage with God's Word or be taught by it. Such pride is unwarranted because we can only be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ by understanding that it is necessary for us to be firmly grounded in Him and be His followers throughout our lives.

God's Word possesses such vast depth, breadth, and length that even if a person were to dedicate their entire life to studying it without eating, drinking, or sleeping, they would still not exhaust its entirety. Therefore, we should engage with it throughout our lifetime, recognizing that God intended it to guide us on our journey. We must progress gradually, remaining humble and modest, as God's Word serves as our path of growth and learning.

Once again, St. Paul emphasises that in order to be firmly established in our Lord Jesus Christ and to progress in the blessings He bestows upon us, we must have His Word as our foundation. We should continue building upon it, growing steadily, and recognising that our faith will never be perfect in this world, as we can clearly observe from our own experiences. Therefore, what Paul conveys here regarding our growth and progress in this spiritual building is a crucial point to understand.

However, it's important to remember that it's not merely about putting on an impressive display. The main focus should be on pleasing the Lord and completely dedicating ourselves to Him, allowing Him to reside within us as in His temple. The Papists, on one hand, may make a grand show, boasting of their large numbers and worldly pomp, but they are blinded by their devilish pride and arrogance. They despise us because we are a smaller group in comparison. They claim Christendom extends throughout Europe, Greece, and Africa. Nevertheless, their pride and ostentation are not what

truly matters in the eyes of God. All their outward displays are superficial, and while they may impress ignorant souls, they are an abomination before God.

Therefore, we must not be swayed by the Papists' numbers or outward appearances, for their church is lacking a true head, as Jesus Christ does not hold preeminence within it. Simple reminds us that we should not be envious or despise them, but instead, we should recognise the falsehood of their claims. Their so-called church is a monstrous entity with no true head.

To understand how we should grow, it is stated that we must grow towards the Lord and in the Spirit, as St. Paul says. Simple directs us away from worldly superstitions, emphasising that they are worthless before God. We must grow in the Spirit, as the shadows of the law have ceased with the arrival of the fulfilment and substance in our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of clinging to the old figures, we should give them up and focus on building ourselves in a spiritual manner in Christ.

This teaching of Christ should be precious and dear to us, inspiring us with love for it. It should lead us to willingly renounce the world and dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to our Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, we should also be cautious not to fall under judgment, as Christ warned, for those who reject this precious stone. By building upon Jesus Christ, we have a secure foundation for our salvation, and we can be confident that He is more than capable of upholding us, ensuring that we will not be abandoned.

If we stumble justly against the stone, it is certain that we will not be able to withstand it, but rather, we will sink beneath it. In the end, it will crush and break us into pieces. Therefore, we must take care that our Lord Jesus Christ does not become a stumbling stone for us, as is the way of the world today, which maligns Him to the extent that everyone proudly raises their rebellious bristles to rush against Him. Instead, let us consider ourselves

and be meekly disposed to offer our service to Him, so that He may sustain us until the end.

Even though we witness Jesus Christ being rejected by the world, and it may seem strange that people would fight against Him, treating Him as a target, we must never cease to regard Him as a precious stone. Peter advises us in the second chapter of his first epistle to see Jesus Christ in this way.

So, when we hear these promises that St. Paul speaks of, we should be drawn to our Lord Jesus Christ, giving ourselves completely to Him and forsaking all that the world may deem excellent. We should also be cautious not to be ungrateful and reject Him as a precious stone, for God tells us that all our well-being rests in Him being our temple and being called upon by us. Therefore, let us benefit from this great and invaluable gift, continually growing and increasing in it until we reach our heavenly inheritance, where we will fully experience all the good things that we currently only perceive through faith.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins and praying for His forgiveness, so that they may not be held against us. May He also correct us in a way that we remain devoted to Him and come to Him freely at all times, even though we are unworthy. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Sixteenth Sermon, the First on the Third Chapter

> If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." - Ephesians 3: 1-6

Although all of us confess that the Gospel's doctrine always brings trouble and persecution because the world despises it, and even though we should not be discouraged or back away, it is still difficult to endure the very thing we acknowledge. There is hardly anyone among us who is not troubled and shaken when God's enemies unleash their cruel attacks on the faithful. Nevertheless, we must remember that such adversity should strengthen our faith. When we witness frail humans fearlessly risking their lives to bear witness to God's truth, it should remind us of the evident power of God's Spirit. Unfortunately, our ingratitude often blinds us to this reality. We need encouragement, as Paul provides in this passage.

When we see the devil inciting his followers to commit tyranny against God's children, we should not let our faith waver. This is especially true when the faithful endure suffering patiently for the sake of maintaining God's truth, knowing it and holding fast to it without wavering. Their steadfastness should not be in vain. In other places, Paul states that he suffered for the benefit of the Church. His suffering did not purchase forgiveness of sins or any grace through his death. It was because the Gospel is God's mighty power for the salvation of all who believe. The more we advance in it, the closer it brings us to God and everlasting life.

Paul suffered as an example to those he taught personally. Through his suffering, they knew that his teaching was earnest and sincere. His spirit,

not his blood or life, sealed and confirmed the doctrine he delivered to them. In this passage, he describes himself as an ambassador to the Gentiles, even though he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. These two descriptions might seem contradictory, but Paul did not hesitate to glory in his imprisonment and chains. He was kept in custody as if he were a wrongdoer, but he maintained his testimony before God and men, suffering wrongfully for faithfully serving God.

Therefore, we should not find it strange that he referred to himself both as a prisoner and as an ambassador or messenger of the living God, representing Jesus Christ. He added the name of Jesus Christ to make it clear that his imprisonment did not diminish his authority. Imprisonment might have tarnished his reputation in the eyes of some because it is typically associated with wrongdoers. However, Paul made it known that there was a distinction between evildoers and witnesses of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why he described himself not only as a prisoner but also as someone whom Jesus Christ held as if in hostage or pledge.

So, when we hear of St. Paul and the numerous trials he endured, we should not consider it excessive. Instead, we should view it as a more certain confirmation of the doctrine he proclaimed. He did not merely carry out his commission to preach but also performed miracles, endured countless troubles and obstacles, and ultimately suffered imprisonment and death. When we witness his unwavering commitment to overcome all the assaults from Satan and the wicked world, we gain greater confidence in the doctrine he delivered. Therefore, when we hear of St. Paul and the many challenges he faced, we should not think it excessive; rather, it serves as a strong confirmation of the doctrine, showing that it is not mere human doctrine but the doctrine of the living God, supported by His Holy Spirit. This applies not only to St. Paul but also to the other apostles, as God ordained that they too would endure suffering.

St. Peter is mentioned that when he grew old, he would experience a different kind of life than what he was accustomed to. He would be bound in straight bonds and led where he wouldn't want to go, at least in terms of his physical frailty, although his spiritual disposition was still inclined to obey God. This illustrates how God's servants suffered, not just a few of them, but many, like a great and thick cloud of witnesses, as mentioned in Hebrews 12. Therefore, we should consider the significance of such testimonies. God intended to support our weaknesses by providing these testimonies alongside His Word, which should have sufficient authority by itself, so there would be no doubts or questioning.

Hence, it's important to remember that the blood of the apostles and martyrs has been shed to confirm the gospel's doctrine, like a seal of approval. It's as if there were a hundred seals, or even a million, verifying all the gospel's contents. While our faith should be grounded in the authority of the Holy Spirit, the testimonies of the martyrs further affirm the gospel's truth. Even if God had not given us martyrs to confirm the truth, the authority of the Holy Spirit in our hearts should be enough. He is like an earnest penny, guaranteeing the inheritance we hope for, based on the promise bought at a great price—the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in our present times, martyrs continue to shed their blood. God could restrain the wicked and change their hearts, but He allows Satan to drive them to rage against the faithful and grants them permission to trouble believers. This is for us to understand the power of His Holy Spirit when He governs and guides us. The weakness of humans is such that they are easily alarmed, even by a falling leaf from a tree. Death itself is frightening. Therefore, when martyrs persevere with such constancy, even in the face of tyrannical torments, it's a sign that God's hand is at work.

When we hear of martyrs enduring cruel treatment for God's Word, it should not be in vain. While preaching alone should sufficiently instruct us,

the sealing of God's Word through the suffering of His servants adds great strength. It leaves no room for doubt or dispute, as they have been granted the grace to suffer for the truth and become faithful witnesses. Their testimonies provide a full seal of God's Word, reassuring us and solidifying our faith.

This is what we need to understand. Even though the enemies of the Gospel may boast and cause a great uproar, we must never cease to glorify God. In fact, all the battles that Satan plans against the faithful are turned by God into victories and triumphs. He enables them to overcome all obstacles that seem to lead to their downfall and destruction. Therefore, we should not be discouraged when we see the wicked and the godless mocking our simplicity, or when our fellow believers suffer persecution. We must remember that the prisons where they are held and the fires of reproach are of far greater worth and significance than the seats of those judges who serve as Satan's agents and accomplices, even more valuable than the thrones of kings and princes, no matter how grand they may appear.

Now, I have also explained to you the grace of God that has been entrusted to me, as I have briefly written, revealing the mystery to you as it was revealed to me. You may thus better understand the knowledge I possess about the mystery of Jesus Christ. I wish to establish that I was ordained as an apostle, not by my own presumption or foolishness, nor by the favour of men, nor by mere chance, but by the free goodness of God. This point is crucial because it not only concerns my own calling as an apostle, but it has implications for the certainty of faith among the believers. When we hear the gospel preached, we must be fully persuaded that the preachers are indeed sent by God and are instruments of His Holy Spirit. Otherwise, even if someone were well-versed and sound in doctrine, they would not be able to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins. The atonement with God is a matter too high and great for us to rely on human judgment alone. The angels of heaven, speaking in unison, could not assure us unless they were

authorised by God. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that Paul's emphasis on not presumptuously taking on the role of an apostle but being chosen and sent by God is not without reason in this passage.

Furthermore, Paul asserts that the Ephesians should have been aware of the mystery or secret that was revealed to him. This awareness was important so that they could be certain that he was ordained and appointed by God to impart His grace and preach eternal salvation to their souls. This message was crucial, especially for those who had been cut off and estranged from the kingdom of heaven. Here, we need to grasp that merely hearing and understanding the preached message of the gospel is not enough. We must ascend higher in our understanding, recognising that God intends us to be assured of His goodwill through the testimony of men. The preaching of the gospel and our gathering together for instruction is not a humanly devised policy or order, nor is it a human invention. It is an ordinance of God, an enduring law. Therefore, when we attend God's school and not a human one, we must do so with sobriety and thoughtfulness, recognising that this is God's design, not man's, and that our gathering to hear the preaching is not to be taken lightly.

True, it is that we ought to examine the doctrine, and we must not accept everything indifferently that is preached. We should not be like brute beasts, as the Papists derogatively term it, lacking all understanding. However, we must hold God's name in honour. When the doctrine of the Holy Scripture is presented to us, we should detach ourselves from the world and set aside our own reason. Instead, we should submit with true obedience and humility to that which we know comes from God. If we come together with such a prepared mindset, God will not leave us in doubt. He will guide us by His Holy Spirit, assuring us that our faith comes from Him and is grounded upon His power. It will also come with the endorsement of those who serve as His messengers.

Now, when St. Paul mentions the calling of the Gentiles to the knowledge of the gospel, so that they may be joined with those who were already near, it is termed a mystery or secret. We should note that God intended to humble the world and keep it under control, so that we would learn to honour His providence, even though the reasons behind His actions may be unknown to us and the means may be hidden. God could have proclaimed the gospel immediately after the creation of the world or soon after Adam's fall. However, He delayed it for nearly 2,000 years. After that, when 400 more years had passed, the law was given. Even though it applied to Abraham's descendants, the Gentiles, who were far more numerous, were still excluded. This might seem peculiar, and David might have wished to have God restrained to a different will. But this is how things were. They could have called the whole world, without exception, but they did not. The law was given, but a long time passed before Jesus Christ came into the world. In summary, nearly 4,000 years went by, with countless people wandering blindly and living in spiritual darkness. God allowed them to continue in their ways. Suddenly, the trumpet sounded, the walls were broken down, and God gathered together those who had strayed from Him. He accepted them in His favour through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God's sovereign dominion extends over the entire world. These are things that could not have been conceived, as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, it is not without reason that St. Paul calls this course of events a mystery, unknown to all previous ages but revealed in his time.

However, we must first address a question that may arise. While the patriarchs were not completely ignorant of what would come to pass, and the prophets bore witness to it, with Moses foretelling and declaring that strangers would come to worship God, this knowledge was not entirely revealed at the time, as St. Paul claims. Nevertheless, let us understand that all these prophecies remained obscure because the means to their fulfilment were hidden. Certainly, the faithful hoped that God would one day gather the world that had been scattered in such a terrible manner, as we have seen.

But regarding the specifics of when circumcision and the ceremonial aspects of the law would be abolished, when God would be worshipped in a different and better manner, when Jesus Christ would shine as the Sun of Righteousness, when people would find contentment in Him, and when only baptism and the Lord's Supper would serve as visible signs confirming our spiritual blessings – all of this was unknown. Even the apostles themselves continued in this profound ignorance. When Jesus Christ sent them out into the land of Judea, He instructed them not to speak to the Gentiles. This was because the opportune time had not yet come. As He approached His death, He spoke of "other sheep" not of the same fold, which must be gathered. This indicated that many chosen by God the Father were not part of the Jewish nation. After His resurrection, He commanded them to "preach the Gospel to all creatures." Thus, their first directive was to preach the hope of salvation to those who had been previously estranged from it. When Peter was informed that God would send him to a Gentile, he was so astonished that the hairs on his head stood on end. He thought it impossible until God sent him a vision from Heaven to make him go to a man he considered unclean. Therefore, it is not without reason that St. Paul refers to this as such a high and profound secret, saying that it was unknown to the Patriarchs and Prophets. They had some inkling of it according to their own limited understanding and under the veil of shadows and figures.

There was not any certain knowledge until God had revealed the matter that He had kept in His own counsel. And so, St. Paul thought it good to repeat the word "mystery" or "secret" to prevent any of us from provoking one another to stubborn opinions, as we often tend to do. People might say, "This surpasses human understanding," while others might dismiss it entirely. This leads people away from obeying God and places a stumbling block in their path, blocking their way to God's truth, which would be clear if they would only listen. However, due to our preconceived notions that it is too profound and beyond us, we think that God is not speaking to us, causing us to despise His Word and consider it irrelevant to us. Moreover,

the audacity and recklessness of people are such that they condemn everything they dislike.

Here, it is important to acknowledge that even what is unknown to us is still filled with majesty before God. We should not attempt to measure God's secrets with our imagination. Such presumption is unwarranted. God's judgments and actions are so deep that they can swallow us up a hundred thousand times. Therefore, we must magnify God's wisdom and, even when His intentions seem obscure to us, approach them with humility. Indeed, even the seemingly mundane matters should be received in a way that recognises God gives us only a taste of them, and we do not possess complete knowledge. This applies to the entire doctrine of the gospel, as there is no aspect of it that does not surpass our understanding. In some matters, God reserves the reason for Himself, which is intended to make us acknowledge the righteousness of His actions, even if we cannot comprehend them with our natural understanding.

Now, if there were ever a time when this doctrine needed to be emphasised, it is today. We witness how many unbelievers isolate themselves from God by shutting themselves out. Why do these unfortunate souls, including those deceived by the Pope, remain entrenched in their ignorance? They claim that God's word is too profound. Yet, does that mean we have just cause to reject it? Instead, we should consider that God's wisdom is apprehended only by humility. Since God condescends to teach the humble and the little ones, all pride should be cast down in us. Thus, we should recognise that God's wisdom is beyond our comprehension. When we see that many people today find the Gospel unpalatable because it is like a foreign language to them, we should receive with modesty whatever God tells us, even if it seems too high for us. We must pray to Him, the source of all light, to grant us understanding according to His will. Just as God's word enters our ears, He works inwardly in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us submit ourselves to Him and be willing to accept whatever

is truly beneficial for us in His name. This is what we should bear in mind when we encounter something in the Gospel that seems difficult and unpalatable. Instead of rejecting it, as many people do, simply because it does not align with their preferences, let us receive it with humility and an open heart.

As I mentioned earlier, let us revere the things that are currently hidden from us, waiting until God brings them closer and increases our faith. When reading the Holy Scripture, we must have the humility to admit, "I do not understand this particular text, but it is not for me to abandon it, for that would be pointless. Instead, I will pray to God, asking Him to bear with my ignorance and open my understanding when the time is right. He, who holds the key to all knowledge and understanding, will reveal as much as He deems fitting and beneficial for me." Similarly, when listening to a sermon, if we do not understand everything that is being taught, we should pause and, in the meantime, continue to honour and reverence God, especially in matters that surpass our comprehension.

Yet, we see how those who aim to silence all of God's true servants from speaking on topics that seem beyond human grasp are, in essence, embodiments of evil. It is sheer madness that, because we do not understand why God has chosen some and forsaken others, some individuals have taken it upon themselves to declare that certain aspects of God's Word should be disregarded. This Word, not only revealed by the Holy Spirit but also sealed with the blood of God's Son, should not be questioned or disregarded. Those who attempt to do so are, in a way, entirely possessed by the devil, and we should pray that God intervenes and reveals their insignificance. They are no better than lice, fleas, ticks, and other vile and despised creatures of the world when they act with tyrannical and barbaric rage against God's Word. For our part, we must acknowledge that the honour we owe to our God entails patiently waiting for Him to increase the knowledge He has granted us.

Moreover, when one person possesses a greater measure of faith and understanding than others, he should humbly accommodate those with lesser knowledge and work to further their understanding. Conversely, those with less understanding should remain within their limits and not overstep their bounds. They should remember the words of St. Paul: "If you think otherwise, wait until God reveals it to you, and in the meantime, live in harmony and avoid division." This is what we should learn from this.

Additionally, we must recognise that through this approach, God intended to magnify His mercy. When He finally proclaimed the doctrine of the Gospel, He revealed the infinite richness of His goodness towards us. While we may not fully understand the reasons God had in mind when He delayed the proclamation of the Gospel for so long, it is evident that He intended to open our eyes and awaken our minds, so that each of us would better comprehend our indebtedness to Him. Were we better than our forefathers? Or when the Gospel was proclaimed throughout the world, were the Gentiles more receptive than before? No, it appeared that wickedness had reached its peak, and contempt for God was widespread. It was precisely in this state of profound wickedness that Jesus Christ came, bringing the message of salvation to all. Even when St. Paul addressed the Corinthians, listing murderers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, and more as those who would not inherit the kingdom of heaven, he added, "Such were some of you," to emphasize that the Gospel was not proclaimed in Corinth due to any inherent virtue or merit of its inhabitants. Instead, it was solely an act of God's free grace.

Therefore, we must understand that this secret, as spoken of by St. Paul, applies in the following manner: it was God's will that all people, without exception, should be sinful. However, He provided a remedy through His grace. In our own time, we cannot claim to be better than our forefathers, as I mentioned previously. In terms of the general state of things, there was greater faithfulness among people fifty years ago. Their conduct was more

modest, and there was less excess and extravagance. In short, people did not behave as recklessly as they do today. True, they still exhibited the flaws inherent to human nature, which are of little worth. Yet, it seemed that Satan was then more restrained in his influence.

But within these thirty years, things have deteriorated to such an extent that it is horrifying to witness. God's grace is now preached, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and God calls those who were previously estranged countless times. What can be said of this except that God intended to magnify His grace and mercy through such a profound transformation? Therefore, let us recognise that the way to benefit from God's wondrous secrets is to revere what we do not know, receive what God has revealed to us, and accept without dispute that which we know comes from Him. Above all, we should ensure that our faith is strengthened and consider whether we ought not to be more inflamed with love for God.

God has deigned to send forth the gospel in our time, seemingly emerging from a deep dungeon. After we had wandered aimlessly like wretched beasts and been steeped in superstition and idolatry to the point where we hardly understood religion, God has revealed it to us once again, not in person but through His doctrine preached to us today, which had been completely buried. Let us take heed of this and, even though the world may not comprehend why God worked in such a mysterious manner, let us not cease to profit from it. Let us not be discouraged by our past state, but rather turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, for through the gospel, we are united to Him, and God acknowledges us as His children.

Despite having been among the wealthiest in the world and still being worthy of exclusion from His house and separation from His church, we should not lose hope that He will call us to the promised inheritance. It should suffice for us that God will gather us into His body, despite our previous scattering, and that He will fulfil His purpose for us if we allow

ourselves to be guided by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is ordained to be our king. Let us willingly submit ourselves to Him in true obedience of faith, without doubt that He will reveal to us the things that we long for.

Thus, we can understand why St. Paul said in his second letter to the Corinthians that even though God has His secret purposes that we cannot fully grasp, He has revealed certain incomprehensible things to us through His Gospel, disclosing His heart and will to us. Through this revelation, we can come closer to fully enjoying the things we hope for.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins and praying that He enables us to gain more and more from His Holy Word. May His Word not inflate us with presumption and arrogance but instead draw us towards true humility, forsaking our own human wisdom and desires to seek only what He teaches us through His Word. Let us obediently and simply submit ourselves to the Gospel, so that Jesus Christ may be glorified and heard among us without hindrance. May we be so humbled that we never seek exaltation except by His hand. May He grant this grace not only to us but to all people.

The Seventeenth Sermon, the Second on the Third Chapter

> "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." - Ephesians 3:7-9

I have previously discussed how Paul had two primary intentions in mind. Firstly, he aimed to illustrate that he was unquestionably chosen to proclaim the gospel worldwide, especially among the Gentiles. In the Church, no one should strive to seize authority; rather, it should be surrendered to God according to His eternal order. Adhering to this divine order is vital to prevent individuals from exalting themselves without a rightful calling. Therefore, it is of utmost significance to note that Paul sought to excuse any hasty actions on his part by emphasizing that he did not thrust himself into the role of an apostle but had the firm assurance that God had appointed him. Additionally, he endeavored to reassure the Gentiles that they should accept the message of their salvation as originating from God rather than from a mere mortal. We should always bear in mind that the forgiveness of sins is far too precious to rest solely on the authority of human beings. Instead, we must be thoroughly convinced that it is God who speaks, allowing us to firmly conclude that whatever is bound on Earth is also bound in heaven.

Considering Paul's past as an enemy of the gospel, one who persecuted Christians and blasphemed God, some might question receiving him as an

apostle and granting him due respect. Consequently, Paul addressed these concerns by asserting that the focus should not be on his individual characteristics or merits, but rather on God's elevation of him through His grace and an extraordinary power beyond the reach of ordinary men. While it is essential for individuals to humble themselves as much as possible, recognizing the freely bestowed goodness of God, we must also acknowledge that God's grace transcends all obstacles. Paul stressed that it is God's grace that bestows upon us all things, and we should refrain from boasting, acknowledging that we owe everything to Him.

Now, as Paul mentions in 2 Timothy that he serves as an example for others, we should apply the same principle to our own lives. When we beseech God for anything, we must comprehend that it flows from the wellspring of His boundless mercy and unmerited favor, setting aside any notion of entitlement. Furthermore, we should anticipate that God's benevolence can exceed our comprehension, for His infinite power surpasses our finite understanding. Consequently, for every blessing bestowed upon us by God, it is fitting that we respond with gratitude, exalting His goodness, and offering Him the praise that He rightfully deserves.

Drawing from Paul's example, we learn that we must humbly implore God to work within us solely by His grace, that His name may be glorified, recognizing that there is no inherent merit within us. We should harbor no doubt that God's power transcends our own capacities, enabling us to yield fully to His divine influence and not obstruct His work through doubt or unbelief. Once we have experienced His boundless mercy and limitless power, we should fully embrace these gifts and allow them to work within us to the best of our abilities.

We must refrain from seeking to overshadow His glory or boasting as though we have achieved excellence on our own merit, for everything we

receive is a gift from Him. Instead, we ought to render unto Him the honor and praise that are rightfully His alone. To elaborate on this point, Paul adds that this grace was extended to him, even to him, the least among all the saints, emphasizing the nature of this gracious gift.

It is important to recognize that if we intend to give God the reverence He deserves, we must approach Him in complete humility. As long as individuals attempt to claim any credit for themselves, it is as though they are setting themselves in opposition to God and assuming the role of their own judges. God can only receive His full due when we are entirely emptied of all self-importance. Thus, one cannot fully comprehend how St. Paul ascribed all things to God's grace and free gift without considering his previous state of unworthiness and reflecting on the kind of person he had been before.

This is a matter of great significance, as we often find it challenging to withhold something for ourselves. Even though we acknowledge God's deserving of eternal praise, it is often difficult for us to release all the accolades rightfully His. Our inclination toward vanity makes it a struggle to humble ourselves as deeply as God requires. God cannot receive the honor He rightfully deserves unless we are completely emptied of self and acknowledge that we possess nothing on our own. We must become like wretched beings, utterly devoid and dependent on God's boundless mercy.

In this manner, Paul offered genuine praise for all things to God's free gift without pretense, recognizing himself as the least among others. It is essential to note that Paul's humility was not a facade, which is often the case with many who claim to be the least while secretly harboring pride. Paul's humility was sincere, evident in his acknowledgment of his own unworthiness and his refusal to preserve his self-importance.

Furthermore, when Paul stated that he was unworthy even to be called an apostle due to his past actions, he demonstrated the authenticity of his

confession of being the least. He would have gladly endured the world's reproach rather than diminish God's goodness. His intent was for his teachings to endure for eternity, underscoring that God had appointed him as a witness to assure us of God's boundless generosity toward us.

Hence, we must present to God the offering of praise that He rightfully deserves by sincerely and steadfastly recognizing that all goodness within us emanates from His grace, generously bestowed upon us. We cannot lay claim to anything on our own, and upon careful examination, we will discover nothing but reasons to bow our heads in humility and contrition. Let us follow the example set by Paul and not allow spite or vanity to hinder us from humbling ourselves among our fellow human beings.

In summary, St. Paul emphasized his indebtedness to God's grace and humbled himself in comparison to the other apostles. We should endeavor to overcome our natural inclination to seek glory and recognition above others and instead embrace the humility exemplified by St. Paul. Jesus Christ's teachings remind us that those who aspire to be exalted by God must first lower themselves.

Let us willingly embrace humility and become like little children. When we do so, it is certain that God will extend His guiding hand to us. Even if He does not grant us grandeur or worldly dignity, He will provide us with what is necessary, as long as we humbly seek nothing more than to be led by His hand.

One might wonder how Paul could refer to himself as a "little one" when he had achieved more than all the others, as he mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Paul was not unaware of the gracious gifts he had received from God, nor did he feign ignorance of his knowledge or the gifts of the Holy Spirit. True humility does not lie in claiming, "I possess no skills, no merit worthy of praise." Instead, when we acknowledge God's blessings and offer Him glory, we should do so with hearts filled with gratitude.

Paul's description of himself as the least among saints related to his previous life before becoming a member of the Church. During his lifetime, Jesus had chosen and instructed the twelve apostles to spread the gospel throughout the world. In contrast, Paul had not been merely a private individual; he had been an outcast, severed from the community of the faithful. Driven by a misguided zeal, he had committed acts opposing God and His Church, acting in ignorance but without excuse.

Thus, Paul's confession of being the least among saints was a genuine reflection, particularly when viewed in the context of his former life. God, who not only uplifts the humble but also transforms them, had miraculously changed Paul. We should marvel at this transformation every time we contemplate it, magnifying the goodness of God and applying it to our own lives. While we should not dwell on our former state with the intention of returning to it, we should reflect upon it to recognize the greater glory of God's grace within us.

Now, let us direct our attention to the gracious gift that Paul speaks of—the proclamation of the incomparable riches of our Lord Jesus Christ through the gospel. It was significant that Paul had been transformed from a wolf to a sheep, but God deemed it insufficient. He elevated Paul to the role of a shepherd, signifying that he had not only changed from a cruel wolf to a humble lamb but had also been exalted to a higher and more profound calling as a herald of human salvation. Paul was entrusted with conveying the immeasurable riches of our Lord Jesus Christ, which transcend human understanding, not because we should refrain from seeking to comprehend them, but because they surpass our capacity to fully grasp.

We can now discern the profound significance of what St. Paul imparts here, building upon his initial point. It is essential to understand that he did not arrogantly thrust himself into the role of an apostle through foolish boldness. Rather, he was divinely called to this position, elevated by the

hand of God Himself. Furthermore, let us be assured that this doctrine was not presented haphazardly; it was guided by the Holy Spirit for a remarkable purpose that we will delve into shortly. Hence, we should not think that Paul's words were exclusively intended for those he taught in his time, with no relevance to us. Instead, we must recognize that it was God's design for this labor and teaching to extend to all, including us, who would encounter it. This is a crucial point to bear in mind as we explore the context of this text.

Whenever the gospel is proclaimed to us, it opens the door to immeasurable riches. Even if we apply our entire intellectual capacity to comprehend the blessings offered, we may gain some insight, but we will never fully fathom the extent of God's generosity toward us. Nonetheless, we should be profoundly moved by His goodness and hold it dear. While it may be true that we fear we will never completely grasp it, this should not deter us from pursuing it with fervor. Even if we detach ourselves from the allurements of the world and aspire to the heavenly kingdom, we will have merely scratched the surface of the inexhaustible riches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This truth should deepen our appreciation for the gospel like never before. Conversely, it would be a grievous indictment of our ingratitude if we were to regard the truths presented in the Gospel as mundane, despite our Lord Jesus Christ revealing the boundless treasures of His goodness.

Furthermore, we must comprehend that once we have embraced our Lord Jesus Christ, we can confidently cast aside all other things as superfluous and redundant. If we, like some, merely mention Jesus Christ as our Redeemer but relegate Him to a lower status among other saints, we effectively diminish His significance. In such a case, we obscure Jesus Christ among lesser matters. Therefore, we must make a concerted effort to contemplate deeply on this text, which proclaims His riches as unfathomable. We should strive to fix our entire minds on this truth and

endeavor to grasp the breadth of the blessings bestowed upon us by Jesus Christ. It is certain that the bounds of our faith will never reach its utmost limits. Given this, we should firmly believe, as I mentioned earlier, that our Lord Jesus Christ should be sufficient for us once and for all. In Him, we will discover everything we could ever desire. As soon as we turn away from Him, we may suppose that we have found something worthwhile, but it will prove to be hollow and futile.

Hence, it is imperative that we recognize our Lord Jesus Christ for who He truly is, acknowledging the fullness of His blessings. Undoubtedly, through Him, we attain everything we could ever request from the hand of God. To seek elsewhere is to tread a misguided path, for He has unequivocally declared Himself as the way, the exclusive route through which we gain access to God the Father. By framing His role as that of a guide leading us to God the Father, He provides us with the unwavering assurance that in Him, we will find complete satisfaction for all our needs and secure our salvation through wholehearted trust.

Conversely, when we deviate from this path, whether to the left or the right, we unmistakably reject the manifold benefits offered to us through His divine person. We would indeed merit spiritual destitution should we turn anywhere else for our needs instead of placing unwavering reliance on our Lord Jesus Christ. God has unveiled His boundless benevolence through Him, meticulously considering every facet of our happiness, joy, and ultimate glory.

Let us also draw profound lessons from the example of St. Paul. As God elevates any of us, we should correspondingly humble ourselves, recognizing our profound indebtedness to Him. This principle applies not only to those who might consider themselves as trailing behind others but also to those who bask in positions of prominence. All who find themselves identified as God's children, heirs to His kingdom, and integral members of

our Lord Jesus Christ's body, sharing in the glory He has entered into, possess an indelible privilege. Even the Christian who might be perceived as an underprivileged outcast in the eyes of the world is adopted by God into His heavenly family, becoming an indispensable part of our Lord Jesus Christ's body. Thus, even the humblest among us has substantial cause to extol God's boundless grace.

However, those who have been exalted to positions of honor have an even more compelling obligation to offer due reverence to God for His bountiful bestowments that have raised them above others. For example, someone endowed with knowledge and grace to serve the church bears twofold responsibility if they do not acknowledge their heightened debt to God. Similarly, those who, by their strength or wisdom, possess the capability to achieve more than their less fortunate counterparts must approach God with profound humility. They should guard against the swell of pride or arrogance, tirelessly striving to maintain a posture of humility. As each individual receives divine grace through God's abundant goodness, their paramount focus should eternally be to honor God and acknowledge the augmented obligation to Him for His lavish benevolence. This, too, is a pivotal lesson we can glean from the exemplary life of St. Paul.

However, as we delve into the discussion of the incomprehensible riches of Jesus Christ, it's essential to clarify that these riches were unveiled when God's mysteries were proclaimed to those who once dwelled in spiritual blindness. Previously, I expounded on the significance of the term "mystery" as employed by St. Paul in this context. Essentially, all the works of God, when scrutinized with care, have the potential to fill us with wonder. And why is this? It's because they originate from His righteousness, justice, goodness, and wisdom, all of which are concepts of unfathomable depth. When we contemplate God's wisdom, power, or justice, we must recognize that we cannot encapsulate them with definitions as we might do with tangible phenomena in the physical world. God's

works, when examined from their divine source, inevitably inspire awe within us.

Consider the myriad phenomena we observe in the natural order—are they not also God's handiwork? Indeed, they are. However, while we may possess a partial understanding of these natural occurrences, our comprehension remains incomplete. For instance, if we were asked how the earth yields its bountiful crops, we might offer some knowledge owing to the commonplace nature of the phenomenon. But should we delve into the underlying causes, our human intellect falters. Can the earth, in isolation, yield such abundant produce? Can it, on its own, revive the seemingly lifeless trees, adorning them with leaves and blossoms once more after the harsh grasp of winter has left them barren? How is it that fruits, grains, and wine provide sustenance to humanity when they themselves lack the essence of life? When we probe the depths of the rationale behind God's wondrous works, we find ourselves peering into an unfathomable abyss. We must humbly concede that God possesses a wisdom beyond our finite reach. Nevertheless, God's works become even more marvelous to us when we encounter causes that surpass the boundaries of our natural intellect and understanding.

For instance, consider the divine decree that willed the sudden proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world. From our limited human perspective, this might appear as a perplexing course of action. Some might question why God chose to extend the call of salvation to the Gentiles, seemingly after having excluded them previously. Reflect upon the world, which endured for an extensive period until the flood brought about its renewal. During this time, God permitted pagan nations to persist in their wayward paths, even as wickedness reached its zenith, inundating the world like a fearsome deluge. Then, unexpectedly, God manifested Himself in an extraordinary manner. Is this not a matter that elicits profound astonishment? To the wicked, to those who spurn God, and to those

ensnared by worldly concerns, these events might appear bewildering, so far removed from their grasp that they may even contemplate legal action against God. However, believers are taught to discern that God's wisdom transcends the boundaries of human comprehension.

Furthermore, in this passage from the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians, St. Paul directs our attention back to the very creation of the world. He suggests that if we find it astounding that God would illuminate those who were spiritually blind and lead those who wandered aimlessly to salvation through the teachings of the Gospel, we should reflect on the act of creation itself. What existed in the formless void, described as "the heavens and the earth," before God's creative intervention? There was no beauty, no order, and no light. Darkness shrouded everything, as described in the account by Moses. Yet, God spoke the command, and light emerged from the darkness.

In a similar vein, when the world was shrouded in spiritual darkness and the Gentiles were bereft of knowledge about salvation, God, through the advent of His only Son, fulfilled the promises He had made through His prophets regarding the gathering of all people unto Himself. This serves as a testament to the fact that His promises were not made in vain. It illustrates how God brought forth light from darkness once again.

Regardless of the circumstances, we must always return to this fundamental truth: the inclusion of the Gentiles in the hope of salvation through the teachings of the Gospel was a divine mystery, and it is referred to as such because God had concealed it. St. Paul emphasized that this mystery had remained hidden throughout all times and ages, veiled in God's own knowledge. When we hear about our salvation, this text should remind us to approach it with reverence and awe, recognizing that it is a work that transcends our finite understanding. To truly grasp it in a way that glorifies God, we must acknowledge its unfathomable nature and dedicate our lives to its study, as the text suggests. Regardless of our approach, the ultimate

conclusion remains the same: God did not tailor the work of our salvation to fit within the confines of our limited understanding and human weakness. Instead, He intended to humble us so that we would, in turn, humble ourselves and revere His eternal plan, which remains hidden from us, and commit all our strength and abilities to praise His holy name. This is the pivotal point to keep in mind.

Let us also apply what is conveyed here to each of us individually. St. Paul discussed the arrival of the Gospel to us, who are from the Gentile race, and affirmed that it was a divine secret. Therefore, if we each reflect upon our own paths and ask how we became partakers of the Gospel, how we were brought into the fellowship of the church, we will all confess, from the most prominent to the humblest among us, that the Lord has worked in an extraordinary manner. It is not within the ordinary course of nature for God to transform and recreate us, making us His children and bearers of His image. It is indeed a genuine miracle that should fill us with astonishment and wonder.

In conclusion, when we encounter God's mysteries, it is prudent for us to exercise restraint and acknowledge our limitations when it comes to matters that God has chosen to keep hidden from us. This perspective should be guided by the word "communicate." Even the most knowledgeable among us should recognize the boundaries of our curiosity and resist the temptation to unravel every one of God's secrets. Those who succumb to the arrogance of knowing it all will eventually find themselves bewildered. The higher they ascend in their pride, the more precipitous their fall, and God will ultimately humble them. Therefore, let us learn to embrace what God has chosen to reveal to us. It is fitting for Him to unveil as much of His power and purpose as He deems appropriate. When He opens to us what was once concealed, let us approach it with humility, seeking His Holy Spirit's guidance to comprehend what He intends to teach us through His Word. We should eagerly receive the lessons He imparts through His Holy Scriptures

and the preaching of His name. Yet, we should also patiently await His timing to unveil what He deems suitable. Let us not trust in our own understanding and yearn to know more than we should. Instead, let us be content with what He has unveiled, recognizing that His concealment of certain matters is for our benefit, providing us knowledge in measured portions. In this way, we come to understand St. Paul's message: that the gospel was revealed to him, and the Gentiles received their portion through his ministry, so that all people could grasp the truths that were once hidden until God illuminated them.

Similarly, let us grasp the significance of our current circumstances. When God raises up knowledgeable individuals gifted in teaching, it serves as a clear indication of His prevenient mercy towards us, signifying His intention to call us into the inheritance of salvation. Therefore, let us cultivate a teachable spirit. Let us willingly receive instruction through the preached word, without seeking to venture beyond its boundaries. Instead, let us rely on what God has graciously disclosed to us. The path to contentment lies in embracing the boundless goodness He has lavished upon us, as mentioned earlier, for His mercies extend beyond human capacity. Our ingratitude would be inexcusable if our desires and inclinations led us to seek knowledge beyond the divine revelations.

Now, let us collectively humble ourselves before the majesty of our benevolent God, acknowledging our shortcomings and seeking His forgiveness. Let us beseech His grace to shape our lives in accordance with His holy will and commandments, so that our actions may bear witness to the fact that since He has adopted us as His children, we also honor Him as our Father. Therefore, let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Eighteenth Sermon, the Third on the Third Chapter

> "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." - Ephesians 3:9-12

As I mentioned this morning, just as all of God's works deserve reverence from us because they bear marks of His infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom, there are certain works that stand out more prominently due to the way God operates in such a manner that people are compelled to be amazed and astounded by them. Among these is the doctrine of the Bible. Everything contained in the law and the gospel is a wisdom that we must honour, for without it, we would never understand anything. Thus, it is said that God teaches the humble and meek. Nevertheless, even the most unlearned and ignorant can grasp some parts of what is revealed in Scripture.

However, there are deeper and more profound matters, which St. Paul now refers to by calling the preaching of the Gospel a mystery or secret in comparison to all the rest. Although God had always intended to call the entire world to salvation, He kept the execution of His purpose hidden until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When it finally happened, it appeared so novel that people were taken aback. Hence, we must consider this when St. Paul claims that he was an apostle to reveal the secret previously hidden in God. By these words, we understand that, although the preaching of the gospel seemed new and unexpected to human eyes, God had not acted

suddenly or in haste. Instead, He revealed His preordained and predetermined purpose.

Therefore, when we observe God's works, we must refrain from thinking that He acted rashly or that things were hidden from us in the beginning and then suddenly revealed. Rather, we should respect God's secret purpose and understand that when we see events unfold, they occurred as God had planned. This serves to humble us, first, by making us aware of our limited capacity, prompting us to reverence things beyond our comprehension. Secondly, it keeps us from prematurely passing judgment on God's ordinances, as predicting future events without divine calling is foolish and leads to disgrace. Those who presumptuously prophesy without God's call are deserving of mockery.

Thus, we must temper our judgments concerning matters that our Lord has not yet revealed in practice. When we witness events come to pass, we must recognize that they were not randomly determined but were ordained by God beforehand. Similarly, we must evaluate the changes that occurred when our Lord Jesus was sent into the world. If one were to inquire why God delayed it for such a long time, it would be an excessive display of curiosity. If asked why the heathens were suddenly included on an equal footing with the Jews, despite having been previously excluded from God's church, we must also acknowledge God's secret ordinance.

Furthermore, we should understand that God had so decreed this long before. Therefore, if we possess this sobriety, we can profit far more from God's works than those who, with a heathenish mindset, bark at them without being able to harm them. Nowadays, we see many individuals filled with diabolical rage, murmuring against all of God's doings because they cannot comprehend the reasons behind His purposes. They spew forth their blasphemous rhetoric, as if to say that God should not keep anything hidden but must consult with humans and make Himself subordinate to them. Since

many people arrogantly thrust God beneath their feet due to this wicked pride, it is all the more necessary for us to instill this doctrine within us. We must respect God's secret ordinances, accept the things that are revealed to us without dispute, deeming them good, right, and executed with such wisdom that no fault can be found. Furthermore, it is worth noting that St. Paul not only declares that God had His secret purpose hidden within Himself but also asserts that it was His will for the diverse kinds of wisdom to be known. We should pay careful attention to this point where he states that God's wisdom is diverse in many respects. This does not imply that God is changeable or fickle in His nature or that there is any complexity or confusion in His plans. There is no such thing in God, nor can there ever be. However, St. Paul's statement is relative to our understanding. If we were to attempt to comprehend God's wisdom, we would be bewildered and blinded by its infinity.

And besides that, it contains things that are capable of overwhelming all our senses, so much so that we would never truly comprehend anything. To put it plainly, this needs further elaboration for better understanding. Imagine you look into a mirror, thinking to see one hundred and eight, or rather an infinite number of images before you. When you see them, you become utterly bewildered. Similarly, St. Paul speaks of God's wisdom in this way, as a warning of the weakness and simplicity of our understanding, so that we do not become too inquisitive in probing matters that exceed our capacity. When it comes to God's secret purposes hidden within Himself, if we push ourselves to reach beyond what is lawful for us and proceed with foolish presumption, seeking to be privy to God's counsel and to inquire into what He has specifically determined, our intellects are bound to fail us. We will find so many things beyond our grasp that we will inevitably acknowledge it is not for us to fathom such a vast and profound abyss.

So, if someone were to ask, "How then can we confess God to be righteous, wise, and almighty, since we are daunted by His works?" For it is said that

it is the wisdom of men to investigate God's works and to set their minds fully on them. He has also designed the world to be like a stage upon which we can witness His goodness, righteousness, power, and wisdom. Hence, there seems to be a contradiction between being diligent in considering God's works and yet having our wits dazzled by them. The answer is quite simple: if we wish to soberly understand what God has graciously revealed to us for our benefit, we will have sufficient understanding. We will realize that God did not reveal these things in His works to confuse us but rather to draw us closer to Him, to know how to call upon Him, to discern between good and evil, and to walk according to His will. If we do not yield to our foolish and excessive desires but instead listen as good students to what our Master teaches us, we will understand all things in God's works that are conducive to our well-being. This is why it is said in the book of Job that we have achieved much if we can merely grasp the limits of God's works. Thus, by contemplating the outermost bounds of God's works, we may taste God's wisdom, righteousness, power, and goodness. However, if we insist on plumbing their depths, we will find a profound chasm that can swallow up all our understanding.

First, it is important to understand that both God's word and His works are wonderful secrets to us, exceeding our comprehension. Even if we consider His everyday miracles, there are more marvels hidden within them than what we observe and experience. Similarly, in the Holy Scripture, there are profound points that are not easily understood. Therefore, we must first humble ourselves and pray for God to enlighten us with His Holy Spirit so that we may benefit from His works and words. Furthermore, we must accept the teachings God has provided us and be content with the measure He has assigned us, without coveting to know more than we can learn in His school. Now, consider what we should bear in mind.

When we approach God with such humility, the Lord will surely provide us with a point of rest. Although His attributes are incomprehensible and the

doctrines of the law and the Gospel contain secrets beyond worldly understanding, we will be taught by them for our well-being and salvation. Thus, there will be no confusion, no mingling, and no entanglement, for God will guide us through His Holy Ghost, granting us wisdom and discernment to understand whatever is conducive to our welfare.

Now, let us address the question of why God wants us to be astounded by His works yet not be overwhelmed by them when we allow ourselves to be taught by Him. It should be noted that it is a sinful arrogance when some individuals, out of pride, reject anything they cannot understand the reason for. If someone were to explain to them that God orders all things according to His secret plan, and that what we call fortune, chance, hazard, accident, and the like have all been determined before the creation of the world, to the extent that even the hairs of our heads are numbered, and not a single bird falls to the ground without God's providence, they would object, "How can that be? If God tells us in His law that He wants this or that done, are we to say that He has more than one will? That would make God inconsistent and changeable."

And so it might seem that God is subject to all kinds of capriciousness like a mortal creature. However, as I mentioned before, such individuals misunderstand their own capabilities. They imagine that if God does not bind Himself in all aspects to the things He has revealed to us through His word, He is contradictory and possesses a dual will. This leads them to constantly speculate in such a manner. In short, God's will is always one and singular, consistent within itself. However, to our perception, it may appear diverse and exhibit many forms, as if we were confronted with numerous dazzling or entirely obscure shapes.

When Paul speaks of God's wisdom as diverse in many ways, it is as though a painting had a multitude of colours within it, making it difficult to distinguish one from another. Yet, Paul does not suggest that God's wisdom

is divided within itself or contains any conflict or strife. He merely points out that although God always has a single intention and remains unwavering and unchanging, although there is no alteration or variability in Him, and though there is but one light with no darkness at all, when people dare to approach Him, their minds are often bewildered and dazzled. Should they continue boldly forward, they will eventually be confounded, and God will completely overwhelm them. Therefore, we must interpret the statements made in Holy Scripture concerning God's providence in this manner. This is the lesson we ought to draw from it.

When God instructs us not to trouble our neighbors, commit robbery, extortion, covetousness, deceit, or any form of wickedness, He is commanding us to live chastely and abstain from all violence. Now, when wars erupt in the world, blood is shed, countless atrocities and robberies are committed, should we claim that such things occur without God's foreknowledge? Do we believe that He has no concern or involvement, as though He were asleep in heaven or simply indulging in His pleasures? This is a blasphemous notion. Furthermore, consider what would become of us if this were the case. Satan, as a roaring lion, seeks to devour us like prey, and we would constantly find ourselves in his grasp, trapped between his teeth. Therefore, if God did not order all things in this world and restrain Satan and all the wicked, we would be lost and perish countless times every hour. Moreover, if we did not understand that such events, among others, are God's judgments through which He chastises us for our sins, we would never be inclined to repentance.

Therefore, let us learn, to the best of our limited ability, that God has only one will, and that it is certain and internally consistent, devoid of fickleness or inconstancy. However, we must approach His secret decrees with reverence, acknowledging that they are as high and profound as to be beyond our reach. If we cannot dispel all the doubts that the devil may sow in our minds, causing us to question how God can be free from sin and not

the author of evil, given that He uses both Satan and the wicked to serve His purposes, allowing them to advance against one another, then let us arm ourselves with sobriety. Recognize that God's wisdom is diverse in many ways, and although His will may also appear diverse in various aspects, it remains consistently unified. This is the fundamental point to remember in this context.

Now, on this basis, Paul proceeds to the subject he has been addressing in general. That is, God created all things through our Lord Jesus Christ with the purpose that His wisdom should be known to the powers and principalities in the heavenly places through the Church. By stating that God created all things through Jesus Christ, he directs our attention back to the beginning of the world, where he speaks of the renewal that occurred when God restored what had decayed and fallen into disarray due to Adam's sin.

Therefore, there was nothing but confusion both in heaven and on earth until everything was set right again by Jesus Christ. Now, the restoration accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ can indeed be likened to this second creation, as if, at His coming, God had restored the world to its former state, which had been somewhat fractured. Nevertheless, both of these, the first creation and the second, were brought about by Jesus Christ. The transition from one to the other is not improper, as illustrated by the analogy Simple provides here. It is imperative that we understand that all things were created in Jesus Christ when He was appointed to be the head of angels and humans alike. Moreover, even if we had not required a redeemer, Jesus Christ would still have been established as our head. All that remained was for Him to take on our nature and offer Himself in sacrifice for the redemption of sinners. However, He did not fail to fulfill His role of reconciling humans to God and uniting them with the angels of heaven. In this manner, then, were all things created in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, this notion is specifically intended to lead us to the restoration that took place when Jesus Christ was given to us as our Redeemer. For even though the world did not cease to have some form, with the sun and moon shining brightly, and the earth yielding its fruits, we must recognize that, as St. Paul states in Romans 8, all creation groans and is in labor like a woman giving birth because it is subject to corruption due to Adam's transgression, for which he was cursed. Where God had previously appeared as our enemy, He became our Father. The things created for our benefit that had been diverted by Adam's sin were all restored at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this means, He gathered together all that had been scattered before, and the world was changed in a remarkable way, just as the prophets had foretold. While the prophets did not intend to confine this renewal to a specific time frame, when they preached about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the grace that would be bestowed upon the Church at that time, they used expressions like, "Behold, I make the heavens new and the earth new," as God spoke through the prophet Isaiah. This was not a solitary occurrence; it was, so to speak, a common expression among the prophets.

Therefore, St. Paul, following the customary language of Scripture, affirms that all things were made new in Jesus Christ, albeit, in regard to the Church. However, it may seem that the world itself was not renewed. Nevertheless, from our perspective, we have already shared in the restoration promised to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. For, through Him, we now enjoy God's creation, whereas before we were deprived. The sun and moon shine upon us, and we are nourished by the produce of the earth. We know that these things belong to us because we are God's children, and this is possible because He has adopted us in Jesus Christ. The words we have sung in the Psalm regarding mankind must be applied to the person of God's Son, as St. Paul explains. Not that he limits it to Him alone, but because what he speaks of regarding the incorruptibility of humanity is not found in us anymore; all is marred and corrupted. Therefore, we must look to our head, through whom we are once again established in goodness.

Thus, we cannot receive God's blessings, whether in our food, drink, or the enjoyment of any of His creations, were it not for the restoration accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bequeathed the world to us as our inheritance. This enables us to enjoy all the gifts He has bestowed upon us with a clear conscience. So, you can see that the creation of all things in Jesus Christ is God's reformation of His Church and our participation in the acquired inheritance for His sake and through His means.

Now, having said that, we are created anew in the person of God's Son, and He is our head as long as we are united to Him through faith. He added that this is a wisdom which even the angels themselves did not fully comprehend. They benefit from our salvation and have cause to honor God for His preference. So, it seems that something had been hidden from them before. Some have been of the opinion that Simple was speaking about the devils, but he explicitly refers to the heavenly places here, making a distinction between the chosen angels and the castaways. It is pointless for the devils to know God's wisdom in our salvation. Some others, unable to dismiss this text of St. Paul's, have speculated that the angels are here among us as students, listening to the preaching of God's word. However, this notion is too naive and childlike. We know that both the doctrine and the use of the sacraments are specifically appointed for us by God because of our weaknesses. The angels in heaven have no connection to either baptism or the Lord's Supper. Why is that? Because the angels are purely spiritual beings, but we, as creatures of this earthly realm, require suitable means to draw closer to God due to our limitations. Therefore, the doctrine preached among us does not serve to instruct the angels. How then can it be understood that the angels are taught by the things they currently witness in the Church?

First and foremost, let us understand that even though the angels behold the face of God, it does not mean they have achieved the perfection promised to

us. This will be fulfilled in the last days. The angels do not know everything as we do, but in part. It's true they are not bound by our limitations, but they are not completely informed either. This is evident when they have to veil their eyes, as demonstrated in Isaiah 6, to signify their limited understanding. Although the angels are heavenly spirits and are intimately acquainted with God, serving as household servants in His kingdom, they still need to cover their eyes, indicating that they do not yet understand everything fully. Their knowledge is limited. In fact, they do not know when the last day will come; that is hidden from them. Why? To humble human beings and prevent them from feeling ashamed of their ignorance regarding things that God has not revealed to us. The angels, who do not know everything either, are set up as an example for us in this regard.

Therefore, it is not without reason that it is said that they did not know what would happen at the coming of the Son of God. In other words, they did not know that all people, without exception, would be called to the truth of the gospel and adopted by God as the spiritual children of Abraham. The angels did know that Jesus Christ was the head of all mankind, but they were unaware of how this would be accomplished or when it would happen. This is what Simple means when he says they marveled at it. It was not enough to say that people should be amazed at this miracle, which involved God taking those who were previously His mortal enemies and allying Himself with them. He transformed them into His own image and raised them up to the kingdom of heaven, demonstrating His boundless mercy. Not only that, but God intends to make us partakers of His eternal glory and grant us the crown of life in His kingdom. We need to learn to marvel at this, so that we may receive these great, high, excellent, and worthy blessings with the reverence they deserve. St. Paul, in this passage and others, refers to the angels as principalities to emphasize that there is nothing we can devise that is higher and nobler than Jesus Christ, as he elaborates further in Colossians 1. Many people at that time were magnifying the angels in an attempt to diminish the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul makes it clear that even though angels are like God's powers, virtues, and instruments through which He carries out His works, and though they hold positions of dominion and power, Jesus Christ still holds supreme authority over them. Just as the brightness of the sun outshines that of the stars, all the dignity of the angels must be subordinated so that Jesus Christ is not obstructed from being visible to all and recognized as the sole guiding star. It is essential to understand this point because we often witness people today who exalt the virtues of the apostles, the Virgin Mary, or other saints to the point of making idols out of them. On the contrary, they believe that if people do not worship them, pray to them, and offer them the service that should only be given to God, they are utterly lost. They argue, "Why should the Virgin Mary not be our advocate, given that she lived in such righteousness and was a mirror of perfection, highly favored by God?" This argument suggests that the excellence God has placed in all His creatures might somehow diminish the position of Jesus Christ. Let us then understand that no matter how much is said or preached about the virtues and worthiness of the Virgin Mary, the apostles, other men, or even the angels of heaven, it should never diminish the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ, deter us from Him, or cause His authority to be transferred to others. We must realize that virtues are distributed to all of God's children, but Jesus Christ is the only source of all goodness to whom we must turn. The creatures are not in any way diminished even when Jesus Christ surpasses them as their head. This is the essence of St. Paul's message. He teaches us not to endlessly exalt the angels. He concedes that they are powers, virtues, and principalities but emphasizes that our Lord Jesus Christ remains their head. They are so grounded in Him that they benefit from our salvation. Thus, it would be ungrateful for us to leave Jesus Christ and turn to the angels. Even they marvel at the riches of God's grace in uniting us with His Son's body and calling us to be His children. The angels' amazement at our salvation is meant to strengthen our attachment to Jesus Christ, keeping us firmly rooted in Him without any deviation. For this reason, it is stated that through Him, we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in

Him. In this context, St. Paul gently reproves the ingratitude of those who are not content with having Jesus Christ alone and believe that He needs additional assistance. He asks, "What more do we desire than to be united with God? Is this not our complete happiness?" Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have confidence to pray to God, and access to Him is granted. Our trust or confidence is not unfounded, for we also have the boldness to approach Him with our heads held high, not presuming self-sufficiency but always remembering the words of the Psalm that although we rely on God's goodness, we must approach Him with reverence. Nevertheless, we can confidently come before God's throne, knowing that His Majesty will not be terrifying to us, for He has shown Himself to be a Father to us through His only Son. St. Paul's purpose is to encourage us to hold firmly to Jesus Christ. This also reveals our own instability because Simple's care and zeal in urging us to cling more firmly to the Son of God are born of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit understands our weakness and instability. If we had even a drop of faith, it would be enough to make us understand that through the gospel, we can possess God's Son, who has given Himself to us. Having Him, we have all that we could ever desire. It would be sufficient to state this in a single word, as St. Paul has already demonstrated, but he repeats and reaffirms it as if to emphasize its truth. This is necessary because we are prone to doubt and unbelief.

Once again, it is not enough to believe for just one day; we are required to continue believing, which is a rare thing in this world. We often act as if we deliberately deprive ourselves of what has been given to us. Since the whole world is in a state of confusion and people are not easily persuaded to come to our Lord Jesus Christ and rely on Him, let us turn to the remedy outlined here.

First and foremost, we must understand that Jesus Christ is the gateway to heaven for us. At His death, the veil in the temple was torn, signifying that we can now enter the sanctuary of God, not a physical temple as before, but

the heavenly realm itself. We can approach the presence of God and take refuge in Him, just as a child would seek the comfort of a parent's lap. It is certain that God surpasses all fathers and mothers in kindness and tenderness. Therefore, when we search for something better or more excellent than God, we will always come up empty. Whether above or below, nothing in all of creation compares to God.

So, given that God has given Himself to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him, we should find complete satisfaction and rest in Him. Despite our fickle minds and affections, we must restrain them like prisoners, saying to ourselves, "Let us cleave to our guard." As David said, "All my happiness and joy come from being joined to my God." He is the wellspring of life and light. As we sang earlier, "He is my portion, and I cannot have a better lot. I must take all my delight in Him." This is the first point we must remember.

Secondly, we must carefully consider the steps. The first step is to have faith. Even though Jesus Christ has opened the way and passage through His blood, granting us entrance to God the Father, not everyone can benefit from it. Unbelievers cannot enjoy this blessing. Faith is the key that unlocks the door, and the door opens easily when we possess this key—receiving the gospel in true obedience of faith. This is why St. Paul emphasizes that it is not enough that Jesus Christ has laid out the treasures of God's infinite goodness and mercy. It is incumbent upon us to receive this faith—not that we can do it by our own power, nor can we partake in the benefits offered by the gospel unless we have faith in Him.

From belief, we must progress to trust. We must be fully convinced that God will always receive us, that we will find favor in His sight, and that despite our wretchedness and unworthiness, we will continually receive His favor when we come before Him. Trust is closely linked with faith. From trust, we move to a sound and bold mind, which is like the highest step.

Despite our natural feelings of dismay when considering our own unworthiness, we continue to offer ourselves to God with our heads held high. Why? Because He looks upon us in the person of His only Son. It is said that He is His well-beloved, not only for His sake but also for our sake, as we are members of His Body.

Thus, we can gather from this text that by receiving the gospel's doctrine with true obedience of faith, we possess our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, we are led to God the Father, attaining the fullness of life, light, and all goodness.

Moreover, we are advised to advance in faith until we are thoroughly convinced that we will prevail against all the temptations that may assail us through faith. In the end, we can boast, as St. Paul does in the eighth chapter of Romans, conquering both life and death, and all powers, whether above or below, and disregarding all hardships. We know full well that nothing can shake the love that Jesus Christ has shown us, which His Father God has also expressed toward us through Him. In this regard, we must anchor our prayers in unwavering certainty.

As St. James says, those who doubt should not expect to receive anything. Therefore, we must be confident in the promises of the gospel, knowing that God stands ready to show us mercy when we come to Him. This is why St. Paul reminds us that if we have faith, we should seek nothing beyond Jesus Christ. He must be our ultimate treasure, for in Him, we possess all that is necessary for our joy and comfort.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins and praying that He may enable us to feel them deeply so that we may detest them more and more. Yet, even in our sinfulness, let us rejoice in His boundless mercy, which He has revealed to us through His only Son. He has chosen to rescue us from the abyss of hell, granting us entry into His kingdom and bestowing upon us the grace to

approach Him with true faith. May we turn away from worldly enticements that seek to divert us from Him and forsake all vain glory. Recognizing our own insufficiency, may we seek all our sufficiency in Him, the true foundation of all goodness, which can never run dry.

May it please Him to bestow this grace not only upon us but upon all people, and so forth.

The Nineteenth Sermon, the Fourth on the Third Chapter

> "Wherefore I beseech ye faint not for my troubles which I endure for your sake, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."
> - Ephesians 3:14-16

It is a remarkable thing that despite having so many means to draw closer to God, people often labour to move away from Him as much as possible. Even the slightest pretext is enough to make them turn away, and yet they believe they have a reasonable excuse. They say, "I was hindered by this or that," which is nothing more than the flimsiest of reasons. Their true desire is to distance themselves from God. This is all too common in our times. Those who seek to justify themselves for rejecting the doctrine of the gospel always find fault with trivial causes of offence. They say, "Oh, this troubles me, this might cause me to dislike the gospel, this might make me abandon it completely." Everything they allege is about trifles. Nevertheless, we must strive even harder to overcome all obstacles and impediments that the devil tries to place in our path. We should persevere in

our faith and hold firmly to our course. This is what Paul is exhorting the Ephesians to do—continue in the faith of the gospel without being discouraged, even though they might be troubled to see him as a prisoner, seemingly already condemned.

Certainly, Paul's suffering in defence of the gospel was not meant to make the Ephesians turn away from the pure truth of God. On the contrary, it was a source of glory for them. They could triumph in advance, considering Paul's unwavering constancy. As I mentioned before, apart from what I've already touched upon, there is a deep-seated wickedness in our nature. We are content if we find any outward pretext to distance ourselves from God. We eagerly seize on any excuse that allows us to escape from God's presence. This inclination should be utterly rejected, but Paul is not speaking of just one people here. He gives us an instruction that should serve us even today.

The instruction is this: Although the majority of the world opposes the gospel and does everything in its power to erase the memory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and even though the faithful are persecuted, defamed, and tormented, we must not be discouraged. Instead, we should let these trials strengthen our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We should remember that we are destined for glory. The fact that God upholds His Church by His mighty hand, preventing it from being completely oppressed and overwhelmed, even in the face of widespread rejection of the Gospel, is evidence of His authorship of it.

If the Gospel were universally accepted without any resistance, there would be great cause for celebration, and heaven and earth would resound with praise for God's abundant goodness, shining upon all people. However, the opposition and hostility of people towards the Gospel serve as a sure sign to us that God is its author. Those who are imprisoned and even face death for it do not waver but remain steadfast. This demonstrates the extraordinary

power of God. Despite all that Satan may do, we have the proof that God is on our side, fighting with us and upholding us by His power. This does not exempt us from affliction, but it assures us of victory and justifies us.

In conclusion, the message we should take from this text of St. Paul is that we must be prepared to endure all the attacks that Satan may launch against us. Even when we see the pure doctrine of the Gospel poorly received in the world, despised, disdained, and even hated, with unbelievers filled with rage to destroy it, we must not hold it in any less reverence. We should not gauge God's majesty by the opinions of men. Even if God were despised everywhere, as most people are, indeed, so ungrateful and monstrous in their rebellion, we should not diminish the honour we owe Him. Similarly, with the pure doctrine of the Gospel, despite the world's opposition and the many who mock it, revile it, and even persecute it, let us receive it with obedience and humility. Our faith should remain unwavering, even when faced with numerous threats, violence, and conspiracies.

Now, regarding St. Paul's saying that it is our glory, what does it serve for? Our faith would be as good as dead if God did not test it. Nevertheless, when we see the faithful being tested, we have even stronger confirmation of the doctrine that God has given us. It is true that our faith should be grounded in heaven, meaning it should rely solely on God's authority, without regard for any creature. Even the angels of heaven cannot validate the gospel; God's majesty alone must be sufficient for us to lean on, and then we shall never be shaken.

However, when martyrs do not hesitate to give their lives as a witness to God's truth, then, as I mentioned earlier, we should be even more encouraged to receive and treasure the doctrine. Persecutions serve to confirm the doctrine, and thus, it is our glory, and we ought to triumph in it. God also supports and strengthens those whom He sends into this battle. It is certain that, due to the weakness of the flesh, they may falter at times, but

when they ultimately prevail, it is the work of God, and we should glorify Him for it.

Now, if we are troubled and tempted to give up at every attack, it is a sign that we do not know how to benefit from the means God has given us to draw closer to Him and remain steadfast. Therefore, we must combat our own weakness and the inherent wickedness of our nature. When we see how the devil seeks to undermine the gospel almost everywhere, we should consider that God does not forget His own but strengthens them with His power so that they ultimately prevail. This should give us hope and encourage us to prepare ourselves as well. When we are at ease and in times of rest, we should not cease to follow their example and be ready to fight.

Simple emphasizes that it is not enough for us to merely receive instruction; we should not stop at being taught. We should be constantly stirred and remain vigilant until God's doctrine takes root in us, touching us to our very core. Therefore, after exhorting the Ephesians, he goes on to say, "I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He does this to show them, by his own example, what they should do. Even when we have been instructed and motivated by God's Word to understand our duty, there will always be some sloth, coldness, and negligence in us.

The doctrine avails us little until God touches us with His Holy Spirit, and this humbles our pride. Many who think highly of themselves can work wonders but find themselves deceived when put to the test. Consider Peter's example; he genuinely promised not to deny his master, even if it meant dying for him. His words were zealous and well-intentioned, but a mere servant girl made him deny Christ. He was ready to deny Him repeatedly, even with curses and oaths. Seeing this, we should acknowledge our own weakness through Peter's experience. Simple emphasizes that we should turn to the one who has all power in Him. It's not enough to know our ailment; we must seek the remedy.

First, rid ourselves of foolish notions that a person can overcome all temptations through their own free will. Instead, acknowledge our weakness and that God teaches us through His Word not to make us capable but to make us more aware of our guilt. Do not use ignorance as a shield.

Instead, recognize our weakness and turn to God, for He calls and draws us to Him. Do not doubt that He will not disappoint when we humble ourselves at His feet, knowing that He will lift us up. Simple's mention of his prayer is not just to claim fulfilling his duty but to set an example for all the faithful. They should turn to God upon recognizing their needs, knowing that He continually upholds them with His strong hand, giving them invincible constancy to endure.

In essence, we should not rely on our own wisdom or presume upon our strength when hearing God's word. Instead, we should desire that God speaks to us inwardly through His Holy Ghost, allowing the preached doctrine to take root and bear fruit. Since God expects more from us than our own abilities can provide, we should seek His help. It may seem contrary to our human reasoning that we may need to endure death and forsake the world and our own lives, but God can work in us to overcome our weaknesses. While suffering for the gospel and facing death may be difficult beyond human capacity, God's grace will empower us to overcome all difficulties if we arm ourselves with the weapons He provides. This doctrine is, therefore, not unprofitable.

Our Lord gives us things through His Holy Spirit that we don't possess by nature, in order to make the doctrine effective so it doesn't disappoint us. Those who slanderously claim that if we cannot follow God of our own free will, it's better to stop preaching, are mistaken. They imply that God's order does not assure us to Himself. However, experience shows us that the preaching of the Word is an instrument through which God secretly works. When we understand this, we see that God aligns perfectly with Himself in

requiring the gospel to be preached to us while emphasizing that it won't benefit us unless His Holy Spirit works in our hearts. Comparing the gospel to an instrument is like saying a plough and other tools are instruments for farming, but they do not cause the earth to bear fruits – God does. In that sense, we pray to Him for our daily bread, understanding that He cares for us as a father does for his children.

So, we should not merely attend a sermon or read God's word individually; we must also turn to God for spiritual nourishment. Do not assume that it's enough to receive the preached word without seeking God's increase. In this regard, Paul uses the analogy that the one who plants or waters is nothing; only God gives the increase from above. He's not referring to physical labour but to those who sow God's word and nurture His church through exhortations. Our labour is in vain unless God's Holy Spirit works with it, making it effective. This shows the close connection between the preaching of the gospel and the secret inner work of the Holy Ghost. They are inseparable, and the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of believers.

Now, after speaking of prayer, Paul asks to be strengthened in the inward man by the power of the Holy Spirit. He highlights our weakness because if we don't recognise our need, we won't turn to God like humble beggars. People, in general, may seek God's help, but genuine humility is rare. Many are prideful and presume excessively upon themselves, even while seeking God's assistance. This excessive arrogance is a grave fault. To approach God sincerely and humbly, we must first acknowledge our own inadequacy. We must understand that our strength comes from above and from the Holy Spirit. Paul's words emphasise this point: "that he may be strengthened by the power of His Holy Spirit." He contrasts what we can do by ourselves with what God's Spirit provides. As long as a person can do everything on their own, they don't need God's Spirit. But since all power originates from God's goodness, we realise that we can do nothing on our own. Any

strength we think we have is a fleeting illusion, a deception by Satan, who tries to trap us in self-reliance to keep us from turning to God and being utterly destitute.

In addition, I would like to further clarify that this is a freely bestowed benefit, meaning it comes solely from God's gracious gift. We should not entertain the notion that God's sacrifice is contingent on anything other than our wretchedness. He doesn't offer it because of any perceived goodness or disposition in us. This is precisely why He fulfils all our needs. Therefore, it is essential, as Paul states, for us to be strengthened by the power of His Holy Spirit, and this is bestowed as a free gift.

Now, when Paul mentions "according to the richness of His glory," he does so to emphasise the abundant goodness of God. This serves to counteract the erroneous beliefs of those who think they can earn their salvation or somehow share in God's glory. It is crucial for us to bear this in mind. Even though the Ephesians had already displayed great strength and unwavering commitment to the gospel, Paul wishes for them to be further strengthened. This highlights the fact that we are inherently weak. Despite God leading us onto the right path, extending His hand to us, and continuously bestowing His grace, even the briefest withdrawal of His hand would leave us utterly quailed. This serves as a warning, as we have seen before, that just as God initiates our salvation, He is also the one who continues the work. There is no steadfastness in us without His upholding hand, especially when it comes to our spiritual life. Therefore, we ought to be motivated to pray daily throughout our lives. Those who forget themselves and become complacent will quickly find themselves deprived of God's grace. This is because they do not seek it with continual care. So, to rouse us from our laziness and recklessness, we must remember that God has called us into His Church and deeply touched our hearts to receive His gospel with true obedience. This should strengthen us all the more.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that as God increases His Holy Spirit within us, He displays the boundless richness of His goodness. This gradual increase in grace reveals God's infinite treasure of goodness, as He draws us to Himself. Initially, we were mired not just in a muddy puddle but in the depths of sin and rebellion. We brought with us an inheritance from our mother's womb—corruption, enmity towards God, malice, rebellion, and blindness. These qualities left us susceptible to all forms of evil, making us Satan's bond slaves under the tyranny of sin. Considering our miserable state, God's act of pitying us demonstrates His vast riches of goodness in our behalf. It is only right that He should be glorified for this.

As I've mentioned before, we should understand this better – just as God has adopted us as His children, we should willingly accept Him as our Father. But how can we do this? Even though He has transformed His image within us, He must continue to display the riches of His goodness, increase His gifts in us, and guide us along our journey. It is crucial for us to remember this doctrine, especially when we observe how the world has been deceived by the idea that every person can exert themselves through their own free will or, at the very least, prepare themselves to approach God. Additionally, some believe that God adds grace upon grace to those who have made good use of the grace He has previously bestowed upon them.

Regarding the first point, how can we possibly earn God's favour when we are like spiritually dead individuals, resembling rotting carcasses? What preparations can we make to obtain His favour? Those who entertain such notions are more misguided than bewitched. Therefore, we must learn to rely on God for the entirety of our salvation, from beginning to end, and reject these devilish illusions that suggest we can accumulate grace through our efforts. We must consider how each of us deserves nothing. As Paul instructs, we must fix our eyes solely on God's goodness, acknowledging His boundless generosity towards us, as He never ceases to bestow

goodness upon us. He is not like mortal men who might say, "I've done enough good; I'm content." Instead, God not only pours out the gifts of His Holy Spirit upon us but also seeks to increase their measure until we reach the full stature of perfection.

Now, let's focus on Paul's specific reference to the inward man. We must recognise that God should continually strengthen and elevate us in this world. However, many are preoccupied with earthly desires. Some desire to display their valour, believing themselves to be as noble as angels, seeking recognition and reputation. This desire for recognition is one form of the worldly strength that people seek. Others aspire to increase their wealth through trade or acquire possessions through various means. Yet others covet social standing and authority. In essence, the means by which we often want God to display His generosity towards us involve indulging our sensuality and earthly desires. However, Paul redirects our attention to the inward man – the realm of spiritual life, which remains hidden from our physical senses but is known to us through our awareness. Similar to this, Paul also speaks of the inward man to the Corinthians, stating that while the outer man perishes, the inner man is renewed. So, what Simple means by the outer man encompasses riches, physical health, honour, esteem, and authority – all of which we naturally desire. These are the elements represented by the outer man.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, we should strive to be strengthened in these matters. However, in the meantime, we tend to disregard the inward man, which pertains to heavenly life. This happens because these aspects are invisible to us, and we are often preoccupied and ensnared by the concerns of this world. Therefore, Simple teaches us that if God allows us to be diminished in worldly matters, we must accept it with patience. He illustrates this point with the following text: When faithless and worldly individuals, whose treasure lies in this world, experience a decline in their worldly prosperity, they lament and ask, "Where are the riches I once had?

Where are the comforts?" Then they begin to complain against God. Similarly, when a wealthy person faces a decrease in possessions, and God takes away what they once possessed, they react with great displeasure, feeling as though they are already buried and now must watch their wealth gradually dwindle away. Likewise, those driven by ambition and seeking only honour and reputation in the world, when they lose their accustomed prestige, believe that all is lost.

Conversely, God's children, who willingly close their eyes to the worldly allurements below and fix their gaze on the heavenly inheritance through faith, are not greatly troubled when they see themselves declining, even in worldly status. They accept it willingly because they understand the underlying change: God is renewing them, drawing them closer to the unseen, and infusing them with renewed vigour, as if the kingdom of heaven were imminent. Thus, what Simple is teaching us here is that just as each of us is ensnared by our foolish desires, we must, through prayer to God for strength, learn not to be distressed if we decline in worldly matters, for this decline can lead to spiritual growth, bringing us closer to God's kingdom. We should remain confident that our earthly decline will ultimately result in our exaltation. Though we may descend into the grave, it is not to perish completely, but to be renewed. Therefore, let us accept abasement, knowing that we will be raised up by the power of our God. Although we may be humble creatures in this world, if we patiently endure, we should not doubt that God will work in us as He promises.

Furthermore, let us pay close attention to what Simple states here. He doesn't just use the name of God but says, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." By this, he shows us first how familiarly we can approach God, as discussed previously. In the past Sunday's sermon, this text was already explained adequately, where we learned how we can approach God. There, faith was emphasised first and foremost. Knowing, then, that the gate is open for us,

we can confidently enter into God's presence. Faith fosters trust in our hearts, and trust grants us confidence. These are the three stages that St. Paul outlines here. He also teaches us how we obtain this privilege – because God is not only to be worshipped for His heavenly majesty, which, though we ought to honour, could be so awe-inspiring that we might shy away from His presence as much as possible. Instead, He invites us to address Him as Father and Saviour, titles He bestows upon us as His children.

By means of this, we are no longer afraid of Him but can approach Him familiarly when occasion requires. This is a significant point to bear in mind, for if we cannot call upon God, what will become of us? In what state shall we find ourselves? It is said that all our well-being and life depend on seeking refuge in God. Now, if we think that God will hear us when we pray with doubt and hesitation, we deceive ourselves. As St. James says, "For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Therefore, we must not be like reeds shaken by every wind or waves of the sea. We must be thoroughly assured that God, who calls us to Him, will not disappoint us when we pray.

But how can we have such assurance? Consider that God possesses an incomprehensible majesty, and there is an immense distance between Him and us. Even if we could fly above the clouds, we could not approach God due to His infinite greatness. If not for Jesus Christ, who serves as the means to bridge the gap, we would be like lost and vanished beings. St. Paul alludes to this when he mentions that he prays to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is so that we understand that God is not distant from us if we follow the path He has shown us. That path involves making Jesus Christ our advocate, speaking on our behalf. He has entered the heavenly sanctuary to represent us, so it's as if He carries us on His shoulders, ensuring that both we and our prayers are accepted and approved by God. We can be certain that our prayers do not disappear into thin air but are

received by God, as promised in the Scriptures, that He is near to all who call upon Him in truth.

Considering this, the world has gone astray by seeking saints to be their patrons and advocates. For example, when people claim that they need the Virgin Mary and Saint Michael as intercessors, as well as other saints they have invented, they believe they are unworthy to approach God's presence directly. While there is truth in this unworthiness, it should also compel us to seek the remedy God has provided. We should turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way to lead us to His Father, as He declared, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and whatsoever you ask of God, my Father, in my name, shall be granted you." Here, our Lord Jesus promises that whatever we ask of God His Father in His name will be granted to us, affirming this doctrine. Therefore, let us understand that as our Lord Jesus offers Himself as the way to lead us to God the Father, we should not wander aimlessly.

If we seek any other way, we shall only go astray and never be certain of reaching God. Furthermore, to be content with Jesus Christ alone, let us remember how He said that all our requests shall be heard if they are based on His name. So, when we pray to God, we must assure ourselves that even though we are unworthy to approach Him, He still accepts us, and our prayers are like a good and acceptable sacrifice offered to Him when we acknowledge Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, we must recognize that we are members of His only Son's body. This is essential because if we had no alliance with Jesus Christ, acknowledging Him as the Son of God would be of no benefit. However, because we are united with Him, and He graciously shares all His blessings with us, we can rightfully call God our Father. This is why Jesus said to His disciples, "I go to my God and your God, to my Father and your Father."

Moving on to the larger point, we must note how Paul addresses a broader concept: that all kindreds, both in heaven and on earth, are named after Him. In this context, Paul emphasizes the unity of Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel is to be preached widely, and God's grace is extended to people of all nations and backgrounds. This means that even those who were once considered outsiders, like the Gentiles, are now part of God's household and citizens of heaven. By referring to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ as our head and body, Paul is illustrating that all kindreds are named after Christ because He has welcomed us into His company, despite our unworthiness.

Paul goes beyond establishing a connection among people and shows that we are even matched with the angels in heaven. He does not merely suggest that the lowest of the faithful is on par with biblical figures like Abraham, David, Peter, and Paul. Instead, he demonstrates that we are also matched with the angels in heaven because Jesus Christ has condescended to be our brother and has united Himself with us in brotherhood. Therefore, when we pray to God, we should approach Him with both reverence for His infinite majesty and trust in His acceptance. We can boldly call God our Father because He has adopted us as His children, and we have Jesus Christ as our brother through adoption. We need not doubt that all the angels in heaven acknowledge and accept us as their brethren when we come to God united with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conversely, if we deviate from this path, we risk being rejected, and even the angels may become our adversaries, opposing our prayers. So, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He reforms our lives so that our actions reflect that we have not wasted our time in His school. Let us strive to please Him in all things, knowing that we cannot serve Him in perfection and that He will bear with our weaknesses as long as we continue to seek Him in times of

need. Finally, let us join together in saying, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Twentieth Sermon, the Fifth on the Third Chapter

> "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." - Ephesians 3:14-19

This morning, we learned the approach we must take when offering our prayers to God if we wish to be heard and have confidence that our prayers will be accepted. It is essential that Jesus Christ is our guide and advocate, interceding for us so that we speak through Him. We follow His rule in prayer, calling God our Father. Some may wonder how we can be so bold as to call God our Father when we have no inherent right to such a dignity. Even the angels do not have this privilege except through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is impossible for us to pray to God as He commands, in the manner He teaches in His Word, without Jesus Christ as our advocate.

Are the angels akin to us? Is the Virgin Mary our great aunt or grandmother? Are the apostles our relatives? No, we must turn to our Lord

Jesus Christ for our spiritual kindred, through whom God accepts us as His adopted children. When we have this, we need not doubt whether God will hear our prayers. We should not approach God rashly, presuming upon our natural reason or self-liking, but with obedience to His command and trust in His promise. Those who seek favour with God through other means have gone astray and shut themselves out.

We must simply follow the Gospel's guidance to come to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ without adding any other creatures, as the whole world does. Those who appoint multiple patrons and advocates in heaven hope to be welcomed by God, but who has promised them that God will accept their devotion and offerings? We cannot appoint officers in heaven; we must obey God's Word. As Paul says, our prayers and supplications are worthless and vain unless they conform to God's Word. How can we call upon a God we do not know? How can we know how to pray and what language to use? We must seek guidance from God's Word and pray with modesty and sobriety, not speaking at random, but in obedience to His Word.

Prayer is the primary sacrifice God requires. While we must worship the one God with both body and mind, this worship is not confined to ceremonies like kneeling. It means honouring God by acknowledging that all good things come from Him. In prayer, we approach God as poor souls destitute of all that is necessary, fully aware that without Him, we are utterly miserable. Just as the law forbade using strange fire in sacrifices, signifying that we should avoid our own devotions when offering something to God, we must also remember that our offerings to God should be seasoned with His Word. Without it, our sacrifices will lack taste and savour.

In our present day, we have the substance and truth of the figures of the law. Therefore, when we offer our prayers, supplications, praises, and thanks to

God, we should do so through our Lord Jesus Christ, as the apostle to the Hebrews exhorts us. Let us remember that in praying unto God, we must not be given to our worldly affections, but seek that God may be glorified, and that the residue may be but as an appurtenance to it. That is the cause why he spoke purposely of the inward men.

For if God should give us the bridle to ask whatsoever came in our head, or if we on our side should take such liberty, what a thing we're at. If he should give us all our own asking, it would turn to our ruin and confusion, for our desires are often misguided, more so than those of little children or sick folks. By experience, we find in ourselves that we'd be firmly fixated on earthly matters, unable to lift our heads towards heaven. We tend to be grovelling downward, deeply immersed in the world, unable to lift ourselves up. Therefore, it is imperative for us to understand the lesson that the Scriptures convey in this text. We ought to pray to God to renew and strengthen us by His Holy Spirit, and to increase His gifts within us, so that as we journey through this world, we may always set our sights on the heavenly goal. We should regard ourselves as wayfarers, knowing that our Lord will acknowledge us as His children, and the inheritance He has promised us, bought so dearly through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, is preserved for us.

Now, here St. Paul emphasises that Jesus Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. This signifies that without Christ, we can never partake in any drop of God's grace. Although God possesses the fullness of life, light, righteousness, and all goodness within Himself, this wellspring is hidden from us. We can never access it through our own efforts or inventions. If we think that we can do good by relying on our own ideas, we are deceiving ourselves. Such efforts will lead us to dig pits, but these pits will be full of holes and devoid of springs of water.

Consider this: when men follow their own inventions, they often end up wandering aimlessly, making no real progress. However, our Lord Jesus Christ is a fountain from which we can draw abundantly. We don't need elaborate tools to reach Him because He beckons to us, saying, "All of you who are thirsty, come to me and drink. Whoever drinks of the living water that I provide will have enough for themselves and even to share with their neighbors."

Therefore, since our Lord Jesus Christ generously offers us the benefits we receive from God the Father, it's no wonder that St. Paul states that Christ must dwell in our hearts for our reformation by God's Spirit. We must also acknowledge that Jesus Christ possesses the fullness of all goodness, not only because He is the eternal Son of God but also in His human nature, which He took from us. In this nature, He became our brother and received the fullness of divine wisdom, understanding, the fear of God, righteousness, and strength. He did not need these attributes for Himself but to distribute them to all His followers, from the greatest to the least.

We need not fear that this fountain will run dry because our Lord Jesus Christ, through the gospel, continually communicates and offers us the things we require for our salvation. It is not without reason that St. Paul, after demonstrating that we can do nothing without being upheld by God's grace, emphasizes that God must dwell in our hearts. From these words, we must first understand that mere contemplation of God's goodness is not enough to remedy our shortcomings, sins, and needs. Instead, God has given Himself to us in the person of His only Son. If it were only to restore us to our original state before our father Adam's fall, it would already be a remarkable display of God's goodness. However, God has not only given us the earth and heaven, providing us with all that is necessary for our earthly life and everlasting salvation. He has also given Himself to us by giving us our Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed. The Scriptures

further guide us on how God gives Himself to us and how we may fully possess and enjoy Him.

We must conclude with what St. Paul states in Romans 8:32: Since God's Son, who possesses all excellence and dignity, has been given to us, will anything else be withheld from us? God has granted Himself to us to such an extent that His Son dwells within us. Should we doubt that we will obtain what we know to be beneficial for us? You can see, then, that our foremost consideration should be that God has demonstrated such generosity towards us. He hasn't merely allowed us to possess all His goods; He has gone so far as to become our portion and a cup Himself, as the Scripture illustrates. It uses such similes to convey that just as a person savors their regular meal and feels well-satisfied by it, so we should turn to God to have the true sustenance. We should be content with Him when He gives Himself so freely to us.

Let us always bear in mind what I mentioned earlier: we need not strive aimlessly or go to great lengths to attain God, for He has bound Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, we partake not only of Him but also of all His benefits. St. Paul specifically uses the word "faith" to illustrate how the gospel should be to us. For it is not enough to say that Jesus Christ dwells within us, as we might question, "How can that be when we are so far below? He is in the glory of heaven, while we crawl on this earthly plane, beset by countless miseries." Given the great distance between Him and us, how can He dwell in us?

St. Paul makes it clear that the gospel has the power to unite us with God's Son, at least when we receive it through faith. We must consider the content and substance of what is preached to us regarding the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely said that God willed to offer Him as a sacrifice for our reconciliation and the complete removal of all our sins, so that they may never be accounted against us. It is also proclaimed that full atonement

has been made for all our sins through His death and passion, and that He was raised again for our justification, as St. Paul mentions in Romans 5. These truths are not the only things said about Jesus Christ. It is also declared that He is our head, as we have already discussed, and that we live off His very substance, like a tree drawing sap from its root. It is further stated that just as a man's head conveys power throughout his entire body, we share in a mysterious and wonderful union that transcends the natural order. This union allows Jesus Christ to dwell in us, even though He is in heaven.

Consider this: If the sun can brighten our day with its rays without leaving its place, providing us with daily refreshment and comfort, even the bedridden find solace in its warmth. Consider this: a creature, not only transitory and corruptible but also senseless and unmoving of itself, possesses such force and property, given by God, to bring joy and refreshment to us in this manner. Now, think of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is ordained to have the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him, and to bestow upon us all the gracious gifts of God His Father according to our individual measure, as stated in the 14th chapter of St. John. Therefore, if we approach Christ with faith, if we embrace the promises of the gospel, we can be certain that He will dwell in us through faith.

We will delve more deeply into this topic in the fifth chapter. Nevertheless, it's essential to note that this text could not have been understood without acknowledging what I briefly mentioned just now: Jesus Christ dwells in us through faith. Our acceptance of Him as He offered Himself with all His grace through the gospel is not merely to view Him from afar or to acknowledge that He offered Himself in sacrifice for us once and for all. It is for the purpose of His dwelling in us through the power of His Holy Spirit, forming a bond between us and allowing Him to fulfill His role as our head. In this way, we become members of His Body and partake of His

essence. This is why St. Paul included the word "faith" when he said that Jesus Christ ought to dwell in us.

Nevertheless, we must not attempt to pluck Jesus Christ out of His heavenly glory to be nearer to Him, as unbelievers do. They seek to reduce and reshape God according to their own desires, as seen in the practices of the papacy. Among them, there are no true gods; only a collection of puppets, known as images and idols. Recognizing that these are lifeless statues and stones, they have fabricated another god, whom they confine within a box, and they worship this figure as a living deity.

If they celebrated the Lord's Supper according to the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ, rather than the abominable concoction they have devised, Jesus Christ would indeed be present among them. However, not in the manner they imagine. In the Lord's Supper, we truly receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We partake of His essence, just as He declares through His Word: He is our spiritual nourishment, satisfying us completely. The bread and wine in the Supper serve as tokens of how our Lord Jesus gives Himself to us, so that we may seek Him fervently in a spiritual manner.

Hence, it is evident that to unite with Jesus Christ, we must not indulge in our base instincts. Instead, our hearts and minds should ascend heavenward, seeking Him above, as previously explained. While it is true that He descends to us through His Word and the power of His Holy Spirit, it is for the purpose of elevating us toward Him. However, we must grasp a crucial point in St. Paul's statement that Christ must dwell in our hearts. Many merely speak of Christ, even understanding Him in their minds, and they think they have fulfilled their duty when they can talk extensively about Him. But in reality, there is no living connection within them.

Therefore, it is insufficient to possess only superficial knowledge of Christ or to gaze upon Him in the abstract. Mere verbal engagement is not enough.

Christ must reside within our hearts, forging an unwavering and genuine connection. This is the means by which we become recipients of God's Spirit. In essence, we can see that all those who seek God's favour without acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ wander aimlessly and fruitlessly. They shall forever find themselves empty, even when they believe they are full, as their satisfaction is merely illusionary and filled with empty imaginations.

So, those who invent their own advocates and presume that God will favour them for it are gravely mistaken. In the meantime, those who exclude Jesus Christ from their understanding must realize that they are far from obtaining their requests. Instead, they gravely err, for when they attempt to deviate from the anchor that is laid out for us in Scripture, namely, having our Lord Jesus Christ as their guide, the angels of heaven, as well as the saints to whom they appeal, must forsake them. Even these holy beings will deny them, and they shall find themselves opposed by all of them as adversaries. To be in harmony with angels, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, we must have true unity with them. And how do we achieve this? Through faith, that is, by embracing the pure doctrine of the gospel. It is not sufficient for us to merely hear it; we must embrace the promises of God found there, forsaking all that Satan may set before us, and relying solely on our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has proclaimed Himself as the light of the world, and those who walk in Him shall not go astray. However, we must carefully examine ourselves so that we do not mistakenly cloak ourselves with the name of Jesus Christ, as many do today. They profess to follow the gospel, but in reality, they think that they have discharged their duty with superficial actions. They listen to the doctrine and speak a few good words, believing that God is highly indebted to them. But here we learn that we have no true acquaintance with Him until Jesus Christ truly dwells in our hearts. This is the means to partake in His benefits and to have His Holy Spirit residing and reigning

within us. Unless we fear God and walk in obedience, aligning our behavior with His will, all our thoughts and desires remain earthly. This signifies living according to the flesh, as Paul stated to the Galatians. Therefore, our outward actions must manifest our true union with Jesus Christ and our participation in His Holy Spirit.

Now, based on this, St. Paul proceeds to emphasize that we must be rooted and grounded in love. The term "love" may refer both to the love God has for us and the mutual love we should hold for one another. But the essence of Paul's message is that we should be firmly united in this regard, founded on God's free love towards us.

Now, he shows how faith is crucial for us to have brotherly love for one another. Holy Scripture consistently leads us to this point, emphasizing that when it comes to the full perfection of a virtuous life, faith precedes and charity follows. The starting point is the complete humility of ourselves so that we may seek all our well-being from God's hand. In seeking it, we must first acknowledge that He provides us with everything through the person of His only Son. Secondly, we must call upon Him to establish our faith in Him, to take refuge entirely in His mercy, and then, feeling deeply bound to Him, as we all indeed are, express our gratitude. He is our righteousness, holiness, victory, joy, glory, and happiness. We must, as Jeremiah says, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord, for it is He who works righteousness, justice, and mercy." Therefore, we must wholly rely on our God, or else all the virtue we seem to possess before others will be like filth and dung.

Now, having faith, charity must be joined with it. We must live justly and uprightly with one another, acknowledging that we were not created for ourselves alone, nor to seek only our private benefit, but for the benefit of our neighbors as well. Let us, therefore, refrain from all wrongful acts, violence, malice, and strive to serve one another to the best of our abilities. This is the perfection of a virtuous life. So Paul, having spoken of faith

earlier, now emphasizes that we must also be rooted in charity. In other words, we should not possess mere fleeting or sporadic bursts of love, as is common among many. Instead, there should be steadfastness and unwavering commitment to it throughout our lives. For a fire may blaze brightly for a while but then die down. Similarly, a massive building may collapse with a single gust of wind if it is not built on a solid foundation. Also, one may plant a tall tree, but if its root is severed, it will surely fall. Likewise, when we have great zeal that is not firmly rooted in our hearts, it will be nothing more than a facade or a temporary display before others. This is why St. Paul specifically exhorts us to be grounded in charity, aiming to correct the common practice of loving in sporadic or impulsive fits.

Nevertheless, it would be foolish to conclude that our salvation is grounded upon our good works, for here, the discussion pertains not to the cause of our salvation but solely to how we should conduct our lives. We know there is only one foundation for the church, as Simple says in the third chapter of the Second Epistle to Corinthians. As we have already seen in the same epistle, especially in the words of Jesus Christ Himself in the 16th chapter of St. Matthew, that foundation is Jesus Christ. No one can lay any other foundation than the one laid by the prophets and apostles, and we must adhere to it even until the end of the world. Nonetheless, we must continue to be rooted in love through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When people inquire about the cause of our salvation, by what means we obtain God's favor, and how we may come to Him and call upon Him with full confidence, we must answer that it is because our Lord Jesus Christ has given Himself to us. He is the one in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells. Although we are far from such perfection, as long as we are grounded upon our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a steadfastness that endures throughout our lives.

Therefore, let us understand that Simple exhorts us to maintain true steadfastness so that we never grow weary of doing good, even when numerous temptations try to lead us astray. Some, despite their best intentions, become discouraged when they experience unkindness from others. They may feel that their good deeds are met with evil, leading them to lose heart. This is why so few continue to fear God and walk as they should.

The wicked take advantage of this situation, furthering their harmful actions. If a person lives with simplicity and bears patiently the wrongs done to them, they become a target for exploitation. Everyone seems eager to take advantage of their kindness. In a world marked by such injustice, where people seize every opportunity for personal gain, those who are easily approached and willing to share their possessions are seen as easy prey.

However, it is mentioned here that if we are rooted and grounded in charity, even if people cast us aside and discourage us with their ingratitude, we will not cease to do good because we have a strong and deep-rooted foundation. St. Paul, having spoken about the goodwill we should show towards our neighbors, returns to the matter of faith.

Indeed, the most crucial point for us is to know that God is with us as His children and that our sins are forgiven, so that He considers us righteous. Without this assurance, how can we find joy in serving and honoring Him? How can we pray to Him with courage and sincerity? It is essential for us to be certain of the infinite goodness bestowed upon us by our Lord Jesus Christ. This certainty should captivate us with love for our God and kindle a true zeal to obey Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to honor Him with all our thoughts, affections, and hearts.

The reason why St. Paul continues with this topic is to impress upon the minds of the faithful where their salvation lies and how they can be certain

of it. Furthermore, we can see the sorry state of the world, for there is no other assurance but to call upon God on this foundation. Through faith, a person can lift themselves up to His presence. On the contrary, we observe how some have acted without shame. Indeed, they have not hesitated to say that we should always be uncertain about our salvation, and that we cannot have a sure belief in it. It is not just the ignorant who hold this view, but even the learned doctors in their assemblies consider it an article of their faith that we should always be in doubt. This is as good as casting people recklessly into the clutches of Satan.

Therefore, it is all the more necessary for us to remember the doctrine contained here. That is, once we truly understand the love that God has for us in our Lord Jesus Christ, witnessed through His death and daily confirmed by His Gospel, we gain perfect knowledge that brings us complete happiness. This is why St. Paul says, "So that you may learn with all the saints what his height and depth, and width and length is." He did not mean to make us into carpenters or masons, speaking of heights as one would in construction, nor did he intend to teach us the craft of masonry when he spoke of width. No, he clarifies his meaning by stating that it is the love that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when we desire to understand how deeply God loves us and how immeasurable His mercy is, considering that He has given us such a profound pledge in the person of His only Son, we have everything that can be said. Even if we were to employ all our intellect, looking both upward and downward, delving into the depths of the earth, and exploring sea and land, we would find nothing but emptiness and falsehood.

Once we have completed all our intricate arguments, we may indeed engage in discussions like clever people who have learned the understanding of many things. However, there will be no substance within us. But when we seek to understand that God is our Father in Jesus Christ, and how this

comes to pass, and by what means we obtain such a great benefit, that is where we must anchor ourselves. It is the true measure of our faith, the bonds that hold it together. Anyone who delves deeper may go astray, as if deliberately entering a maze from which they can never extricate themselves. Therefore, let us find contentment in Jesus Christ as He is, as He has revealed Himself through His gospel, and then we shall be fully satisfied.

We all have an innate desire for knowledge, some more intensely than others. There is no person, however ignorant, who would not seek knowledge. Since this desire is inherent in our nature, let us learn what true knowledge is. Indeed, there are sciences and arts, all of which are useful in this world. It is necessary for people to have skills and trades, as well as engage in liberal sciences. All of these are good if they serve their intended purposes. Yet, we must seek the science of sciences, the one that will never fail. For when a person has traversed the entire earth in pursuit of other sciences, what profit will they gain? It will all be in vain. Therefore, let us not seek anything outside of Jesus Christ; let us rest entirely in Him, never straying away.

Here, we must understand, first of all, what I have mentioned previously: if we truly knew who our Lord Jesus Christ is and the benefits He brings us, such as our ability to approach God in His name with full confidence, we would readily forsake all other things. As St. Paul said in Philippians 3, he considered all his former accomplishments as loss and rubbish, so that he might hold fast to Jesus Christ. He pursued this throughout his life, extending his arms as though to grasp it, as he himself testified. Therefore, what we should take note of here is that when we desire to understand Jesus Christ and the benefits He bestows, enabling us to approach God in His name with unwavering trust, our minds will no longer be tormented by restlessness. Instead, we will stand firm in the pure simplicity of the gospel.

However, for a clearer understanding, let us examine how people speak of our Lord Jesus Christ. They may call Him the Son of God and consider Him their Redeemer, yet they appoint others to perform His duties, even referring to them as priests. They claim the exclusive right to reconcile us with God, as many monks, friars, priests, and hypocrites do in the world. They sell their prayers as if Jesus Christ had delegated His role to them, accumulating wealth in the process, while Jesus Christ is pushed far into the background. Furthermore, it is said that through the one sacrifice He offered once for all, He has obtained grace and salvation for us, forever, so that His death and passion satisfied God's wrath, providing us with righteousness. However, the Mass has been introduced as if Jesus Christ's sacrifice offered in His own person were a mere figure, and what the papists have invented is presented as the only means to gain God's favor. They claim the Mass is necessary to pay one's ransom, just as the drunkard, the wicked, the swearer, the debaucher, the thief, the glutton, and the one who harms their neighbor all rely on the Mass to atone for their sins, believing that God is pleased with it, while the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is thrust aside.

Once more, it is said that Jesus Christ is our only advocate who intercedes for us with God His Father. Nevertheless, in the papacy, there are numerous patrons and intercessors, each concocted by individuals from their own imaginations. They are not satisfied with the apostles and martyrs alone; they also add the likes of St. Christopher and St. Catherine, even including mythical figures who never existed. Whatever nonsense the devil may have put into their heads, it has been embraced.

Again, it is acknowledged that Jesus Christ is our righteousness. But does that stop anyone? No, each person presumes to make amends with God through their own deeds, establishing merit as the basis, among other things.

Furthermore, it is affirmed that Jesus Christ is our guiding star and the path to God, His Father, and ultimately to eternal salvation. However, they insist on devising their own ways, believing that as long as they have good intentions, God should accept it. They thus lead others into their snares, compelling them to bend to their dictates, much like a shepherd drives sheep at his whim.

Notice how prideful people become when they turn away from God's pure truth to their own foolish inventions. They corrupt even the most pure and sound things.

So why have all things been turned upside down in popery? Because they did not recognize Jesus Christ as He is presented in the gospel. Instead, they made a lifeless and ineffective thing of Him, retaining nothing more than His name and titles.

It is not sufficient for us to merely say that we believe in Jesus Christ and consider Him our Redeemer. We must also understand the purpose for which God His Father has sent Him and the benefits He has brought us. Once we comprehend all of this, we will be filled with Him. We will no longer need to wander aimlessly or search for sustenance in impure sources. Our Lord Jesus Christ has informed us that we will find both sustenance and refreshment in Him, so we can fully satisfy our souls with nourishment suitable for them.

Therefore, it is even more essential for us to do this when we read the Holy Scripture. Our focus should always be on understanding the grace of God that He has revealed to us in the person of His only Son. By knowing this, we will have greatly profited in God's school and can cast away all other things, which are nothing more than filth and poison. Indeed, false doctrines may appear appealing at first glance, for we see how people often gravitate towards them, as mentioned in Colossians 2. This is because these deceptive ideas and speculations may initially seem wise to some.

We must understand that true sustenance comes only from what God provides, and it is His will to supply everything He knows we require. Can we then be satisfied without Him? Do we think that seeking the Virgin Mary and addressing her as the mother of grace, as is commonly done, will fulfill our needs? It is like trying to gather bits and pieces of food by snatching morsels here and there. However, Jesus Christ says, "Come unto me, and you shall find all that you need," for in Him are stored all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So, when we seek to understand the love that God the Father has shown us through Jesus Christ, we will gain wisdom in abundance. We will no longer need to wander or search up and down, far and wide, for we will have all that is good and necessary for our well-being. When we hear this, it should be clear that we are misguided if we do not trust in God's provision and rely entirely on His salvation. We need not scatter our efforts or engage in fruitless pursuits.

This concept is illustrated in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Go trade in your own ways, and when you have roamed around both heaven and earth, what will it profit you?" If we are so blinded by our aimless wanderings and cannot follow the path laid out for us, but instead dig pits of our own choosing and forsake the living water that God has placed before us, it is as if we hunger and thirst for our own foolish desires. We become like pregnant women craving charcoal to eat and dirty puddles to drink instead of clear spring water. Pursuing Satan's illusions and nonsense in this manner, being eager for his deceitful tricks, and not content with the good that our Lord has provided for us, makes us worse than bewitched and reduces us to mere beasts.

Therefore, let us first understand that all the things people offer us on their own behalf are mere trifles or, rather, the illusions of Satan. Secondly, when the Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ is for us, it is not in vain. We must

rely entirely on Him and cleave to Him, for in Him lies the fullness of all goodness. We need not wander or go to great lengths to seek what we require. Finally, we must consider the infinite grace bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ. St. Paul, by mentioning "love," directs us to the source of this grace. Even if we were privy to all God's secrets and knew the entirety of His will, we would still need to be convinced of the love He has for us. Speaking of God to unbelievers brings sorrow, as they perceive only severity in Him. However, when His grace and fatherly kindness, as revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ, are declared to us, we can approach Him confidently, free from fear, with familiar access to His presence. This grace is an inestimable blessing, surpassing all our desires in this world, as St. Paul declares.

So, you can see how important the love of God is. St. Paul specifically mentions it as being in Jesus Christ because without Him, we would not be beloved by God. If we were to contemplate God and apply all our intellect to it, considering ourselves in the process, we would encounter an incomprehensible majesty in God, which would overwhelm us like a deep abyss. His perfect justice would make it even more impossible for us to stand before Him than for snow to endure in the presence of the sun.

When we turn our gaze inward, we must confront a sea of wretchedness within us. Our senses are blind, and we lack any virtue. We are given to all evil, held captive by sin, and even the things we perceive as excellent within ourselves are repulsive before God. Therefore, when we desire to understand these two aspects - the terror of God's majesty and the sight of our own despair - we must then seek every possible means. We may call upon the angels and saints for help, but how can they belong to us? In reality, we are separated from them. Furthermore, we may think that God, the source of all purity, would accept us, but we are such wretched creatures. Do we believe that He will involve Himself in our filth and uncleanness? No, instead, He must cleanse us.

Thus, it is not without reason that St. Paul explicitly speaks of God's love, so that we may understand that God rightfully detests us as long as He sees us in our natural state. However, this same love is founded on the shedding of our Lord Jesus Christ's blood. This cleansing washes away all our blemishes so that we may stand before God without bringing anything that might displease Him. Through this means, we are discharged from all our debts because Christ offered perfect obedience.

Our stubbornness is nullified and will not be held against us because Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice. We are liberated from sin's tyranny because Christ has overcome the devil, death, and sin on our behalf. We now partake in His victory and rejoice in it. Thus, we briefly see how God has loved us in Jesus Christ.

Once we understand this, we must no longer engage in fruitless speculations or futile imaginings, searching upwards or downwards. Instead, let us recognise that Jesus Christ is near us, dwelling within us. He desires us to be joined to Him as His body and living members of His substance. Therefore, we should remain so closely united to Him that nothing can separate us. Even if our own fancies tempt us to stray from Him, let us cut off such temptations with faith.

When we do so, we will find that God continues to show His love and kindness to us. Jesus Christ will fulfill His role as our shepherd if we listen to His voice and rely completely on Him. We should have no doubt that He will protect us, and we will be safe under His care. He has promised to receive all given to Him by God the Father and safeguard them so that none will perish but will be raised up on the last day.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying for a deeper awareness of our miseries. May our weaknesses drive us to seek the good things offered to us through true faith. Let us not wander aimlessly in our own speculations and

fantasies but remain firmly rooted in His Word. Let it be our sole source of wisdom, taking such firm hold in our hearts that it not only leads us to live righteously before God and seek His mercy through His only Son but also enables us to live harmoniously and fairly with one another.

May we grow in this understanding and reject the world's abuses. Knowing that we have Jesus Christ as our guide, we can trust that we will ultimately attain the same perfection that He has obtained for us. It is God's will for us, His fellow heirs, to reach this state. May He grant this grace not only to us but also to all people.

The Twenty-First Sermon, the Sixth

on the Third Chapter, and the first on the Fourth

> Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
>
> I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. - Ephesians 3:20-4:2

When God has done us much good, although we feel indebted to Him and obliged to offer Him due praise, we cannot fulfil our duty with a willing heart unless we have hope that He will continue to be the same in the future

as we have known Him to be in the past. Without faith, we cannot have hope. Thus, it becomes impossible for God to receive the praise due to Him from humanity, even if He has come to our aid and granted our every wish.

If we were to think that His help in our time of need was merely a fleeting moment, soon to vanish, and that henceforth, we could expect nothing more from His hand, we would be discouraged from seeking Him. Our hearts would be burdened with sorrow and despair. To maintain our praise of God, we must unite two things: firstly, we must remember the good we have received from Him, and secondly, we must maintain hope that He will remain steadfast in His benevolence until the end, continuously bestowing His blessings upon us.

This is the order that St. Paul underscores here when he says, "Praise and glory be yielded unto God, and how unto him," adding, "who is able to do all things beyond our asking, yea, and beyond our thinking too." St. Paul has this in mind, as we have seen before, that God has revealed the boundless riches of His goodness by spreading the gospel, which is the message of salvation, throughout the world.

Nevertheless, he encouraged the faithful to discharge their duty cheerfully by assuring them that they should not doubt that God would withdraw His hand, as if His generosity towards them had been temporary and fleeting. His intention was to convey that God would continue His work, allowing them to praise His name without interruption. This means that we should express our gratitude not only for the blessings we have already received but also in anticipation of God's continued faithfulness. This is the essential point we should draw from this statement.

This statement is an exhortation for "glory to be yielded to God in the church." It emphasizes that it is insufficient for each individual to privately acknowledge the blessings bestowed by God. Instead, believers should unite in their thankfulness and praise. When the body (the church) prospers

and grows in number and spiritual gifts, it is not only the recipients of these blessings who should strive to praise God but also the entire body. Believers should be bound together in a holy union, as the Apostle Paul will later explain. This is why he specifically mentions the church, indicating that God's goodness should inspire every individual to glorify Him. In this way, we recognize that whatever God does for our fellow believers should be considered as if it were done for us.

Paul also addresses a potential obstacle to unified praise among believers. There was a historical animosity between Jews and Gentiles, with Jews often feeling a sense of superiority due to their heritage and adherence to the law. Gentiles, on the other hand, were seen as having no claim to such privileges. Paul reminds them that since God has called both groups as brothers and sisters to share in the inheritance of salvation, they should be united in praising Him. He says, "Let glory be yielded to God, yay, even forevermore from world to world, and by Jesus Christ." Paul's intention is to stress that the church will be preserved forever, and there will always be a remnant in the world. Thus, the message of salvation will never be in vain, and there will always be people who can serve as a mirror reflecting the immeasurable mercy of God, which He has shown us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we understand St. Paul's meaning, which assures us that even though Satan may attempt everything within his power to erase the memory of God and disrupt the church, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will ultimately prevail. The church will endure, and the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ will remain effective, despite the cruelty of tyrants and the schemes of enemies, whether they are within households or seek to destroy the entire structure. This is why St. Paul emphasizes the name of Jesus Christ.

It is indeed true that we can only give thanks to God through Jesus Christ because we would be unworthy to receive any good without Him. By nature, we are enemies of God, and even though He is generous even to unbelievers, it only increases their condemnation, for "to him that is unclean, all things are unclean," as St. Paul mentions elsewhere. Therefore, we can never express our gratitude to God except through the name of Jesus Christ, through whom we receive all good things.

However, St. Paul's main message in this passage is to make us understand that God's intention, through His only Son, was to reveal Himself as a Father to all humanity. He ordained His Son to establish an everlasting atonement that would continue for all eternity. We should be assured that God will uphold His truth in this world and will always have a flock gathered to Him where His name will be invoked.

Now, let's move on to the second part of this passage, where St. Paul emphasizes that it is not enough for us to have experienced God's goodness in the past. We must be filled with hope that God will continue to show His mercy towards us in the future. This is why St. Paul mentions that God is "able to do all things exceedingly, abundantly above our asking or thinking." St. Paul's message here is a warning that if God has shown great mercy to us in the past, we should not doubt that He will continue to do so. God is not like fickle human beings, and we should not fear that His blessings will run dry after bestowing great benefits upon us. On the contrary, God has an abundance of blessings, and the more we receive, the greater His abundance becomes.

Therefore, to prepare ourselves to acknowledge and honour the good that God has bestowed upon us, we must always be fully convinced and persuaded that we will find Him to be a Father because He has promised to be so. When St. Paul speaks of God's power, we should not imagine it as idle power, as worldly people often do.

They will readily admit that God is all-powerful, but in the meantime, they trust in Him less and less. To them, it seems like He is resting in heaven, or that He doesn't concern Himself with the affairs of this world until He thinks of them. However, when God speaks to us about His power, it is so that we may use it as our shield against all the distress, hindrance, and doubt that the devil throws before our eyes to make us question God's promises.

For instance, when it is said that Abraham believed in God's almighty power, it wasn't a vague belief but a belief in the context of God's infinite power being applied to the promise given to him. The promise was that through his descendants, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham, looking at himself, saw that he was a man rapidly decaying, almost at death's door. His wife had been barren all her life, and she was beyond childbearing age. The promise given by God seemed utterly impossible. Why, then, did Abraham still have unwavering faith in God's promise? It was because he had faith in God's infinite power, which could overcome all obstacles and hindrances. Abraham applied God's power to his own situation, believing that God's truth and power were inseparable.

Similarly, consider what the Apostle Paul wrote about being entrusted with God's message. Paul saw himself as a frail and vulnerable creature. He was pursued and despised, and the message he carried was hated and opposed. His life was constantly at risk, and he faced numerous troubles that could have overwhelmed him. Even when imprisoned and facing death, how did he achieve victory against so many temptations and challenges? He knew that God was the keeper of his soul and trusted in God's infinite power, which could accomplish everything He intended.

Therefore, let us learn this lesson, as it is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. The frequent repetition of this message is not without reason. We are often frail and easily shaken, so even when God promises to

protect us, a slight adversity can quickly dishearten us. However, if we truly honoured and acknowledged God's Almighty power, we would boldly face anything that appears to be against us. For as Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" We also see how David defied all his enemies and even death, saying, "Though I should walk in the shadow of death and within the grave, yet should I be safe, because God is my shepherd, and His shepherd's staff will guide me." In another place? He says, "Though I were surrounded by a million enemies, I would not shrink." And why? Because God is with me. If we were as firmly persuaded of God's mightiness as we confess it with our mouths, we would not be easily dismayed, nor would our faith be shaken at every little threat. Therefore, let us conclude that since we are so weak and the smallest things can terrify us, our confession of God's almightiness does not come from our hearts. We must, therefore, make a conscious effort to instil and practice this lesson day and night, that we may truly experience it.

The reason why it is mentioned to us so often is that we do not consider it of great importance. But when our Lord repeatedly tells us that He holds all things in His hand, that He governs His creatures as He pleases, and that nothing can thwart His purposes or the fulfillment of His promises, it is so that we may give His promises the weight they deserve. When we find ourselves on the brink of despair, and the devil engages us in such fierce battles that we see no way of escape or end to our troubles, we should reflect on this. Who is it that has spoken and promised to be our defender? Is it not the Almighty One who, with a single breath, could dispel all the devil's schemes, even if the whole world were against us? If God has deigned to take our side, what could anyone do against us? In this manner, we must exalt God's power above the entire world so that we may rest in His promises.

God's Word and His power to fulfill what is contained therein are inseparable. We blaspheme God whenever we doubt or waver, wondering if

He is able to defend us as He has promised. Since He has made the promise, there is no doubt that He will fulfill it, lest His power be diminished, which is impossible. This is why St. Paul speaks of God's power here. The prophets also, when speaking of the sackcloth that God always has ready to rescue the faithful from death when they are plunged into it, often say, "Is it not the God who made both heaven and earth?" This may seem far-fetched, but when I am in distress, seeking refuge only in God's pity, and He tells me that He created heaven and earth, He seems to be sending me far away and steering me out of God's blessing into the sun.

But God's declaration that He created heaven and earth is meant to convey that He also governs His creation, cares for us as His children, and has authority over all things above and below. He directs everything according to His will, and nothing is beyond His control. So, if He says so, we must immediately apply it to our benefit and have no doubt that His power is superior and capable of uprooting anything that appears to be against us. This is how we should always connect God's promises and His ability to fulfill them. St. Paul states that God can do everything beyond our asking or thinking, and it is not without reason that he includes everything related to our salvation. For the one who trusts in God for one thing will not hesitate to question whether He will add a second or a third benefit. Therefore, St. Paul wants us to expect everything from the hand of our God.

He says, "Above our asking, it is true that we must not fall asleep when we are helped and governed by God, thinking that His hand will be filled with His benefits. But if we believe in His Word, we must also be moved to pray for it as a true proof of our faith when we resort to our God. For that reason, it is said that the faithful must cast all their cares into His lap, as a true testimony that at all times of our need, we resort to Him, who wants us to seek all our welfare in Him alone.

Therefore, the faithful must be diligent in prayer, as St. Paul mentions in another text, where he exhorts us to prayer and supplication, setting before us this diligence so that we are not slothful. Even if we give ourselves wholly to praying unto God, God must still exceed our requests and do much more for us than we require. As proof of this, when any of the faithful feels his own weaknesses, he will immediately humble himself and resort to God, not just once, but every minute of an hour. Afterward, he will continue to seek Him, both for his body and soul, and even if he does this many times, it is not too much. I must emphasize that the faithful thoroughly examine the miseries to which they are subject to provoke themselves to pray unto God.

However, we should not underestimate the devil, who has many tricks that we do not perceive, and God must be found to provide for them, or else what would become of us? Although we may feel various things afflicting us, there are many others that are unknown and hidden from us. So, it will always be true that God exceeds all our prayers and wishes. Take note of this one point: let us do what we can to continually resort to God, but let us also be fully persuaded that He must be found to watch over us and be much more vigilant than we are in recognizing our needs and the appropriate means to help us. All these things must be entrusted to Him, as I mentioned earlier from the Psalm.

So, when he adds "above our ability to think," he shows that even though people, enlightened by the gospel, learn to distrust themselves and walk in fear, and are humbled by their own wretchedness, they still perceive only a fraction of it. The rest must be left to God, and we must look for more from His hand than we can imagine. This also shows us that we cannot go too far in trusting God and asking Him for what we need. However, we must not use this liberty foolishly to ask God for this or that, driven by our fleshly desires. We must fully commit ourselves to Him, and especially in prayer, we must fight against our own lusts so that we do not become too

demanding. We see what happened to those who demanded their desires to be satisfied; the children of Israel were fed with meat until they were ready to burst."

But while the meat was yet in their throats, God's wrath and vengeance fell upon them. It would have been no better for them if their request had been denied than granted. Therefore, when we pray, we must not take such liberty as to say that God should be subject to our affections and desires. Instead, we must ask Him for the things that He has promised us, assuring ourselves that He will approve of our requests. As I mentioned before, let us not fear that we will be too excessive, for we will see that He will do even more. So, this is what we should do, and let us not be afraid of being accused of presumption or arrogance when we rely on His promises.

Indeed, if people trust themselves more than what God's word will support or indulge in hopes that go beyond what is reasonable, such hopes will undoubtedly lead them astray. But if we ground ourselves in God's truth, which is sure and indisputable, let us have unwavering trust in Him, and let us not doubt that He will fulfill it completely and even more. As I mentioned earlier, God is with us here. We see then that one of the things to remember in this context is that we must consider God's blessings, not only those we have experienced ourselves but also those that are evident throughout the world. They should inspire us to praise God's name and create a harmonious melody among all the faithful, honoring God for all the benefits He has bestowed upon His entire church.

Furthermore, we must hope that He will continue what He has begun and that, since we have already experienced His mercy when we were far from Him and rescued from the depths of our despair, we should not doubt that He will continue and increase the blessings we have already partially received. In our prayers, we must also consider the many necessities that compel us to turn to Him and recognize that He will do much more for us

than we can wish. We are weak-minded and unskilled, and we do not know what is best for us. However, God remedies this in two ways: first, by stirring up unutterable groanings in us, as He more fully explains in Romans 8, and second, by supplying us with His grace, so that He not only answers our pleas but also anticipates us through His mercy, even when we are in our wretchedness and do not perceive a tenth of what we need.

Now, on this basis, Paul encourages the faithful to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called. This is not only so that they should thank God with their mouths, as he urges them to do, but also to benefit themselves with the spiritual gifts they receive and use them to glorify God. For if we were to proclaim God's praises, but people could see no zeal for honoring and serving God in our lives, it would be mere pretense, and such a confession would be empty and hollow when our lives do not align with it. Therefore, for good reason, Paul adds here that people should walk in accordance with the calling to which they have been called.

In this regard, we should first note that because we are naturally sluggish, there is always too much sloth and coldness in us. We cannot find a better way to stir ourselves to greater obedience to God than to contemplate His infinite mercy, which He has shown to us. In this regard, Paul, in Romans 12, encourages the faithful to be teachable and to place their trust in God. He sets before them the mercy they have received from His hand. It is as if he were saying that whenever we hear the stone that ought to be removed or reflect on the immeasurable goodness that God has shown us by not sparing His only Son but giving Him up for our salvation, allowing Him to be offered as a sacrifice to remove the memory of our offenses and wrongdoings, it should deeply affect our hearts.

Therefore, in this text, he speaks the truth when he mentions God's calling before our eyes. It is indeed a sufficient binding force by nature to serve and honour God, for we derive our life from Him and exist at His sustenance.

We witness how all His creatures serve us. This obligation is great enough to direct our lives according to God's will. But God deems it insufficient merely to place us in the world and provide for our physical needs. He also takes us to be His own children, nurturing us in His church, which is His house. Through His adoption of us, He bequeaths us the inheritance of heaven and assures us of it, having given us the pledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that God, out of His infinite love for us, has offered us so much, should kindle the fire within us to run to Him. By renouncing ourselves more and more, we should strive to give ourselves entirely to Him so that He may have the full use of our entire lives. Our sole purpose should be to exalt His name. This is what St. Paul was emphasising when he said that he desired the Ephesians to walk in a manner befitting the vocation to which God had called them.

Therefore, we can conclude from this text that to overcome the slothfulness within us and especially to subdue the stubbornness that hinders us from pleasing God in all aspects, we must learn to direct our attention towards the infinite grace that God has bestowed upon us. He has made us partakers of the spiritual blessings through our Lord Jesus Christ by allowing us to become members of His body and adopting us as His children and heirs.

Furthermore, we should contemplate the purpose God had in mind, so He would not have to rebuke us as He did the Israelites through His prophet Isaiah. He complained about their ingratitude, likening them to a vineyard or a precious vineyard that He had cared for. Despite His care, they produced nothing but wild grapes and bitter fruit. We must be mindful that God has reason to reprimand us today, just as He did them. If the ancient Israelites received great gifts, then we, since the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, are even more obligated to thank and acknowledge God. Consider that what He gave to our forefathers in olden times through symbols and shadows, He has granted us in reality and substance today. We live in the fullness of time, during which it has been God's will to abundantly pour out

all His blessings upon us. Therefore, we will be less excusable if we are ungrateful and fail to acknowledge the good that God has done for us. This is what we should bear in mind.

Moreover, we should realise that, like Simon Peter, our Lord has redeemed us from the clutches of death and called us to His kingdom of light. He did this so that we may proclaim His virtues and dedicate our entire lives to magnifying Him to the fullest extent, in accordance with the present text, which states that we must live in a manner consistent with the calling to which God has summoned us.

Now, this significant gathering and drawing of us unto ourselves, as though God intended to make a new world of us, indeed, this was accomplished by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose was to separate us from the impurities of the world. Since we have been set apart by God and dedicated to Him, with the intention of making us His inheritance, let us not disappoint Him in His purpose. If we are indeed the children of light, as He says elsewhere, then let us not walk in darkness as the unbelievers do. Rather, let us make effective use of the grace we have received. This, in essence, is what we need to remember about the term "vocation" or calling. In short, we shall be much more blameworthy than ignorant and blind souls if we do not strive to hold ourselves under God's guidance and subjection.

The truth is that in the present age, there is no corner of the world that is not corrupted, to a horrifying extent. Even those who have never encountered the gospel but have been continually immersed in superstition will justly face condemnation from God. As for us, it is certain that we will have an even greater accountability, since God has illuminated us with His Word. While others wander astray in destruction, He has shown us the path to salvation, calling and luring us daily closer to Him. Therefore, we must consider this privilege carefully and not extinguish the light or cast aside the special grace granted to us. Instead, we should be even more motivated

to serve Him. However, we must pay close attention to how the Apostle Paul advises us. He says that this must be done with utmost submission, humility, patience, and gentleness. By this, he means to express that it is not enough for each individual to strive to do their duty alone. We must also extend our hands to our neighbours and brothers, so that God may be served with one common consent among us.

Thus, we must understand that, as St. Paul states, this is not directed towards each person individually. Rather, it encompasses the entire body and community of the church. It is as if he were saying, "My friends, it is not enough for each of us to withdraw from evil, abstain from it, and demonstrate zeal to live in the fear of God and with uprightness. We must also care for one another and be fully resolved that it is insufficient to serve God if we do not strive by all means possible to encourage others to do the same. Therefore, he who leads should reach out his hand to his neighbour, and together, let us go forward. Those who are strong should assist those who are weak, bearing them up when necessary, so that we may all be drawn closer to God. This must be done not only within every town and village but also to those whom we do not know personally. Nevertheless, they are part of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we should serve as mirrors and examples to them, encouraging them to lead a godly life by showing them the way to follow us.

Furthermore, let us also benefit ourselves by doing so. If we see others who are more virtuous, zealous, and steadfast than we are, we should be ashamed and think to ourselves, "How can I lag behind when others march so boldly and eagerly towards God?" Therefore, the main point we must take from this is that since God has not called us individually or separately, but has directed His voice to all of us, and wishes it to be a holy bond among us, we must respond to Him, not only with our mouths but with our entire lives. There must be true unity among us, and we must strive to ensure that God is worshipped purely everywhere. Since we are all called to

one inheritance, we should consider each other as brothers and sisters. Since we call God our Father, it is fitting that we be joined to our head, that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ. When we are joined to Him, we will certainly not be cut off from those whom He has included in His body. The hand should not despise the foot, nor should the foot scorn the hand. Since we know that our life solely depends on Jesus Christ, we should strive to support one another. We should pray to God to strengthen us against all of Satan's attacks, and to thwart his attempts to divide us. We should continue to battle with unwavering determination and follow the path that God has shown us until we reach the inheritance that He has promised us and purchased so dearly through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins and praying that He draws us to true repentance. May we be utterly cast down in our own eyes, only to be raised up again to serve Him. This should not be for a single day but for our entire lives. As His grace never wanes, may we never cease to serve Him. May His gifts to us increasingly inflame us to draw nearer to Him and be firmly united with Him. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Twenty Second Sermon, the Second on the Fourth Chapter

> "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism." - Ephesians 4:1-5

We have seen this morning how God's children should be joined together so that everyone may assist and strengthen their fellow believers, and all of us should strive together to serve God. To accomplish this, we need to address the vices within us. On one hand, we observe that people are inclined towards pride, self-indulgence, and self-aggrandizement, which gradually give rise to scornfulness. When one desires to elevate oneself, they must necessarily regard others as inferior. Hence, it is impossible for there to be harmony among us until we have rid ourselves of this pride and excessive self-regard.

Once we are united, we will also exhibit meekness. Why are we often harsh towards our neighbours, with nothing but severity and roughness in our dealings? It's because each of us aspires to dominate others. Therefore, the absence of gentleness among us is due to this pride. That's why St. Paul pairs meekness with humility because humility gives birth to meekness. Finally, he advises us to exercise patience or endurance, bearing with others' weaknesses and faults. If we meticulously scrutinize and highlight every fault in every individual, we will find cause to reject both the great and the small, as there is no person without some flaws. However, if we first overcome the pride I mentioned and conform ourselves to meekness and

gentleness, enabling us to be forbearing and accommodating toward others, viewing them as brethren, then the church will thrive through such means.

In addition, St. Paul emphasizes that if we aim to maintain unity of spirit, we must live together in peace. We are well aware that when strife flares up, everyone wishes ill upon their adversaries. As soon as we give free rein to our emotions, leading us to resent this person or that, and nurture ill will or grudges, discord within the church becomes inevitable. Therefore, if we wish to be in unity, which is essential if we are to be God's children, we must take great care not to allow Satan to sow discord or division among us. We must strive for tranquillity and seek to prevent conflicts when we perceive any potential for them. This is how we ought to conduct ourselves if we intend to assist our fellow believers and ensure that God is honoured among us with one accord.

Here, we must first observe how St. Paul warns us that if we do not exercise self-control individually, the devil will always find easy access to us, causing trouble. Why? As I mentioned earlier, each of us carries the disease of ambition within us to some extent. So, there is none among us who would not seek some semblance of superiority, at least until God humbles them and, through His Holy Spirit, eradicates all pride, making them clean.

But consider all those who follow their own natural inclinations; they are invariably so proud that they refuse to be content unless they are elevated and esteemed. Thus, St. Paul thought it necessary to caution us against this vice and encourage us to dislike it and strive to rid ourselves of it. This will not be easy, for it is a fierce battle. Nevertheless, we must not give up until we have gained the upper hand over our own pride and realised that there is nothing within us for which we should be esteemed. Rather, we should be thoroughly ashamed of our own wretchedness.

As proof of this, when we carefully examine everything we believe entitles us to gain favour, dignity, or reputation among people, we will find that

every bit of it is a free gift from God. Consequently, we should humble ourselves because, otherwise, we cannot truly honour God. So, considering that all the virtues for which we might be praised are testimonies to God's goodness, and that He has shown Himself to be a loving Father to us by allowing us to draw near to Him in this manner, it should humble us and cause us to walk in all humility.

Moreover, if we compare our virtues to our vices, we will find that there are many more reasons to humble ourselves than to exalt ourselves. For when a person thoroughly examines themselves, they will realise that even though they have a genuine zeal to serve God, they still fall short and stumble in their efforts. There is no virtue in them that is not marred by some flaw, reminding them that they should not be proud. Furthermore, their vices often outweigh their virtues. Thus, they have no reason to be proud of themselves. We do indeed defile holy things when we mix our own imperfections with the gifts of God's Spirit.

Therefore, even those who are esteemed as pearls and elevated almost to the status of angels must always restrain themselves, recognising that there is no flaw in them that should not be considered grievous, just as in those who have not received such great gifts. In addition, we must realise that there are vices within us by nature. If there is any goodness in us, it is solely due to God's mercy and grace. Hence, we must attribute all evil to ourselves. Those who truly understand this will quickly cast down their pride and self-deception.

Now, for those who consider themselves to be of lowly stature and have nothing to boast of, they are fighting against their own nature if they attempt to humble themselves. They will often find that those who know themselves best esteem themselves least. However, we must go even further and acknowledge that we are nothing of ourselves and incapable of accomplishing anything of value. The goodness that God has placed in us

should teach us humility. Once we grasp this truth, we will be truly humbled. True humility does not involve putting on a facade or feigning a meek countenance, as many do, speaking gently and lovingly while appearing mild on the outside but harbouring pride within.

Humility, in essence, means being brought low within ourselves and not seeking to elevate ourselves to any degree of honour or to seek higher esteem than our neighbours. True humility requires us to lower ourselves to the point where we can embrace our true brothers and sisters, especially since we know that we need to be patient with one another.

For behold, it is said of our Lord Jesus Christ that He easily allows us to come to Him because He Himself was tempted and made like unto us. He bore our weakness and infirmity because He had experienced them Himself. Now, it is certain that our Lord had no vice in Him, for He is the source of all goodness. Nevertheless, to encourage us to approach Him and to be heard by God His Father for His sake, it is said that He had compassion on us because He had experienced human weaknesses, albeit without any sin, as I mentioned earlier.

So, what shall we do if we foolishly believe that we are entirely perfect, especially when pride is so deeply rooted in our nature? How can we have compassion for those we see in misery if we do not first recognise that we are no better than they are? Therefore, it is crucial to understand that to be compassionate, kind-hearted, gentle, and friendly, pride must first be eradicated within us. Additionally, kindness is the mother of patience and continuously bears that fruit. If we are too stern, it is a sign of cruelty within us, akin to wild beasts. This harshness also convicts us of pride and overestimation, indicating that we have not grasped the important lesson here.

Indeed, we should all be concerned about our neighbours' faults, not encouraging them with flattery, as is common in the world. However, our

correction should be measured, for we also need to be patient with others and not be hasty in condemning them as we would not want others to be with us. This reflects the essence of the law and the prophets, as stated by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, zeal should be combined with kindness, for if it is mixed entirely with vinegar, it loses its taste. There must be some moderation in all rebukes to sweeten them so that they are not excessively harsh.

St. Paul intended to show us that while we should not overlook any evil, we must also not reject the weaker members as if they were reprobates. We should strive to win them back, as previously discussed. There are two extreme customs to avoid. One is the practice of flattering others to maintain worldly favour. Those who indulge in this must close their eyes to their friends' faults, which is a form of betrayal. The other extreme is excessive rigidity, where even minor faults lead to outbursts of anger. Such individuals will never possess the spirit of meekness unless they are guided by God's Spirit.

This shows that pride lurks within us when we become excessively harsh and take too much upon ourselves. There is no excessive rigour without cruelty, and no cruelty without pride. Whoever despises their neighbour sets themselves up as the judge, and those who can tolerate nothing are terribly stern, considering all sins as unpardonable. Therefore, it is essential to remember what St. Paul has shown us: to forgive and forbear. We should not condone others' vices, nor allow them to commit evil without rebuke. Instead, we should patiently correct their faults, show empathy, and bear with our neighbours' frailty and weakness so as not to shame them or drive them to despair by showing no forbearance or forgiveness. This is what we should keep in mind.

And this is the very reason why Paul insists that people should bear with one another in charity or love. He suggests that since we are all brothers, we

need no other rules to make us kind-hearted, patient, and humble. As proof of this, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 that charity, or love, possesses three qualities: first, it is gentle and kind-hearted; second, it moves us to be humble and meek; and third, it is patient and endures all things. These three qualities are attributed to love by Paul, and they teach us about charity.

When we ask about the rule of holy life, Scripture tells us that love is its full embodiment because it is the bond of perfection and the fulfillment of the law. These texts show us the importance of charity. Moreover, our Lord summarized the doctrine of the law by emphasizing two points: that we should love God with all our heart, mind, power, and strength, and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. Therefore, if we think we are approved by God and possess charity, yet lack humility, gentleness, and patience, we make the Holy Spirit a liar. He has not simply given us the word "charity" but has also shown us what it means.

First and foremost, it means we must overcome the pride that deceives us and makes us rebel against God. If we cannot humble ourselves in obedience to God, it is difficult to be humble towards others. Let us, therefore, strive to correct pride within us, and always aim for humility. We can achieve this by bearing with one another. Even the heathens understand that if we had the wisdom to see our own faults, we would be patient with others because we ourselves need patience. If we do not extend the same patience to others, it is due to our lack of discernment.

In light of this, charity requires us to be patient, not only when wronged, but also when we observe our neighbours' weakness and lack of progress in their faith. Even if they are not as well-versed in God's word as we might wish, let us show them compassion and correct them with gentleness. Our correction should neither nurture their vices nor drive them to despair. This is what we need to focus on.

Now, concerning this, Paul goes even further, as I mentioned earlier, that, as I have touched on before, we must maintain the unity of the Spirit or the bond of peace. He establishes the unity of spirit as an essential characteristic within the Church and the flock of God. If we are at odds among ourselves, we are also at odds with God. Paul emphasizes that this unity is crucial today, as it is the means by which we are recognized as God's children.

Indeed, even the wicked and unbelievers form their own alliances and are tightly connected to one another. Their wicked deeds bind them together, creating an unbreakable bond because they recognize that they are mutually implicated in their misdeeds. However, Paul presupposes that the faithful are united in God, as he will soon explain. He then proceeds to show how this unity can be maintained, emphasizing the importance of the bond of peace.

When a fire is kindled, it is not easily extinguished. We often think that after engaging in a heated argument, we can quickly return to a peaceful state of mind. However, the devil is so cunning that the strife and contention can become deeply entrenched, even if not openly expressed. Resentment and hostility can linger within, even after the debate appears to be over. Therefore, we should not assume that a dispute will be resolved as swiftly as we might hope. Paul cautions that the Church will be consumed by the fire of strife unless we strive to remain peaceful, avoiding all contention and disputes.

Paul then elaborates on the type of unity he referred to earlier, stating that there is only one God, one faith, one baptism, and one hope that we are called to. There is only one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is above all, and in all. It was necessary to emphasize this to underscore that peace will only be true and acceptable to God if it is based on a solid foundation.

For example, if we were to seek peace with a Catholic, we would have to compromise the pure doctrine of the Gospel, going against God and participating in various impurities and abominations. It would be better for the entire world to be destroyed, including us, rather than seek peace that requires us to go against God. The same applies to seeking peace with the Turks, as both groups seek our destruction and distance us from God.

If there is any reconciliation among us that allows our fleshly desires to prevail, it will lead to great confusion. God's servants are often falsely accused of conspiring, malice, stubbornness, or refusing to consent to any wrongdoing. Those in authority and with influence may attempt to hinder the preaching of God's word as it should be, imposing their own arbitrary rules. Even if preaching continues, it will not be in accordance with God's word. If God's servants are forced into such compromises, they will be tormented by Satan and his allies, blamed, and slandered. Such individuals will consistently twist good into evil through false reports and distortions.

In summary, true peace must unite us under God and make us one in Him. Without this foundation, any peace is mere deceit. This is why Paul calls us back to God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the faith of the gospel, and baptism to illustrate how we should be in agreement among ourselves.

Now, we have two key points to consider here. Firstly, when seeking reconciliation with others, we must always keep our focus on God. We should continually strive to be settled in Him more and more. In general, peace is desirable and held in high esteem among people. However, we should not use the cloak of peace to distance ourselves from God, ultimately making war against Him and being declared His enemies. This is why we are told that we must engage in a continual battle with the wicked. Since they serve Satan, they will persist in opposing God and our salvation. Therefore, we must not be lukewarm or neglectful in this regard but rather zealous in standing against them. Even if they enjoy honour and prestige,

we should view them as vile and loathsome, filled with filth and uncleanness. Despite their boasting of greatness, we must be firmly convinced that it would be far better for them to be cast into the depths of hell than to exalt themselves against God. Thus, we must understand that these prominent individuals are not wiser than fools when they dare to oppose God so brazenly. Consequently, we cannot have peace with them because doing so would require us to forsake God for their pleasure. Therefore, if we are united in God, we should follow the rule provided here, which is to humble ourselves to such an extent that the world can see, through our meekness, that there is no arrogance left in us to fuel discord. Kind-heartedness should be accompanied by patience. We must condemn people's vices while always striving to bring them closer to God, winning them over rather than driving them away through harshness.

Now, let's turn to the words of St. Paul in this passage. He states that we are one body and one Spirit, called to one hope through our calling. Firstly, he emphasizes the condition of our divine calling, which requires us to be so closely united that it is evident that we are truly the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not sufficient for us to be merely grouped together like a heap of stones; we must be bound together with genuine goodwill. As it is said, in the early Church, there was but one heart and one mind among the faithful. Similarly, the same unity should be present among us today. St. Paul's assertion that we are one spirit and one body means that we are made as if we were one person in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ willingly shares His name with the entire assembly of the faithful to draw us closer to living together in harmony and brotherly love. We should aim for reconciliation that turns us into brothers, closely connected like the fingers of a hand, as without this unity, we cannot demonstrate our desire to attain the kingdom of heaven. This is what St. Paul meant by the terms "body" and "spirit." When God's Spirit dwells within us, He reforms our affections in such a way that our minds are closely linked together.

However the situation may be, the entire body of the faithful is like one man. It is not appropriate for anyone to exalt themselves, but rather we must all be interconnected, each person in their role or calling to support one another. We must be united as one, as I will explain further. Since there is no one else to govern us except Jesus Christ, we must become as one in Him. We know that what was said about Adam and Eve and all married couples applies to the church as well, that the church is bone of our Lord Jesus Christ's bone and flesh of His flesh, signifying a union. So, if we are all so closely connected to the Son of God, it is only right that we also live in harmony with each other, and that this unity extends throughout the entire body. It would be impossible for our Lord Jesus Christ to reign over us while we are divided amongst ourselves, given that He is one.

Now, to inspire us to do better in this regard, let me tell you that we are called to an inheritance. In saying this, there is a much holier reconciliation among us than among the natural brothers of this world. Even though natural brothers share the same parents and blood, they often go their separate ways, dividing their inheritance amongst themselves, which can lead to them drifting apart and breaking the natural bond that once united them. However, our inheritance is one that cannot be divided. No one can say, "I have what is rightfully mine, so I will go my own way and live apart." What is our inheritance? It is God Himself. Furthermore, it is the heavenly life acquired for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and He has ascended to gather us to Himself. Therefore, since we are all called to the same inheritance, if any of us withdraws from our brethren, it is equivalent to renouncing our share in the kingdom of heaven. We would find such a blasphemy abhorrent. If someone were to ask any of us if we were willing to renounce our place in paradise, it would be a shocking proposition. However, in reality, we are excluding ourselves from the gate and denying ourselves access to the kingdom of God. We are erasing the hope offered to us by the gospel when we fail to unite amongst ourselves. If this truth were

deeply embedded in our hearts, there would be greater friendship and brotherly love among us, marked by meekness, mildness, and patience.

Although we may have been misguided in the past, it is better to heed the warning now than never. Therefore, let us learn from St. Paul's teaching that whenever we are provoked to anger, even if we feel we have a reason to reject, abandon, or separate from someone, we must remember that we all share the same hope of entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ, our head, calls us all to Himself with the condition that we truly demonstrate, through our actions, that we consider all gospel partakers as our brethren, as if they were our own flesh and blood, and that we are closely bound together like the fingers of one hand, as I mentioned earlier. Building upon this doctrine, St. Paul goes on to say, "There is but one Lord," which means that by acknowledging God's sovereignty over us, we can maintain unity because God cannot tolerate discord. Even though humans may be inconsistent and change their minds frequently, they still cannot tolerate discord in their own homes. If there is strife or conflict, they cannot stand it. How then will God, the God of peace, who desires us to be united under Him, react when He sees that we are His household? Do we think we can involve Him in our quarrels, disputes, and conflicts? He will not change His nature for our sake. Instead, He will cut off those who act as rotten members and demonstrate that they do not belong to Him. Therefore, let us turn to the sovereignty and dominion that God holds over us in order to quell all disputes and disagreements that Satan may try to incite among us. Just as servants, even when they have disagreements or grudges among themselves, restrain themselves and reconcile for the sake of their master, so too must we restrain ourselves and seek reconciliation for the sake of our heavenly Master.

What should we do in such a case, as for the matter of pleasing our Lord? St. Paul effectively declares that when we become so contentious and cannot tolerate anything, but instead quarrel over every small and trivial

matter, it is not only a sign that we displease people, but also that we rebel against God and are unwilling to submit to Him. This is what we must consider when pondering his statement. Now he adds that there is only one faith, one baptism, and one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he says that there is only one faith, he is indicating that we share a common treasure even in this world. He had already mentioned the inheritance we hope for, which is guaranteed to us in heaven, even though it may not yet be fully revealed. The pledge of eternal life is none other than the gospel, and we all possess it in common. Therefore, if the faithful were to forsake one another, the gospel would be torn to pieces. We must carefully consider the significance of the word "one," There is only one hope of our calling and one God the Father. By doing so, we are tearing apart and dispersing the kingdom of God as much as we can when we fail to live in harmony.

It is said that there is only one God. It is as if we are tearing apart the hope of our salvation when we refuse to allow God to govern us and protect us. When we state that there is only one faith, it becomes evident that the gospel is not divided into pieces and fragmented when we cannot get along with our brethren or bear with them gently and patiently, as previously commanded. This is the situation we create when we do not live in harmony. This is what God calls us to avoid. We must derive a double benefit from this. One way is by eliminating all diversity of opinions and ensuring that we all have only one faith in our hearts and one confession on our lips. If the faithful contradict one another, it is clear that they are demonstrating that they do not have the gospel on their side, or at the very least, one party is deviating from the truth. While it is true that disagreements may arise, there is a remedy in such cases. Those who are unsure if God has revealed the truth to them should remain calm and pray for God to lead them further. Nevertheless, we must be fully convinced of the articles of our faith and agree with one another on them. Each of us should be able to affirm that we hold nothing other than what is the general belief of the church when questioned individually. Therefore, the first point

we must consider from St. Paul's statement that there is only one faith is that this faith is not a unity concocted by the human mind. It is because God must bring us to it, as we cannot arrive or remain here without God strengthening us in His truth. Thus, there must be a reciprocal relationship between faith and the Gospel. Just as there is only one gospel, of which God is the author, there must also be one faith.

Also, concerning the doctrine, it is not enough for us to confess God together with one voice, but it must also teach us to hold ourselves so closely united as a single unity, where each of us strives for our neighbour's benefit and considers how we may be of service to them. We must apply ourselves faithfully to this, bearing with those who are weaker, honouring those who have received more generously from God, and not considering ourselves highly, but rather seeking to attain the height to which God calls us. This is so we may become partakers of His glory, as we humble ourselves and walk in this world with humility and modesty. This relates much to what is said in this text, that there is but one faith.

Paul also tells us that there is only one baptism. Through baptism, we put on Jesus Christ, as He mentioned elsewhere, and we are joined to Him to partake in His life and all His blessings. There is only one baptism, in which the name of Jesus Christ is always invoked, as He is our Redeemer. We are baptized in the name of the Father, the originator of our salvation, in the name of the Son, who has accomplished everything for our redemption, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, through whom we are sanctified to possess and enjoy the immeasurable benefits secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. So, those who call us to Him through this visible sign need not consider us as wild and mad beasts, provided we continue in the unity He has commanded. It is not without reason that Hudson connects baptism and belief in the gospel here, for he respects our dullness, which often prevents us from grasping spiritual things unless they are presented in accordance with our nature.

Paul speaks here with full confidence in God's will. Now, because we do not easily understand the things of the world or spiritual matters, some may still argue that all of this is too spiritual and beyond human comprehension. You see, the things he has spoken here might appear somewhat obscure, so we might not find much delight in them as required. However, St. Paul brings us back to the visible sign through which God gives us a glimpse of Himself, accommodating our frailty. In baptism, we see the water, which signifies that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. By nature, we are all unclean and utterly rejected and cursed by God, but through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God the Father. By this means, we are called to the glory of heaven and renewed by the power of His Holy Spirit. Thus, we must be truly dull and brutish if we fail to perceive this visible and evident truth. It is as if God has provided us with an image of the elevated reality, suited to our limited understanding.

In short, the primary purpose here is not to separate baptism from the gospel. Instead, baptism is added as a visible mark so that, if we first struggle to understand the unity of faith to which baptism leads us, we may be led to it. It is as if God has imprinted the mark of adoption on our hearts to show that we belong to Him once we are baptized with water. Must each person have their own baptism? No, baptism is always the same. Therefore, we must dedicate ourselves to the One and Only God and the One and Only Saviour, Jesus Christ. To achieve this, we must also be closely united. From St. Paul's words, we can clearly see that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God. Baptism, being such a unifying force, brings us to a unity of body and soul, a brotherhood that surpasses all worldly alliances. What will it be like when we come before God, from whom baptism derives all its power? God is not just the Father but also Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Hence, we must understand that there is a true unity in the essence of God, and although there are distinctions of persons, He is not separated or divided within Himself.

Although the Father is simply referred to as God, as St. Paul will later explain, this is in respect of the distinction and order, as He is the head of Him who was sent to be the mediator. Because Jesus Christ humbled Himself, even though He possessed the form of God, and did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, He chose to lower Himself and empty Himself entirely. In any case, we see that baptism leads us directly to God, confirming what we mentioned before: if our peace and unity are not rooted in God and we are not guided by Him according to His Word and through the power of His Holy Spirit, there will be nothing but discord in us. However, if we are touched deeply by what is said here, that Jesus Christ has bound us to Himself on the condition that we also be bound to one another, we will be held together so strongly that the devil will not succeed in dividing us from the flock. We will overcome all temptations, and if there are any vices and weaknesses among us, we will bear with them patiently and continue in the holy unity to which we are daily encouraged by the gospel and by the shared baptism we have received.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He helps us recognise them more and more, leading us to true repentance. We should seek His grace so that we can purify ourselves from all defilements and, in doing so, learn to be unshaken and undismayed in the face of any assaults from Satan. May He grant this grace not only to us but also to all the peoples and nations of the earth, etc.

The Twenty Third Sermon, the Third on the Fourth Chapter

> "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." - Ephesians 4:6-8

We have seen here too, that God, do not forget any means that might unite us in true concord and brotherhood, for He has dedicated us all to Himself by baptism, wherein we put on Christ, as we come together into the church. Just as we are called to one selfsame life, to be ears all together on the kingdom of heaven. So we ought to know who is the master with authority over us; for God is our Father, and we are His children. He does not desire discord among us, for it would be like setting trouble in His own house and church. Since we are members of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is fitting that we should unite in true unity, or else we shall tear His body apart. Nonetheless, to understand this unity better, St. Paul teaches us that God, being the Father of all the faithful, bestows His power and grace upon them and is above all things, gathering them into one. In short, He dwells in them by His Holy Spirit, and they must be one body unless they wish to turn away from Him. Therefore, you can see that the reason why God is our Father is not merely that He created us or that He has not forsaken us through His gospel. It is because He has bestowed His grace upon us and, as I mentioned earlier, because He is above all. Thus, the means by which God binds us to one another is like casting His beams, as if sunbeams from heaven, upon us. Therefore, we must come together as one, knowing that the things belonging to our spiritual life come from God's gift to us. This is not to scatter us apart, but rather to gather us into one body. In these final words, St. Paul further clarifies that God is within us. So, if each of us knows that God has bestowed such grace and honor upon him as to make him a dwelling place, there is no excuse for us to be in variance and hatred, each separated from the other, living for himself, leading to the complete disruption of the order God has established, if it were possible.

Therefore, when St. Paul speaks here, he is not referring to the grace that is common to all men; he is speaking of the church. He shows that we ought to unite because God has adopted us and taken us into His household. It is true that God has made it clear that we have no strength or life apart from Him, and for this reason, St. Paul says that in Him we have our life, movement, and being. However, this applies to all things in general. In this context, it is also said in the first of St. John that our Lord Jesus has been the life of all men since the creation of the world. Nevertheless, because humans have a more excellent privilege than brute beasts, it is said that He is their life and light. But here, the issue concerns the spiritual state of the church.

Whereas all Adam's descendants are corrupted and cursed by nature, God has separated us from this state by shaping us to choose Him. This separation is meant to bind us to Him in a holier and more profound bond than the rest of humanity who follow their earthly birthright. This unity is discussed in John 17, where it is said, "Holy Father, sanctify them, as I have sanctified myself for them, that they may become one in us, as you and I are one." Our Lord Jesus emphasized that He spoke not of the world or those not in His following and heritage. He allows others to go astray, but He desires His church to be truly united. How can this be achieved? It may not seem so when we are scattered, each focusing on themselves. However, if we consider how God has transformed us through His Holy Spirit, giving us a special life that demonstrates His grace, we should understand that even though we may be dispersed in the world, we should be united under our Lord Jesus Christ. None of us should be attached to our own profit, and none of us should love ourselves so much that we despise our brethren. Instead, we should allow ourselves to come together under the guidance of our God, for He dwells within us. We must demonstrate, through our actions, that we desire to be one in the power of His grace, which He has spread everywhere. Therefore, we see that the apostle Paul encourages us to help one another attain the perfect unity that God has already initiated

within us. To achieve this, he advises that we should detach from the world and dedicate ourselves wholly to our God.

As I mentioned before, since God is the Creator, He must infuse life into all things, both above and below, as it is stated in the Psalms, "When you withdraw your spirit, all things are troubled and finally turned into nothing." This means that no beast, tree, bird, or fish exists without its being and continuation being sustained by the secret power of God. He not only gave them their initial existence but also maintains and upholds them. However, we have even more, for we not only live in this world and enjoy the benefits God has provided, such as the ability to see, hear, and use our senses, but God's Spirit dwells within us. It gathers us to Him and helps us understand that we are not just mortal beings, recipients of this temporary life from Him. He has marked us as His children and governs us, allowing His righteousness to dwell within us since we are inherently corrupt.

Thus, you see that the first thing we need to remember is that since God has drawn so close to us, dwelling not only among us but within us through His Holy Spirit, making us His temples, as I explained earlier, we must separate ourselves from the defilements of the world. However, it is not enough for each of us to acknowledge the grace we have received; we must also strive to live in unity and brotherly love. In doing so, we can help our neighbours navigate the journey we have embarked upon.

It is a woeful situation when someone separates themselves from the body of Christ, renouncing fellowship with others. Therefore, we should offer ourselves to God in such a way that He may govern each of us individually, while also striving to unite ourselves and work together in harmony. In this way, we can collectively demonstrate that we are the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Him as our head, all aiming towards God, desiring nothing more than to be one with Him.

To reinforce this point, Paul mentions that each of us has received grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. This reveals that God employs a unique method to draw us closer to Him—by distributing His gifts in a way that compels us to rely on our neighbours. Left to our own devices, we are naturally self-centred, but necessity binds us to others and to God. To humble our pride and presumption, God has distributed His gifts in a way that clearly demonstrates our need for each other. There is no one among us so perfect that they can do without the help of others. Therefore, we must be willing to share what God has given us for the benefit of our brethren, and equally, we should be open to receiving help and support when we find ourselves in need. This mutual service reinforces the importance of humility and meekness, which are essential for fostering unity among us.

Paul's analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 compares the church to a human body, illustrating how absurd it is for each member to despise the others or be solely focused on itself. In the body, individual limbs do not possess separate understandings or private interests; rather, they work together harmoniously. Just as the hand willingly serves the rest of the body without hesitation, and the feet support the body without complaint, so too should we, the members of the body of Christ, collaborate in unity. God calls us to be one in Jesus Christ, not isolated individuals. Thus, He has distributed His gifts among us to create a bond of concord, preventing us from becoming prideful and self-sufficient. God intends for us to function together, like various body parts, each fulfilling its role to support the whole body.

First of all, let me emphasise that if we possess any excellence, it should not lead to pride, for we are indebted to God for it; we have nothing of our own. As we have previously discussed, Paul used this reasoning to prevent anyone from becoming overly presumptuous, urging humility and sobriety while attributing all glory to God. Therefore, he reiterates that no matter how excellent someone may be, they have no reason to exalt themselves above others, as everything comes from God. The manner in which we

acknowledge this is by confessing that it is a freely bestowed gift. This is Paul's intention in the first place: to caution against the vice of excessive self-exaltation, which tempts all of us to assert our mastery over others. However, St. Paul reminds us that we are all utterly dependent on God's free gifts and should lower our heads, recognising that preeminence belongs to God alone. We must learn to submit to Him and be content with our respective roles. We should labour and strive to serve our neighbours and the entire community or body of the church.

Furthermore, it is essential to understand, as I have previously explained, that according to the measure of Christ, we will not find perfection in any living person. Every individual requires assistance, not only in the context of our everyday lives, but also in our spiritual journey. Our Lord has forewarned us of the need to stay connected because we are inclined to drift apart. Not everyone can be a baker, farmer, or cutler, and therefore, we all rely on one another. Without communication and cooperation, we would not survive a single day in this world.

Our Lord has given us this advance notice because He knows we can be quite fickle and prone to disunity. However, in this context, He is addressing spiritual gifts, which serve to remind us that God is our Father and we are the members of His church's household. A perfect person who examines themselves will recognise that their possession of more than others is measured, and no one should presume to have everything. When we have our measure, we must consider the two points I mentioned earlier: first, that those who receive a larger measure are more strictly obligated to use it for the common benefit of the church, and second, that they must seek help from their neighbours, as they cannot do without them. Therefore, they should peacefully conform to others and aspire to be a functioning member of the body, allowing all of us to hold on together, with our ultimate desire being that Jesus Christ has preeminence over us, leading us to God the Father. Thus, you can see how Paul refers to this measure as being "in Jesus

Christ" because it is through Him that we are bound together, as previously explained. Our spiritual kinship, though originating from God as the source of all goodness, could not flow to us without Jesus Christ among us, uniting us through His means.

In line with what we've seen in the first chapter regarding Christ's role in gathering all things together, both in heaven and on earth, that were previously scattered, let us understand that since God has not granted us such perfection that each of us can sustain themselves in isolation, we must unite in peace and harmony. It's evident that God could have created us as perfect beings from the start, lacking nothing, and He is certainly not selfish in enriching Himself with His gifts, as far as He knows it's for our well-being. However, considering our inherent weaknesses, God has not immediately bound us to Himself. Instead, He wants us to learn to live with vigilance and awareness, recognizing that it's our responsibility to see through what He has initiated. In this journey, we should also exhibit humility and gentleness towards one another, avoiding the pride that leads to disdain or isolation from others. We must acknowledge that even the humblest person in God's Church possesses something to offer to their fellow believers.

As we've discussed before, if we ever think that a seemingly unlearned person has nothing to teach us and that we can gain nothing from them, we must be cautious not to underestimate God's grace. It's important to remember that anyone who has a taste and understanding of the gospel has the presence of God dwelling within them through His Holy Spirit, for faith is a unique gift from God. Thus, wherever we witness an appreciation and knowledge of the gospel, we can be sure that God resides in that person. Additionally, every drop of God's grace, no matter how small, is valuable and worthy of esteem. Therefore, there is no reason for pride to hinder our unity, or for us to forget that we are all part of one body.

On the other hand, each of us must also examine ourselves closely, for we will be held accountable for the benefits God has bestowed upon us. The more we have received, the more we will be blamed if we do not fulfil our duty of serving our neighbours, as mentioned earlier. Ultimately, the purpose of God's gifts is always to edify one another, allowing God's temple to flourish among us and reach its full perfection. This is how we should use the spiritual gifts given to us by God.

For this reason, it is also stated that those who understand the gospel should reflect the fact by the way they conduct their entire lives, demonstrating that they are children of light and not blind wanderers in darkness. Therefore, let us learn to use God's gifts in a way that brings glory to Him. This is why the concept of "measure" is emphasised, so that we cannot excuse ourselves by pointing to the poor example of others. When it comes to commendation, each of us tends to hold themselves in high regard and tries to persuade the world that they are truly exceptional.

Yet, in the meantime, we fail to recognise that God has doubly obliged us, not only to bestow His abundant blessings upon us but also to place us in a higher position than our neighbours. Therefore, let us consider ourselves blessed both collectively and individually. Collectively, because we have the gospel freely preached among us, and we should serve as a shining beacon to guide the way to salvation. Individually, we should discharge our own responsibilities, ensuring we do not give our neighbours any reason to stumble. Instead, we should strive to draw those who are distant from God and His truth closer to us, as well as support and encourage those who are already on the right path. Unfortunately, many fail in this regard. Those with exceptional gifts often seek to dominate others and crave worship like idols. As a result, the unity among us is often shattered.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned earlier, it is impossible for us to achieve true brotherly harmony without conforming ourselves to those within the church

as we would to our own body parts. Without this conformity, genuine unity remains unattainable. Yet, we often witness everyone aspiring to be esteemed as the head. Furthermore, when it comes to edifying others, we often act contrary to what St. Paul tells us here. In Romans 14 and 15, he instructs us to act as if a strong man were to see a weaker one. Instead of using our strength to crush our neighbour, we should support and uplift them. It is akin to a strong man carrying a small child – he should not break the child's arms and legs by rushing ahead. If a stronger person seeks to outdo another merely to prove their superiority, it does not mean the weaker one should be defeated by force. Therefore, we must be cautious in our interactions with our brethren, ensuring that the strong do not overpower the weak but rather support them. It is like the analogy used by the prophet Ezekiel, where those who misuse their strength to oppress the weak are like goats butting their horns against defenceless lambs whose only intention is to be meek. This is the conduct we ought to exhibit, but sadly, we often fall short of it.

It is certain that the city of Geneva is meant to serve as a shining beacon, illuminating the path for those who are still distant from the gospel. However, I must address the current state of affairs, as witnessed in recent events, including those that transpired just yesterday. It is clear that the public is well aware of these happenings, both from what I share in the pulpit and what is discussed in the streets. If I were to remain silent in light of such circumstances, especially when even children sing about it, would I not be failing God and His people? Should I and my colleagues be like dumb dogs, not speaking out?

When a goldsmith creates a cross or a chalice, they are held accountable for their actions. If others produce items that serve superstitious practices of the papacy, it should not be tolerated. When a merchant sells goods, they receive due punishment if they deserve it. However, if someone sells chesticles, orbs, and other trinkets related to the Mass, it is somehow

permitted and tolerated. These actions have indeed taken place, and they were carried out in the name of those who should be enforcing discipline and punishing wrongdoers. Moreover, they occurred in a place consecrated to God for the administration of justice.

Some may argue that it was done inadvertently, but I believe that if the individual had considered their actions carefully, they would have refrained from such a blatantly unlawful and inexcusable deed. Therefore, let us be vigilant, and I emphasize, let us be vigilant, not allowing ourselves to be deceived by Satan and lulled into a state of complacency, failing to heed the admonition presented here. That admonition is that if we have received any grace or gift from God, we must hold it in high regard and use it in a manner that brings glory to God and furthers His church. Otherwise, we will have to answer for causing offence, and it would have been better for the offensive items to have been consumed by fire a hundred times than to have been displayed openly in front of those who watch us from afar.

Indeed, we are well aware that there are many who observe us and are eager to find any reason to speak ill of us, not just to mock our efforts, as we may deserve, but to blaspheme the name of God. Therefore, if someone has erred, it is beneficial for them to be rebuked, so they may learn and improve. We must recognize that God has bound us deeply to Him, exalting us and honouring us more than we deserve by making us His people and entrusting us with the pure doctrine of His gospel. We should take this to heart, be cautious, and avoid becoming so careless as to act according to our own desires. God can indeed take away what He has granted us and dispossess us of His blessings at His discretion.

St. Paul explains here how God's generosity is evident in Jesus Christ, yet He bestows the gift of His Holy Spirit on each person in varying measures, not uniformly, but as He sees fit. Paul mentions that this was made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ ascending into heaven. At that moment, Jesus

attained supreme authority, and the Father bestowed upon Him a name above all names, so that every knee should bow before Him, as stated elsewhere in Scripture.

Our Lord Jesus Christ received the fullness of grace for the world, as St. John noted in his first chapter. We all received from Him so that we may be satisfied with the good things we lacked before. This is why the Spirit was given to Him without measure, as also mentioned in the same text. The faithful, being members of the Church, have received their share, according to the measure of His only Son.

However, for Jesus Christ, God did not limit the giving of His Spirit. Why? Because He is the head, and from Him, every individual must draw their spiritual life. He holds complete authority over us. Therefore, let us be content with the portion allotted to each of us, walking in reverence before God. Moreover, let us understand that perfection is found in Jesus Christ, for God's Spirit rests in Him. Both the great and the small must approach Him humbly, acknowledging their spiritual poverty, and they should not be ashamed to receive from Christ's abundance, recognizing their need for His blessings.

Furthermore, even though our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated Himself as the only Son of God during His time in this world, confirming this through His miracles, wonders, and gifts, when He ascended into heaven, He revealed Himself as the one who had been commissioned by God the Father to provide all that we need. This is why it is stated in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. John that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus Christ had not yet been glorified.

It is evident that our Lord wrote by the power of His Holy Spirit, for when Peter confessed Him as the Son of the living God, the response was, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." To be certain, we understand that there is nothing good in us, and the goodness

God grants us is through His Holy Spirit. All things have been entrusted to our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is His responsibility to impart His teachings to us, as it has been revealed in His role, with the Father granting Him special authority to bestow His gifts upon us. This is also why the prophet Isaiah states that God's Spirit rested upon Him, signifying that we would perish, as if through drought and emptiness if we were separated from Him.

Regardless of the circumstances, we must always return to this point: the Holy Ghost was poured out upon all the faithful when our Lord Jesus Christ was exalted, as stated in another passage. Therefore, let us recognize that when our Lord Jesus Christ departed from the world and ascended into His heavenly glory, it was for the purpose of allowing us to enjoy His goodness even more. This is the reason He told His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I remain with you, the Holy Ghost will not come." Indeed, our Lord Jesus could have granted them His Spirit while visibly present with them just as He did after He had departed from the world. However, we must not speculate on this matter according to our own understanding. We must understand that our Lord Jesus humbled Himself for a time, as we will explore further later, but He was received into His heavenly glory to establish His supreme authority, causing all creation to bow before Him.

As a result, we see how our Lord Jesus Christ, in His wisdom, chose to be absent from us in His physical form so that we might better sense His presence through His indwelling in us by His Holy Spirit. This is what St. Paul addresses here when he mentions that for this reason, it is said that He ascended on high and gave gifts to men, having first led away His enemies as prisoners. The text cited from the sixty-eighth Psalm reveals that God is highly exalted in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, in that song, David praised God for being established as the king of Israel, representing our Lord Jesus Christ. He had established the worship

of God in its purity, corrected the numerous disorders that had occurred during Saul's reign, and achieved many victories. It was evident that God had shown His grace upon him, making it clear that his kingdom was not merely that of a mortal and temporary man, but rather that God intended to reveal His glory there. That is David's primary message. When he begins by saying that God has gone up, he employs a common scriptural manner of speaking. During Saul's time, everything seemed to be in disarray. It appeared as though God had been inactive. Religion had been suppressed, and there was a great deal of wickedness with excessive liberty to do evil. David signifies a remarkable change when he says that God has gone up. In other words, he shows that through His actions, God had displayed His care for His church, His intention to protect it, and His desire to make His Majesty known there. That's one point.

Furthermore, he adds, "You have led captivity captive," meaning that God had subdued His enemies, of which there were many who sought nothing but the ruin and desolation of the people. David suggests that as soon as God went up, He immediately broke and crushed the heads of His enemies so that they no longer troubled His people. All their efforts, force, and attacks proved futile. He adds that God received gifts from men, signifying that those who had been conquered had offered tribute to God as their Sovereign King. While this was done in David's person, God intended His glory to shine forth in the man He had chosen, anointed by Samuel. In short, we see what David intended to convey in that verse.

St. Paul, therefore, applies the same to our Lord Jesus Christ, and rightly so. Whatever was prefigured in the person of David must be attributed to Jesus Christ, as He is the truth and substance of all these shadows. In Him, we find a much more royal fulfilment of the things mentioned in that psalm. St. Paul did not misappropriate that text when he attributed it to the only Son of God, stating that He was exalted on high. As he will explain later, Jesus Christ was first humbled and then exalted. Thus, we see that God took

possession of His sovereignty, not over the entire world, but over His own people, intending to govern them according to His good pleasure. Subsequently, He asserted His sovereignty over His enemies. He didn't just receive tribute and gifts so that all would honour Him, but He also subdued the rebels. There are no devils or reprobates who have not been defeated by the mighty hand of God, and in this, we see that our Lord Jesus Christ is the one of whom David was a foreshadowing.

St. Paul tells us in essence that although our Lord Jesus Christ does not dwell among us in the manner of men, and we do not see Him with our physical eyes, we should not be separated from Him in our minds. He has ascended to fill all things, not with His body, but with His benefits and gifts. Regardless of the great distance between our Lord Jesus Christ and us in terms of heavenly and earthly places, He desires to dwell within us and make us one with Him through the gifts He bestows upon us. Therefore, we should strive for the unity He spoke of. This concludes the main points we can gather from this passage. Although we must now bring this discussion to an end, we must understand that Jesus Christ is not so far from us today that we cannot experience His closeness. He has ascended, not to abandon His church, but to be exalted so that we may honour Him as our head. Since we are members of His body, we must serve one another. We must not distance ourselves from Him, but rather, each one of us should draw near to Him and strive to bring others along. The strong should not discourage the weak but strengthen them. The healthy should support the less fortunate, and those who are progressing well should help those lagging behind, striving towards the ultimate perfection to which we are called.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that we may truly repent and turn to Him for our continual growth. Let us acknowledge our weaknesses and pray that God may bear with us, grant us forgiveness for our sins, and encourage us to come to Him without doubting. We can be confident that

He will always recognise us as His children and grant us the inheritance He has acquired for us at great cost. And so, we say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Twenty Fourth Sermon, the Fourth on the Fourth Chapter

> But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) - Ephesians 4:7-10

I started this morning by expounding upon the psalm cited here by St. Paul, demonstrating that all the things spoken therein apply to the person of the only Son of God. While it is often stated in a figurative sense that God ascends when He reveals Himself as the Judge of the world and the defender of His church, we can see most clearly in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, that God condescended to be lowly for a time in His Son's person, despised by men, and subsequently exalted by the power of His Father. This is articulated by the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Thus, St. Paul asserts that it was necessary for Him to first descend in order to be exalted.

Before delving further, we must note that St. Paul has altered the wording. While David states in the psalm that God received gifts and offerings, referring to tribute and homage from those who owed it to His Majesty, St.

Paul, on the other hand, says that He gave. This does not exactly match the psalm, but the Apostle's intent is to illustrate that the triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon His resurrection from death, surpasses all of David's victories and everything depicted in shadows and symbols under the law. It is more significant to give than to receive.

Moreover, when the psalm states that God received, it was not for His own benefit, as He has no need for anything. Rather, it alluded to the enrichment of His church. Just as the women who had not left their homes were entitled to a portion of the plunder, David shows that God's glory is not sought for personal profit but rather for the well-being of His church. God's display of His wealth is not by hoarding treasures behind double locks, but by making them available to all who come, especially those who seek with true faith. While His riches do not diminish, His generosity towards us abounds, inviting us to seek Him for help in all our needs and wants.

In essence, God's wealth is demonstrated through His generosity and His drawing us toward Him for assistance in all our necessities. As the prophet conveys, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Thus, it is evident that those who rely on Him will lack nothing. As a result, the psalm states that everyone, not just the warriors, shall partake in the spoils. Even the women, who did nothing more than spin yarn by their firesides, shall share in the victory as if they had achieved it themselves.

In this passage, we are shown that God's reception of tributes and taxes from those under His dominion was not to enrich Himself but to make us participants in the benefits of our salvation. We should take careful note that when God bestows His gifts upon us, it is not so that we may take credit for our own virtue or prowess but to acknowledge our complete dependence on His free goodness for all things. Consequently, all things must be directed

towards His glory. The more He bestows upon us, the more we ought to readily confess our indebtedness to Him. The chief point is to make use of the gifts we have received for the edification of the church, thus glorifying God more and increasing the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ among people. The condition under which our Lord distributes His possessions, which are rightfully His own and which He could have kept to Himself, is that we must offer Him homage for them, both in word and deed.

Moving on to what St. Paul adds, he mentions that it was necessary for Jesus Christ to descend just as He descended into the lower parts of the earth, and then He was exalted. Some have offered more complex interpretations of this passage, suggesting that Jesus Christ not only descended to the grave but even into a place called limbo, which is a concept of their own making. However, St. Paul's statement is straightforward. He implies that because Jesus Christ was humbled, God the Father exalted Him to His right hand, granting Him supreme dominion so that all knees should bow before Him. When St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ being humbled, he refers to the act of clothing Himself in our human nature, wherein He became despised and lacked worldly dignity or reputation. The world viewed Him as worthless, even to the extent that people were ashamed to look at Him, as Isaiah the prophet declares. Jesus Christ willingly subjected Himself to all forms of reproach, including mockery and physical abuse, ultimately facing a death so shameful and accursed that it was considered a curse by God Himself. He bore this ignominy for our sake so that we might be blessed through Him.

Considering all this, when we examine ourselves honestly, we have no reason to boast or be proud. We should lower our eyes in humility, for if we truly understood our own nature, we would naturally humble ourselves. Jesus Christ, our head, was not in a similar state when He descended, for He possessed His divine glory and majesty before the creation of the world. Nevertheless, He willingly humbled Himself to the point that outwardly, He

appeared to have relinquished His Majesty in the eyes of men. He continued in His perfect state, but this was not evident to those who saw Him. This is why it is said that He appeared in the form of a man. It is essential to understand that Jesus Christ took on human flesh and allowed Himself to be despised and rejected, yet this did not diminish His divine essence. It was merely an outward appearance. Therefore, when we see how Jesus Christ, despite His divine glory, chose to be abased and rejected in the eyes of the world, we have no excuse for pride or arrogance. He has shown us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, enduring many trials and achieving life through death, and His subsequent exaltation serves as a model for us. If we continue to be filled with pride despite witnessing these things, what excuse can we possibly have, considering that we are nothing compared to Him?

When Paul speaks of the low places of the earth, he refers to the human nature that our Lord Jesus assumed for our salvation, along with all the aspects I have previously mentioned. Jesus did not present Himself as a grand prince, nor did He employ pomp and worldly trappings to make Himself feared in the world. As it is written in Isaiah 42, "He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, nor will His voice or cry be heard in the streets." Additionally, consider how He endured reproach and patiently bore it. As He approached His death, it seemed as though everyone had conspired against Him. Therefore, we must take into account all these qualities to understand how Jesus Christ descended into the low parts of the earth.

Even if we compare His divine majesty to our human nature, we can aptly call all the earth the low places. Though Jesus Christ possessed the entire world, it would still be insignificant compared to His heavenly glory. Those in the highest positions of dignity are like crawling frogs or leaping grasshoppers in comparison, as the prophet Isaiah suggests. Thus, it is not surprising that the entire earth is considered low in comparison to heaven. Paul's intention here was to highlight briefly that Jesus Christ willingly

stooped to the point of becoming a mockery to unbelievers and even to being condemned and regarded as cursed and forsaken by God, all for our salvation. Therefore, it is only right that we should patiently and without complaint accept God's humbling of us and bear in ourselves the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, enduring scorn, contempt, and mockery for our simplicity. No one should take upon themselves or claim things that do not belong to them. That is the essence of St. Paul's message.

Now, when he says that He has gone up above all heavens, we understand that the Son of God does not hold dominion over this world. St. Paul's assertion that He is above all the heavens emphasises that His dominion is heavenly, divine, and eternal. Even the heavens themselves will pass away and be renewed, as Jesus Christ Himself stated while on earth. If Jesus Christ dwells in heaven, He would be subject to the same impermanence, implying that He would be frail and transient. Instead, He is above all the heavens in His infinite glory, where change and alteration are absent. Furthermore, St. Paul adds that He fills all things. By this term, it means that Jesus Christ is not confined to any single place, but His presence can be felt, and He dwells within us. He fills all things not with His physical body, as some have mistakenly believed, but with His power, spiritual blessings, and gifts. St. Paul's intent is to demonstrate the presence of Christ so that we understand that we have not lost anything despite His departure from the earthly realm. Although He no longer resides here in a visible manner, He continues to exercise His power and fill all things, ensuring that we receive everything necessary for our salvation. This is the essence of St. Paul's message.

Therefore, let us heed and put into practice the earlier exhortation, which is that we can only be regarded as God's children if we become like the firstborn Son. Knowing this, let us willingly humble ourselves so that God may exalt us, just as our Lord Jesus did to attain His glory. Let us fully grasp the depth of God's mercy in allowing His Son, who was His image, to

be so humbled. Consider the immense love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who condescended to conceal His divine essence for a time and did not assert His rightful position but instead humbled Himself before the world's gaze.

When we contemplate these truths, let us first realise how precious our souls are to the Son of God, given that He humbled Himself so greatly for our sake. Let us value the gospel, through which such a great benefit is bestowed upon us. We should be assured that if God's Son had not come to us, there would have been no way for us to approach God the Father. Not only are we immersed in sin and weakness, but we also carry the burden of the prince of this world, the devil. Therefore, since we are under the dominion of Satan and sin, how could we ascend if not drawn by Jesus Christ?

Christ's descent teaches us always to honour Him in His role as the Mediator. Although unbelievers and unholy individuals may despise Him because of His crucifixion, we should continue to honour Him as He deserves. His greatness and majesty were temporarily veiled to magnify His mercy and kindness. This is evident in Paul's words, where he seeks to convey God's earnestness and care in ransoming us from the clutches of death. Thus, we learn what to contemplate upon the apostle's statement that Jesus Christ was humbled.

Furthermore, when he stated that Jesus ascended above all the heavens, it is akin to saying that He is exempt from the realm of creatures, knowing that He is unchanging. For this reason, in Romans 6, it is mentioned that He suffered once by dying for our sins, but He did not remain in death forever. Instead, He entered into the life of God, meaning He made us participants in immortal glory.

Therefore, let us lower our gaze and acknowledge the high sovereignty bestowed upon Him. Let us honour it, knowing that even the angels of heaven accompany us in this, for it is not in vain that the psalm declares

that all the angels of God worshipped Him when He revealed Himself to the world. The apostle also applies this text to His person in the first chapter of Hebrews.

Furthermore, let us recognise that although Jesus Christ is not confined to a specific location, He does not cease to retain the true nature of His body. Some people imagine that even though He is in heaven, He is present everywhere else as well. They come up with speculations to justify this, arguing that God can exist above and beneath us simultaneously. They go so far as to claim that the body of Jesus Christ is physically present in places of worship, and they require people to worship it. This notion, however, diminishes the true nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. In their defence, they argue that if it possessed the properties of a body, it would have to occupy a specific location. Yet, they assert that Jesus Christ is in heaven; therefore, they conclude that His body lacks the properties of a body. However, we know that angels do not have bodies, yet they are not omnipresent; they go wherever God appoints them. Since angels are not confined to a particular place despite their limited essence, which is within certain bounds, why should we deny that Jesus Christ is above all the elements of this world and above all the heavens while still remaining truly human?

This does not mean that He can die again or be subject to any of our human passions and weaknesses, as He was during His earthly life. He has now transcended all those limitations. However, despite these changes, He retains His true human nature. Even though He is above the heavens, we must understand that this does not distance Him from being near to us and in us. As mentioned earlier, He fills all things, but this is accomplished through the power of His Spirit. Therefore, when we are grafted into His body and united with Him through faith in the gospel, we can be certain that we have access to an unending source of blessings. In Him, we find all kinds of goodness and perfection.

Now, if St. Paul had meant what some have falsely claimed, and as is asserted by many ignorant and stubborn individuals today, namely, that Jesus Christ fills all things with His human nature, he surely would not have omitted it. But he left it alone as an absurdity. However, it's important to note that the two statements made here, on one hand, that Jesus Christ has ascended above all the heavens, and yet, on the other hand, that He does not cease to fill all things, convey different meanings.

When it is said that He has ascended above the heavens, it signifies that we should not be tethered to this world and our worldly desires when we seek Jesus Christ. Instead, we should lift our minds on high and seek Him there through faith. So, when the Holy Scripture declares that God is in heaven, it does not intend to assign Him a particular place. We must distinguish between God and His spiritual essence and Jesus Christ in relation to His body and human nature, which He took from us.

When speaking of God, we must always acknowledge that He possesses an infinite essence that fills all things, making heaven His royal throne and the earth His footstool, not that He has feet or a literal seat. This serves to demonstrate that there is no distance so vast that can contain the infinite majesty of God. We need to keep this in mind when God communicates with us.

So, why is it said that God is above all the heavens? It's because we, being dull and earthly, tend to confine God to every pillar, stone, spring, tree, and everything we see if He doesn't remind us otherwise. To correct such misconceptions, God tells us to lift our minds upward, as though He raises us by our chins and says, "Wretched creatures, why do you seek to see Me here below? What do you intend by likening Me to yourselves? To truly know and worship Me, you must ascend above the world in your thoughts, recognizing that I am incomprehensible."

Therefore, when we say "Our Father, who art in heaven," it's so we might direct our minds towards Him, knowing that He is with us at all times. However, we should not assume, as some do, that we can please God with excessive chatter and elaborate ceremonies, which may appear impressive to the world. We must not delude ourselves into thinking that we can transform God to be like us.

But we must, instead, redirect our thoughts upwards, lifting our minds above the world. Concerning Jesus Christ, it is stated that He is above all the heavens, even in His human nature. How is this possible? Because, as God, in respect of His essence, He is equal to His Father and fills all things. However, in respect to having taken on a human body, He is above the heavens, not present in the world. Some may wonder why these two natures cannot be separated. It's true, but this does not mean they cannot be distinguished.

Likewise, with Jesus Christ, if someone asks why He is not wholly present with us as our head and mediator, having gathered us to Him in such a way that we live off His own substance, the answer is that He is fully with us when we receive Him in the person of the mediator. However, if someone asks whether every part of Him that exists in Himself is among us, the answer is no. It is not necessary for Him to be among us in such a way that He is subject to suffering or any earthly limitations. He must remain unblemished and free from all such concerns. This is why the apostle tells us that He has appeared once, and we now await His return. So you see what we should consider regarding the statement that Jesus Christ is exalted above all the heavens.

Now, let us return to the word "fill." In this context, St. Paul teaches us that the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ has no boundaries. It is not confined but extends to us. As I have mentioned before, our Lord Jesus Christ "filling all things" refers to His power. He is not a king in the manner

of worldly rulers who are subject to hunger, thirst, diseases, and other limitations. They must have officials close by or borrow assistance from others. However, this is not the case with Jesus Christ. He does not reign by force of arms or worldly means; rather, He rules over us by His Spirit and through His Word.

By these means, all things are filled with Him, particularly through the gospel. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that we commune with Him. God calls us daily to make us partakers of His only Son, and this can only occur if His power is extended to us. In this matter, we must be prepared to receive more than our senses can comprehend, for the power of our Lord Jesus Christ surpasses our understanding.

St. Paul will further elucidate this mystery in the future. When he describes Christ as the head of the church and likens it to the relationship between a husband and wife, he exclaims that it is a great mystery or secret between Jesus Christ and His Church. Indeed, it is a secret that we can never fully grasp through our own wisdom or reasoning.

Therefore, when St. Paul states that He "fills all things," we must rely on the experience of faith rather than common reason or opinion if we intend to understand how Jesus Christ dwells within us. Regardless of our circumstances, we should not believe that any distance can separate us from the Son of God. His dominion extends high and low, and we will sense His presence in us, becoming one with Him, even joined to God the Father. We will attain the perfection mentioned in St. John, where it is said, "It is expedient for you that I go my way, for my Father is greater than I." Jesus Christ does not claim inferiority to His Father in terms of His divine essence, for there is only one God. Instead, He uses this language to help us, like children, understand and gradually ascend to a greater understanding. In this way, He links us to God the Father until we are truly

transformed into His glory, a process we already begin through the gospel. We see dimly now, but one day we will see clearly.

Let us honour this king, appointed over us by God the Father, and recognise that we ought to be His people and even His own body. This understanding should inflame our love for Him. Jesus Christ, exalted above all the heavens, is also the judge of the world. He will call us to account not only for our actions but also for our thoughts. We must walk in His fear and obedience, knowing that when the trumpet sounds on the last day, we will all appear before Him. We must also acknowledge that He "fills all things" in a way that overthrows our enemies and restrains them from harming us. Our enemies may scheme and plot, but they cannot prevail, for Jesus Christ has the upper hand. It is essential for Him to be above all to ensure our victory, or else we would be lost.

Consider the infinite force possessed by the devil and his followers. Without Jesus Christ's dominion, they could wreak havoc on our salvation. However, Jesus Christ "fills all things," demonstrating His power over Satan and his allies. Despite their efforts against the Church, they will never succeed because Jesus Christ holds them in check, as if with His foot on their throat. Thus, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ was granted to Him with full authority, ensuring that His strong and invincible hand will always defend us. He has taken us into His perfection, being exalted above all the heavens.

That is why St. Paul explicitly states that every knee shall bow before Him, both creatures in heaven and creatures on earth, even creatures under the earth. When we hear that angels bow before our Lord Jesus Christ, we should understand that He assigns them to serve us as our protectors, defending us against Satan. Since this responsibility is entrusted to them by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is their head, we can be assured of our salvation. This is how we should interpret this text.

Furthermore, we must live in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ so that we may genuinely experience His presence in us. As I mentioned earlier, He is above all things, through all things, and in all things. Although this was originally spoken of God the Father, we know that Jesus Christ is the means by which God dwells within us. Therefore, let us be His true temples. Since He, the source of all purity, has graciously chosen to dwell in us, we should strive to keep ourselves pure in both body and soul. If we indulge in uncleanness, it is as if we are driving away the Son of God, who cannot coexist with our corruption and filthiness. This does not mean we can be completely free from sin, but we should not delight in it. Instead, we should fight against it and strive to conform ourselves to the purity found in our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as He sanctified Himself on our behalf, we should also be holy, empowered by His Holy Spirit and guided by the gospel's doctrine.

Regarding this feeling of Jesus Christ dwelling within us, we can be confident that He is truly present in us because we know that He has bound the devils and all those who despise His Majesty in subjection. This unique presence is reserved for us because He has chosen us as His temples, demonstrating that the connection He has with humanity applies specifically to us, both in terms of human nature and His Spirit. He does not merely remain human as before; there is more to it. We become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, not in the sense of being created from His substance, but through the power of His Holy Spirit, which allows His body and blood to flow into us. We are filled, not only with food to eat but also with drink to quench our thirst. These blessings are available to us if we consider and accept the benefits offered by our Lord Jesus Christ and do not reject them due to our unbelief.

Let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He grants us a true knowledge of ourselves and our wretchedness. May this awareness humble us to the point

where we approach Him with utmost humility, confessing our dependence on Him for all good things and placing our ultimate trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. We should be so closely united with Him that we cast away our fleshly desires and affections, which hinder our union with God.

We persist in the hope that has been bestowed upon us, eagerly awaiting the day when we depart from this world and enter into the eternal rest that You have procured for us. We pray that it pleases Him to bestow this grace not only upon us but also upon all the people and nations of the earth, and so on.

The Twenty Fifth Sermon, the Fifth on the Fourth Chapter

> "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." - Ephesians 4:11-12

We have observed that although our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended above the heavens and there is a considerable distance between Him and us in terms of His physical absence from the world, He remains ever-present through the power of His Holy Spirit, filling all things. This filling serves the purpose of encouraging every faithful individual to humbly utilise the gifts and grace bestowed by the Lord for the benefit of those He has placed in His church to lead. Conversely, those who have received greater measures of these gifts should not exalt themselves but instead work towards the common good, salvation, and well-being of all God's children.

To summarise, Paul's intention was to convey that Jesus Christ, possessing all spiritual riches, has not distributed them equally among us, but rather in different measures and orders, as demonstrated in His church. Not all are prophets, teachers, or evangelists, which illustrates Christ's deliberate distribution of gifts by measure. Thus, anyone who presumes to possess all that is necessary deceives themselves in two ways. Firstly, no one attains such perfection that they no longer require the guidance of others. Secondly, those who excel in knowledge are obligated to use their gifts for the benefit of others. Conversely, the less skilled and ignorant should not envy those with greater understanding. Instead, they should recognise that God's order serves a purpose and submit to it.

The Prophet's message underscores the importance of allowing ourselves to be filled with spiritual gifts essential for our salvation and not rejecting instruction from fellow human beings. We should not fall into the folly of desiring revelations from heaven to bypass preaching and reading. Rather, all should willingly adhere to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ. Those gifted with knowledge and expertise in the Holy Scriptures should dedicate themselves to serving the entire church, as God has exalted them for this purpose. The less skilled and ignorant should not envy others but accept that God's distribution of gifts benefits their salvation.

God wills that all things be shared, and each member of the body should have their share. Therefore, when St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ appointing apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, he signifies that the preaching of the gospel and the assembly of believers to hear the Holy Scriptures explained is not a human invention but a divine ordinance. Jesus Christ has established it as a law, and it must be upheld without deviation. However, there are some who, out of arrogance, seek to cast off this yoke. They question why they should be taught by their peers when they have access to the Holy Scriptures. They believe that they should draw all their

knowledge from there and see no reason for anyone to be preferred over others in this regard.

This would result in a dreadful disorder within the Church, where no one would willingly submit to be taught or accept a master or teacher unless they were convinced and resolved that this order was not a human invention. Instead, it is a government established for all believers by the Son of God. He desires those with the responsibility of teaching to be seen as sent by Him. Such teachers would rightly tell others that by despising and rebelling against His doctrine, they also despise and rebel against Him and His Father. Therefore, anyone who wishes to be considered a Christian must also be a child of the Church. This emphasises the importance of humility and receptiveness when it comes to receiving the teachings preached to us and remaining perpetual learners in the School of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul also indicates that when we have faithful and diligent teachers who guide us on the path to salvation, it is a sign that our Lord Jesus Christ has not abandoned or forgotten us. He is present with us, watching over our salvation and well-being. Consequently, we should not assume that individuals can independently decide to teach without divine guidance. No one can speak a single word to the glory of Jesus Christ unless it is given to them from above, and the Holy Spirit guides their speech. The Holy Scripture is described as a wisdom that surpasses human understanding, and the natural person cannot fully comprehend it. God must reveal these hidden and lofty matters to us. Therefore, when we witness the Holy Scripture being accurately expounded and applied for our benefit, we can be confident that God's Spirit bears witness to His presence among us. We should learn to receive this excellent gift, acknowledging it as the homage our Lord Jesus Christ demands from us.

This is also why the gospel is referred to as the kingdom of heaven. We understand that we do not accept God as our King or honour our Lord Jesus Christ when He is sent to us if we refuse to be governed by the means He has ordained, such as the preaching of the Gospel. We must obey and receive the Gospel's doctrine without resistance. Those who are entrusted with teaching should faithfully discharge their duty, and the rest should willingly receive what is taught to them. They should allow themselves to be instructed, lest they unwittingly oppose the Son of God. This is how we can continue to grow in knowledge throughout our lives, as will be explained in more detail later.

Now, in addition to this, Paul, by listing the various roles and officers, better illustrates how thoroughly our Lord Jesus Christ has shown Himself committed to the salvation of His own. He has not left anything undone that was necessary and suitable to lead them to the inheritance of salvation.

It is worth noting regarding these officers that Paul mentions, some of them served temporarily, such as the office of apostleship. They were not chosen with the intent of continuing until the end of the world but only to spread the Gospel's doctrine throughout the entire world, even if not everyone obeyed it. This was the special reason why our Lord Jesus Christ ordained the 12 apostles. Later, Paul joined them to preach among the Gentiles, marking the beginning of His kingdom's expansion. However, after the Gospel was sufficiently established, the office of apostleship ceased. Nevertheless, there were companions and fellow helpers who did not hold an equal rank but were commissioned to spread the seed of salvation. Paul refers to them as evangelists or gospels. According to his letter to Timothy, he instructs them to diligently carry out the work of an evangelist.

Now, concerning the office of Prophets, it does not hold the same prominence as it did in the past. God has reduced His gifts due to the world's unfaithfulness. This is not because He is any less generous or lacks

what is necessary for our salvation, but because, regardless of the state of the world, we are unworthy to receive His treasures as abundantly as the early days of the Gospel. Thus, we receive only a small portion of these gifts. However, the prophets served as interpreters of God's will and had a much deeper understanding of the Scriptures than the common teachers. Their role was to instruct.

Regarding the shepherds mentioned by Paul, they are ministers of the word with the ordinary responsibility to teach in a specific location. The same applies to teachers. An example can be found in the Church of Antioch in the 13th chapter of Acts. No one can be a shepherd without being a teacher. Nonetheless, teachers have a distinct responsibility, which is to explain the Scriptures to ensure a proper and sound understanding of them. This way, their power remains and continues in the church. Heresies and false opinions are unable to prevail, and faith remains steadfast and sure. The teachers served this purpose. St. Luke's account shows that the apostles were not bound to any specific location; Jesus Christ commissioned them to preach the Gospel to all creatures. They were to go wherever opportunities arose and doors were opened for preaching the Gospel, without being tied to a particular place. The same applies to evangelists. They travelled worldwide but were appointed to specific places when called.

In a similar manner, Timothy was chosen for a period, and although he primarily served in the role of an evangelist, he was willing to relocate as circumstances required. Titus, too, was assigned to the island of Crete, although he hadn't yet become firmly established there. He moved around as the current situation and needs dictated. Here, we can observe how some misguided individuals, who seek only disorder and disrupt established order, wrongfully claim that one should not remain in one place but should imitate the apostles. This is a misrepresentation of Jesus Christ's intentions, as demonstrated by this passage.

The apostles acted like heralds, proclaiming the gospel everywhere, and they were accompanied by evangelists. Meanwhile, there were also prophets, some of whom were more closely associated with certain places, as God distributed His grace. Nonetheless, prophets were present in every church, as we see in the Epistle to the Corinthians. This emphasises the importance of the gift of prophecy, which should be valued above all other gifts due to its greater benefit and contribution to the edification of the church.

Regarding shepherds, we can see how St. Paul and his companion Barnabas appointed them in various places. They instructed Titus and Timothy to ensure that the churches were provided with shepherds to guide them, preventing disorder. Therefore, ministers and shepherds were appointed by the authority of Jesus Christ and assigned to their respective positions. It is essential to remain in one's assigned role rather than coveting other positions. This is the lesson we should draw from St. Paul's discussion of these various roles.

Now, since we see that the appointment of ministers and shepherds is made by the authority of Jesus Christ, and they are assigned to specific roles, we should understand that each person should remain in their designated place. Just as a man is stationed in a bulwark or tower to guard it when it is in danger, everyone should be content with their place and not covet other positions. This is the essential point to take from St. Paul's discussion of the various roles.

In summary, let us learn that our Lord Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, understood what was necessary for the well-being of His church. He provided the faithful with everything needed so that they would lack nothing and have sufficient and convenient means to draw them towards the kingdom of heaven. Nowadays, we no longer have the office of apostleship, as I mentioned earlier, nor do we have ordinary evangelists. Nevertheless,

Jesus Christ still graciously extends His care and assistance to us. He does so even though His Word is often disregarded, offering us His gifts, although not as abundantly as we might receive if we had the zeal necessary to fully appreciate them.

However, let us not consider our situation the worst simply because we no longer have apostles. It was necessary in the past, given the confusion and disorder caused by the Papacy, for God to raise up men who were not chosen according to the established order of the church. He bestowed upon them His grace, and they served His purpose. But now, in places where the gospel is preached, and order is established, we must return to the earlier point. That is, when God provides us with shepherds who faithfully guide us, and teachers who uphold the purity of doctrine and strengthen us in the true Gospel, helping us to resist sects and errors, we should esteem this grace highly and not grumble against God.

Moreover, it is certain that if the Gospel were received with the reverence and earnestness it deserves, and if God were more bountiful on His side, we would have more good preachers. Unfortunately, we currently have so few good preachers, and many of them are like amateur builders, worse than Nord and less knowledgeable than the monks in the Papal system. They are willing to preach anything, be it Muhammad's Quran or Christ's Gospel, as long as it ensures their livelihood.

Furthermore, we see a group of drunkards who have no more zeal than swine, and they are as silent as mastiffs that never bark. They only open their mouths to confuse Light and Darkness, creating chaos. We must understand that God is executing just vengeance on those who disregard His Gospel. Consider the humility and submission that people show to God despite hearing the doctrine and seeing the Gospel proclaimed as His reign over us. Most people have little inclination towards religion, and even those who appear devoted often treat the Gospel as nothing more than a collection

of ceremonies. They are reluctant to accept any form of restraint, and they cannot bear to be rebuked for their vices.

These hypocrites want the Gospel to be preached but only under certain conditions, as if they were willing to make a deal with Jesus Christ. Yet, their pretense cannot hide the fact that they are shameless, and the world can see their true nature. It is a sad reality that one can find more religion and fear of God among the unconverted than among those in places where the Gospel is preached. The worst of it all is that some of these wicked individuals occupy positions of authority and truth. Some are drunkards, others are involved in immoral activities, and some even blaspheme. In short, there is a shocking level of wickedness among them.

Since we know this, let us humble ourselves and acknowledge the ingratitude and rebellion within us as the cause of all the disorder we witness. Regardless of our own circumstances, if our Lord continues to be gracious enough to have His doctrine preached to us, it is an assurance and infallible sign that He is near, working for our salvation by calling us to Him. We should not seek revelations from heaven or wander in search of signs, for the Word is already in our hearts and mouths. What more could we ask for? Who can ascend above the clouds or descend into the depths? Let us firmly believe that God offers Himself to us through the preaching of the Gospel, and we need not look elsewhere.

When the Word is preached to us, we have the privilege of hearing God's call and experiencing His open arms, as if we were in His very presence. We should remember that God has sent us preachers and teachers as His instruments, and through them, He calls us to Himself. We need not seek extraordinary signs when we have the Word of God readily available to us. Therefore, let those to whom God has given more knowledge not exalt themselves, but consider how they can serve the greater good of the entire

body. They should not hoard their gifts but use them to glorify God and help those in need.

It is important to understand that the use of these gifts is a shared responsibility. Those who possess knowledge should not keep it locked away like a treasure but share it with those who lack understanding. They must recognize that God has entrusted them with these gifts but intends for them to benefit the entire community. Therefore, they should not envy others whom God has chosen to honour in different ways. Instead, each one should know their own place and degree and avoid contention with God's ordained order within the church. We should be assured that the structure and order established in the church are based on the authority of the Son of God and should not be tampered with by the whims of those who seek to disrupt it.

There are those who consider the preaching of the Gospel to be unnecessary, thinking it is for children, believing that they have the Holy Spirit at their disposal to reveal things from Heaven to them at any moment. However, it is clear that the devil has deceived them with such arrogance, and people need to realize that he would achieve his goal if the means of our salvation were abolished. Just as Paul says, the preaching of the Gospel serves to perfect the church and lead us to the kingdom of heaven. Conversely, when there is no longer any doctrine or shepherding, the devil will undoubtedly gain control over us, leading to our dispersion and inevitable ruin.

Therefore, recognizing that this order is not of human origin, we should willingly submit ourselves to it. All of us, both great and small, should accept God's guidance through this means, as it has pleased Him to establish it. Additionally, we can see how God's children are referred to as the children of the church. St. Paul emphasizes that our Lord Jesus will reign over us on the condition that His Word is always in our mouths. He

does not suggest that angels will come to reveal God's will to us, but rather, we are to understand God's will through those appointed to convey it to us.

Just as during the time of the law, it was said that priests were God's messengers, and people were expected to seek guidance from them, similarly today, God does not want us to wander aimlessly with our own opinions. He directs us to the readily available source, making His Word accessible to us. If a person were to seek the hidden source of a fountain, buried deep within the earth, and refuse to drink until they found it, people would consider them mad and irrational. God, in His wisdom, has made His Word easily accessible to us and does not require us to go to great lengths to receive it. He has provided us with this wellspring, bringing His Word to us as if through conduits. We need only open our mouths to receive it, much like people come to draw water from continuous, abundant conduits.

Therefore, since God has ordained men as the instruments of His Holy Spirit to bring His Word to us, let us adhere to this ordained means. If we desire to be taught by God, let us accept the doctrine preached to us by human agents. This is what we must remember from this text so that we do not foolishly question why God has not given us a particular grace or gift or why He has chosen to use such means. We should be content with God's ordinance, recognizing that delving into these matters will only lead to our embarrassment, for true wisdom lies solely in His divine will.

Also, let us observe what is immediately stated in this text, namely, that it is God's will that there should be an order of ministry or service. It is as if to say that God could indeed bring us to perfection by Himself, without any other means or assistance, yet He chooses to be served by men and appoints them to various roles. In doing so, He makes these ministers the means through which His goodness and the praise of our salvation come to us. Therefore, it is incumbent upon men to submit to this divine arrangement.

Some might find it peculiar that instead of speaking solely about the gifts of the Holy Ghost, Paul leads us to offices. He initiated this discussion by explaining how our Lord Jesus Christ gives gifts according to what He deems suitable for us, providing these gifts in various ways to fully equip us. To reinforce this point, Paul mentions the existence of apostles, shepherds, teachers, and evangelists. It might appear as though he is veering off track from his initial discussion. However, we should note, as we see more extensively in the first Corinthians, that our Lord Jesus Christ has established and maintained the order we have already discussed in His church. His intention is that there should be shepherds, prophets, and teachers. He promptly equips them with what is necessary for the execution of their duties. He does not operate as humans do. In our case, we can appoint one person as a magistrate and another as a preacher. Yet, we cannot provide them with the essential qualities for their respective roles. We cannot transform a person into someone entirely new once they have been elevated to a position of honour; they remain fundamentally the same. Similarly, when selecting shepherds, we may choose a person who ultimately proves unsuitable, as we cannot bestow upon them the qualifications they require. However, when individuals are chosen by God Himself, and they yield to His divine will entirely, other gifts are added to their responsibilities.

When our Lord Jesus chose His apostles, He selected simple fishermen and those who were not highly esteemed. Nevertheless, He effectively used them for the proclamation of His gospel, initially as heralds to announce the arrival of the King. But when He intended to send them forth to perform their duties, He sent them the Holy Spirit, indicating, as He does in many other passages, that everything necessary for the well-being of the church must come as a free gift from Him. This is because it is well understood that all things originate from Him, with the ultimate purpose of giving Him all praise. Therefore, it is no wonder that, in speaking of the diversity of gifts and their allocation, Paul purposefully emphasises that God bestows

particular gifts for specific roles. It is as if to say that God has a reason for not granting the same gifts to everyone. He does not desire every individual to be a shepherd, prophet, teacher, apostle, or evangelist. He calls those He chooses, emphasising the importance of humility. Therefore, if we are willing to submit to Him, we should not hesitate to receive our authority and value from Him, rooted in His divine ordinance.

God sometimes leads certain individuals to a private life, yet simultaneously chooses others to proclaim His Word. Therefore, individuals must accept their roles as directed by Him.

Furthermore, let us observe that if men proceed with a fear of God in their elections and seek to obey Him, He will surely demonstrate through their outcomes that those He has called to teach and entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding the flock will not lack His empowerment. Experience bears this out, and it is attested to us that if we gather in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, truly and sincerely, He will be in our midst. We should keep this in mind. Nevertheless, we see that the papacy has manipulated and shaped people to their own ends, causing them to deviate completely from the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ and the manner in which the church was governed in apostolic times.

Let's revisit the main point being discussed here. The intention is to lead us to the previously mentioned unity. Therefore, we should be of one mind, joining together as brethren and aiming at a common goal, all under the leadership of one head who unites us. There should be no envy, ill will, factions, or anything else that may divide us. To bring about this unity, it is stated that there is only one God and one Lord to whom all authority is given, one baptism, and one faith. We are all called to one inheritance. Building on this, it is added that for the sake of confirming this unity, Jesus Christ has ordained that one man should teach the rest, and the congregation should listen to him. With this arrangement, both the speaker and the

listeners should share the same faith. As not all of us can be apostles, teachers, and prophets, He has selected some to occupy these roles. The purpose is to bring us to the aforementioned unity and acknowledge Jesus Christ as our head, with all of us gathered under Him. This is what the Apostle Paul is emphasising.

Now, if there had been any chief or supreme authority designated by God in this world, the bishop who held it should have had superiority over the entire church, and his commission should have extended so far that his sovereignty would have been established everywhere. Surely, St. Paul would not have overlooked this, or else, if he had, it would have been a grave omission inspired by the Holy Ghost. He would not have omitted the principal and most convenient point of his message. Therefore, if there were nothing else, this text alone would suffice to refute the audacity of those who claim that there must be a supreme head in this world, arguing that because Jesus Christ has left this world, there must be a vicar. However, it is certain that St. Paul meant to convey what we have seen in other texts, which is that St. Peter's apostleship did not extend to us, for he was appointed specifically to the Jews, as is stated in Galatians 2.

In any case, we see here the continuous order that we must maintain and adhere to if we wish to be subject to our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not involve having a pope, but rather, each church should have its own shepherds and teachers according to their needs, the number of people, and the requirements of the place. This ensures that when we are united in one body as a church, we may have lawful governance. It is impossible for us to do otherwise due to our immaturity and the weakness of our faith. Therefore, it is necessary for us to accept the remedy provided by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may submit ourselves to His word and authority.

This is the essence of what we must emphasize in our resistance. Paul proceeds to highlight the immeasurable benefits and fruits that arise from

maintaining this order. As mentioned earlier, some individuals are so proud that they desire to lord over others. Hence, nothing is better than understanding that God, in His wisdom, has established this order of governance, appointing shepherds to teach us. It is contrary to our own salvation when we stubbornly resist and reject what God has ordained for our well-being.

Truly, if there were nothing else to consider but the fact that God has willed it, then we should willingly submit to His commandments. However, our hearts often struggle to do so unless we can clearly see that it is for our own benefit. God's intent is not only to humble us but also to elevate us by establishing this order. Therefore, it is not sufficient to merely obey God's commands or do so reluctantly. We must eagerly embrace them, knowing that they are for our own good.

Now that we understand that this order is particularly essential for our salvation, we should wholeheartedly commit ourselves to it. Otherwise, our ingratitude will be even more reprehensible when we reject what God offers us, not primarily for His sake but for our own benefit. This is what St. Paul intended to convey when he spoke of the preaching of the gospel and the appointment of individuals for this purpose—to bind us together and eliminate dissension.

Furthermore, St. Paul also emphasizes that anyone who rejects common order and strives to be excessively spiritual, as if they are detached from earthly concerns, is in fact, separating themselves from the body of the church and, in doing so, renouncing God. Such individuals should be avoided and shunned like deadly plagues because they sow discord in the church. No matter how much we desire unity, all our efforts will be in vain if we do not adhere to the principles outlined here. Our Lord Jesus intended to unite us firmly within His own body.

Therefore, if any man claims that he will withdraw himself from the obedience of the church, it is akin to severing the sinews of a body. It's like saying you love someone but then cutting their sinews everywhere, causing the entire body to become disjointed, dismembered, and ultimately collapsing into chaos. This analogy holds true for us as well because we are meant to be united, and God has provided for this unity by giving us prophets, teachers, shepherds, and evangelists. Now, if we reject them, what else can be said except that we intend to break apart the unity that our Lord has ordained among us? Indeed, Paul clearly shows us that all who do not submit themselves to the doctrine of the gospel and show reverence to the ministers are deadly enemies of God's people, seeking their own destruction. Therefore, we should avoid them like wolves because they are utterly intolerable, causing the downfall of the church, despising God's well-ordered affairs, and forsaking all that is good.

Furthermore, this edification or building up of the Body of Christ is immediately followed by St. Paul's declaration. This underscores the importance of those who refuse to submit to spiritual authority, which our Lord Jesus has permitted. The Body of our Lord Jesus must be precious to us. Indeed, it would have sufficed if he had said "the church," but by using this honourable title, St. Paul conveys that it would be treacherous for us to attempt to tear the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ apart. Without building it up, it cannot be perfected or maintained in good condition. This building up can only occur through the preaching of God's Word. So, if we desire that God be honoured and served, that our Lord may peacefully rule among us, if we wish to be His people, to live under His protection, to be built up in Him, joined to Him, and to continue in Him until the end, in short, if we desire our salvation, then we must become humble learners, receiving the doctrine of the gospel and listening to the shepherds as if Jesus Christ Himself were speaking to us. We must be confident that He approves of our obedience and faith in listening to mortal men whom He has appointed.

Therefore, let us demonstrate our desire for God's honour, as well as our concern for our own salvation and the well-being and edification of the church. This will happen when all of us, regardless of our status, agree that Jesus Christ should have instruments through which to speak to us and draw us closer to Him. If we follow this order, He will surely bless us, and we will have reason to glorify Him. We will see that it has always been His desire to secure the salvation of our souls and that He is always present with us, working for our ultimate benefit. Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He makes us feel them deeply. May we be brought low and seek nothing but to be lifted up by Him. May our Lord Jesus have such preeminence over us that we honour Him as He deserves. Let us be under His care, guided by His Holy Spirit, so that His Word may prosper more and more within us and strengthen us. May He bear with our weaknesses and never cease to claim us as His own as long as we live in this world, until we are all gathered into His kingdom. We pray for His grace not only for ourselves but for all.

The Twenty Sixth Sermon, the Sixth on the Fourth Chapter

> "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the

sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." - Ephesians 4:11-14

We have seen this morning how God, considering our frailty, has shown His mercy to us by appointing that we should be taught by fellow human beings like ourselves. He also made it clear that He had in mind what would be most suitable for His servants. When He said that He would always send a prophet in Israel from among the people, He intended to convey that we need not search far for Him; He will find a way to be closely present among us. Thus, when the gospel is preached, God's condescension to our limitations is as if He came down to us in person. Therefore, we should not despise the order that He has established for us. Our unfaithfulness would be even more reprehensible if we fail to acknowledge how greatly He loves us and accommodates us according to our limited capacity. While we may not possess the excellent abilities of angels, God provides us with the means necessary for our condition.

Furthermore, let it be known that this provision is not temporary; we must continue in it throughout our entire lives. For if He had not added this, one might argue that we should conform to God's rule for a while, much like sending children to school but not expecting them to spend their entire lives there. It might seem that the previous instructions were intended only for a brief period, and once we have been trained for a year or two, it should be sufficient, and everyone should be sufficiently learned. However, we must understand that as long as we are in this world, we must continue to profit from God's teaching. Our ears must be continually exposed to His Word to restrain us on one side and to strengthen and advance us on the other. Even if we had the ability to learn all that is necessary for our salvation in two or three years, our fickle nature would lead us astray if not held in check. Therefore, God's grace ensures that His Word is preached to us until our dying day, securing our faith and steadfastness.

Moreover, there is an even greater necessity, as those who consider themselves advanced will find that they are still far from the goal they pursue. Therefore, we must daily seek to grow stronger and have the light of our faith increase, just as the daylight grows brighter and reaches its zenith. We must continue to progress until the Sun of Righteousness appears to us. Some may be so stubborn that they refuse to believe this, content with their present knowledge. You will find many who are proud and presumptuous, thinking they surpass even the greatest doctors in the world because they have mastered a few Latin words. Similarly, those who have just begun studying a subject often believe they have already reached perfection, even though they have only scratched the surface. Such people are bolder and more reckless than those who have made substantial progress.

Thus, it is essential to understand that those who diligently continue their education in God's school will find themselves ahead after ten or twenty years. Regardless of how the world sees it, we must heed the apostle's words that God does not intend for us to be instructed in the Gospel for only two or three years; we must persist in it. Even if we live for a hundred years or more in this world, we must remain students, realizing that we are still far from perfection and must continue moving forward. Each of us must motivate ourselves, and God must graciously continue teaching us without interruption so that we may never grow weary. When we have learned a lesson that benefits us, we should not assume that it is already firmly imprinted in our hearts or well-known to us. Even when we have learned one, two, or three lessons, we still need much more. No one is so well-prepared that they do not require further instruction. In short, we must firmly understand that God has ordained this system in His church so that the gospel may be preached. As long as we are on this earthly journey, we should continually return to the school where God teaches us because we walk by faith, not by sight.

In his show, we do not yet have the capacity to behold God's glory, as St. John also states in his first epistle. We shall not see Him as He is until we are all made holy, transfigured, and made like unto God. As St. Paul says elsewhere, we currently see only in part and know only in part because we walk in faith. The source of faith, its nourishment, and its growth come through the word of God, especially when we have preaching and diligently seek edification through it. This is the initial point where our faith begins, and it is the means by which it continues to develop and increase until it is thoroughly perfected.

For this reason, John addressed both old men and young men, including those in the prime of their age, urging them all to submit to the obedience of the gospel. To the old men, he said, "Come, hear Him who was before all time," referring to our Lord Jesus Christ. To the young men and little children, he advised, "Learn to know that you have a Father in heaven," and to the stronger, he said, "Know your strength and life." In short, he showed us that God's children must be humble enough to submit themselves to instruction and teaching from day to day and from year to year. They should recognize that they have not yet reached the desired goal. He added that this should continue until we are all united in the unity of faith.

Because we might easily stray and no bridle could hold us back, as I mentioned earlier, St. Paul reminds us that we have not yet reached the point that these arrogant individuals, puffed up with their vain self-importance, believe they have already attained. St. Paul says, "Are you not there yet?" While it is true that we should strive for unity, as I have already mentioned, for without harmony, there can be no church or religion among us, and God is not honored or served. Nevertheless, we continue to progress towards this unity, just as we do with all other virtues. As long as we live in this world, we always advance further and further. Life in this world is akin to a race or a path appointed by God.

When people speak to us about the unity of faith, it is not to suggest that Christians should hold differing and opposing opinions while they are in the process of learning and growing. Rather, it is to convey that our faith cannot truly be one until it is firmly established. There will always be imperfections and weaknesses, and there will always be clouds of ignorance. Therefore, we must continue to strive toward the goal set before us.

Furthermore, we must take note of what is crucial for us concerning the knowledge of the Son of God. In this, He shows us the essence of our faith, which is not about wavering or uncertainty but about comprehending who Jesus Christ is, understanding His power, and recognizing the benefits He brings with Him. This is the true perfection of faith, a notable point indeed. We can observe how the world, in its misery, has been led astray in the past and continues to be misled by the Pope. They often engage in devoutness, torment themselves with great effort, and tirelessly inquire about various matters, filled with questions. Yet, they remain unfulfilled, just as Paul described those who are always learning but never gaining wisdom. I am speaking of these hypocrites who despise the simplicity of the gospel and turn away from Jesus Christ to follow their own foolish inventions. They engage in speculations and make great efforts, but they will never truly gain wisdom.

Since all the treasures of wisdom and understanding are stored in Jesus Christ, we must fix our gaze upon Him. In Him alone will we find the entire substance of our salvation. When we desire to know what Jesus Christ, given to us by God the Father, has accomplished through His death and passion to reconcile us, when we wish to understand that He alone is the source of our righteousness, and when we recognize that we are cleansed from all impurities by His blood, that He has satisfied all our debts, that He has sanctified us with His Holy Spirit for God's service, and that He is our advocate, making us find favor in our prayers and supplications—once we

understand all this, we can dismiss all the knowledge that others claim to possess, knowledge they have imagined without certainty. For this reason, Paul explicitly mentions the knowledge of the Son of God here, to better define the word "faith." This term is frequently used, and everyone claims to believe in it. However, when asked, those who boast of themselves as pillars of the church and devout Catholics may stumble when questioned about the essence of faith. They may say it's about believing in God, but even the Turks and pagans say the same. Yet, despite this, they condemn the Turks because they argue that the Turks don't truly know what it means to believe. The same can be said of the Papists. How do we differ from them? We, who call ourselves Christians, understand that God has sent us Jesus Christ to elevate us. We are certain that because He is our Father, He will not hold our sins against us but will accept us into His favor through His own boundless goodness. He counts us as righteous when we humble ourselves through genuine repentance and place our trust in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that there is nothing in us except our own wretchedness. You can see, then, that our Lord Jesus Christ is the true target or aim we set our sights on. If a person were to use a longbow, crossbow, or gun and had no target before them, but simply discharged their weapon at random...

Now, this way or that way, what a shooting it is! Similarly, the situation is such for those who do not aim at our Lord Jesus Christ. They only wander and entangle themselves in many troubles. We would constantly be at risk of being misled and deceived by people if we did not know Jesus Christ and firmly establish our entire faith in Him. We must be confident that He is the essence of our faith. Furthermore, I want to emphasise that this is for the age of perfection and our true fulfilment. As I mentioned earlier, we must understand that as long as we live in this world, we must continue to grow and progress because we are aware of the many imperfections within us, and we have not yet reached our full potential.

However, it should not be assumed that we remain as little children forever, as Paul will add later. Here he sets out three stages of age. First, there is infancy and childhood. Second, there are the years beyond twelve, before discretion and self-governance have fully developed, during which time we must continue to learn and grow. Finally, when a person reaches the age of forty, they are considered to be in their prime. By that age, they should have acquired some proficiency in both body and mind, enabling them to rest. This does not mean we should not continue to learn even in our later years, but this is how St. Paul presents it.

First, he states that we must listen to the gospel until we reach full maturity. But when is that? It is at our safety in death. We must not measure our years as men do, for after a person has passed fifty, it may appear that their senses and intelligence are declining. However, St. Paul says that we will never reach full maturity until we are freed from this physical body. Therefore, the spiritual maturity of Christians is attained when they depart from this world.

But let us examine our current state. Since we began to progress in the Gospel, we are like half-grown children. Some may be past fifteen or even twenty years of age, yet they do not see the need to continue learning daily. They still require learning and are aware that they have not reached the final step. They have not acquired a stable and well-informed judgment as required. It may happen that a twenty-year-old has mastered all the sciences he was taught, but he is still immature. He lacks the ability to apply this knowledge because he is not yet fully developed. For even at that age, he is still like green corn or unripe grapes in a vineyard.

Therefore, Paul uses this analogy to convey that as long as Christians are alive, even if they are eighty or ninety years old, they must continue to be like children who willingly submit to being governed because they know they lack full discretion. Yet, Paul tells us not to be like infants who have no understanding, unable to distinguish between good and evil. Instead, we

must bear in mind that even if we have seen and experienced much in the world, and have travelled extensively and engaged in numerous activities, we are not so wise that we have nothing left to learn. The issue here pertains to God's wisdom, which surpasses all human intellect. We may receive much commendation from the world and believe ourselves to be exceedingly wise, yet we only possess partial knowledge. Therefore, we must not deceive ourselves with overconfidence, thinking ourselves wise enough. I am speaking about those who are capable of teaching others. Even they must continue learning like the rest. Those who speak must also receive instruction.

In summary, we must firmly believe that if we do not progress personally, we regress. It is crucial to remain vigilant and avoid complacency, thinking there is nothing more to learn. We must acknowledge that our life is like a journey, and we should continue to advance and gain ground, just as travellers progress on their journey. We should strive for improvement, gaining more knowledge and understanding with each passing day, whether it involves deepening our understanding of what we thought we already knew or learning entirely new concepts from others. Older individuals are diligent in accumulating wealth as they approach their death, fearing their weakness and dependence on others. We, on the other hand, should feel great shame if we do not amass a wealth of God's Word in our old age, considering the continued presence of weakness and sin within us.

If we do not strive to be continually enlightened until the day of the Son of Righteousness, our Lord Jesus Christ, shines upon us like a high noon, we will remain in ignorance. Therefore, it is essential to humble ourselves and avoid excessive self-confidence. We should walk our path with caution, recognizing that we have not reached the end of our journey. This is why St. Paul stated that he did not look back at what he had already accomplished but focused on what remained. Despite his significant achievements and

spiritual experiences, such as being caught up to the third heaven and witnessing divine secrets, he pressed on toward his goal.

Now, what should we do, considering that we are still in the early stages of learning? We should acknowledge that we require new and daily instruction until we are completely free from the weaknesses of our flesh, which will only happen after we depart from this world. We must allow ourselves to be guided and governed like teachable and humble young people, accepting good counsel as necessary. St. Paul attributes this full maturity to our Lord Jesus Christ, implying that we delude ourselves with unfounded self-assurance when we rely solely on our own understanding. Once we truly know Jesus Christ, we will recognize our many imperfections.

Jesus Christ is referred to as the Wisdom of God, His eternal Word, and His image so that we may learn from Him and see God's glory in His person, which would otherwise be invisible to us. However, can we truly comprehend God's infinite wisdom or fully grasp His glory? We fall far short of such understanding. Therefore, we should avoid the foolish presumption that we know more than we do and instead look to our Lord Jesus Christ. Many people become overly self-assured, thinking that they can achieve faith on their own. St. Paul reminds us that faith is a gift from God, and our role is to diligently engage with His Word, attend sermons, read, and listen to good teachings to strengthen our faith. However, we should not rely on our own wisdom, for our Lord Jesus Christ must work in us through His Holy Spirit.

Therefore, let us remain humble and become learners in God's school. This humility involves recognizing that everything we have comes from God. On the other hand, St. Paul warns against being like children who are easily swayed by various doctrines or tossed about like chaff in the wind. We must not be deceived by worldly influences. St. Paul divides our spiritual growth

into three stages. The first is childhood, before we receive any instruction, when we are like ignorant beings without the ability to discern God's truth.

There are many such children in the world, even at the age of three or four school years. When St. Paul speaks of children, he uses a metaphor and does not refer to the counting of days, months, or years. His meaning is that those who waver and are as unstable as a boat tossed upon water are like little children. It is true that the Scripture sometimes uses the term "child" in a different sense. For example, when St. Peter exhorts us to be like newborn babes, desiring the milk of soundness and putting away all malice. Our Lord Jesus also encourages us to be like babes, meaning that we should not be puffed up with presumption and pride, making no high estimation of ourselves and not being troubled by the lusts that trouble us.

In this sense, it is good to be like babes or little children. However, in another sense, St. Paul warns against being babes in understanding, which means being so doubtful and wavering that one is sure of nothing. Many people in the world remain in such ignorance and stubbornness. The world is filled with such babes who resist settling in God's truth and easily follow others' opinions. When asked about the gospel, some may respond that it must be good because God is its author. However, they are unable to provide a reasoned explanation of their faith, revealing their lack of understanding. They persist in their ignorance and prefer to remain as little babes.

Others may appear knowledgeable and capable of giving an account of their faith, but when faced with challenges or heresies, they become perplexed. They quickly abandon their previously held beliefs and are easily swayed. This shows that they have not put in the effort to progress and become more steadfast in their faith.

urthermore, besides likening men to babes, St. Paul presents another similitude, saying that such individuals are like reeds that sway with every

wind or like a boat adrift upon the waves of the sea. This may not apply directly to little babes, but St. Paul's intention is to highlight the wretched state of those who are not firmly grounded in the Gospel. There is no greater wretchedness than being tossed and wavering at every wind, having no stability in matters concerning our salvation. If we were under constant threat, living in fear and trembling every minute of the day, we might prefer to die quickly rather than endure such uncertainty. However, our eternal souls are at stake, and we cannot afford to be so unstable.

St. Paul meant to address our slothfulness and recklessness and motivate us to action. He says that we must not be susceptible to the deceit of men. He uses a term related to dice playing, which is known for its lack of faithfulness and trustworthiness. Dice games are notorious for being deceptive, with players often resorting to cunning tactics to deceive their opponents. Even little children, not in the sense of infants but young individuals who act prematurely as adults, tend to become indignant when someone prevents them from being deceived. If all games were allowed without restraint, there would be numerous victims everywhere. Young heirs, barely a dozen years old, would be exploited and tricked, losing their possessions.

Therefore, when St. Paul speaks of the steadfastness of faith in the gospel, he employs comparisons from everyday life and common experiences. He emphasises that without a well-established faith, a determined commitment to walk in God's truth until the end, and an unwavering stance, we are like little children susceptible to deception and exploitation. We will encounter deceivers and swindlers who will plunder us without our awareness, leaving us astonished at our impoverishment. St. Paul's point is to remind us of the need for vigilance and discernment because when we let our guard down, we become vulnerable. In times of peace, we tend to relax, party, and neglect our responsibilities. However, when danger threatens, we understand the importance of remaining vigilant and guarding ourselves.

St. Paul tells us that there will always be threats and attempts to deceive us. We live in a world with a variety of harmful influences. There will always be wicked company seeking to undermine our faith. There will be scoffers, heathens, and others who desire chaos and will try to spread their poison and heresies to corrupt and infect people. In short, the devil employs countless strategies to deceive us, and people are often eager participants in these deceptions.

There are enough proponents of false beliefs who willingly offer themselves, finding contentment in such a course. As Paul tells us, if we do not make a determined effort to advance in God's Word, we will surely be ensnared, tossed to and fro, and carried away in every direction like children. Without careful consideration, even those among us who seem the most grounded will stumble and, within a step or two, fall disastrously. It is not only here in Scripture that we are warned not to remain as little children in understanding. We can observe that the people of the Jews received this admonition as well. Isaiah, for instance, reproved them, saying that they behaved like perpetual infants still in their ABCs, trapped in their brutishness. Despite having been reminded countless times, they always needed to be taught the basics repeatedly.

The Prophet condemned them, especially in the context of God's doctrine. He said that they acted like little children and behaved like beasts in this regard. In worldly matters, they might be crafty, but when it came to matters of salvation, they understood nothing. The Lord warned that He would punish those who scorned being taught in His school. Therefore, let us strive to reach spiritual maturity. While we may not attain perfection in this world, we should not remain as complete novices or unlearned. We should demonstrate that God's gracious gift of His Word to us has not been in vain.

Furthermore, we must realize that our lack of preparedness against the devil's tricks is our own fault. By diligently seeking growth in the Gospel and God's Word, we can equip ourselves with the necessary armour and weaponry to fend off the devil's deceptions and falsehoods. This is the way to understand and resist Satan's schemes and to repel his attacks. Having the Word of God will serve as our sword, shield, and helmet, as we shall see in the sixth chapter. In short, we will be well-equipped to withstand assaults. Therefore, if we find ourselves wavering and easily influenced, we must recognise that it is a result of our own negligence. Such feeble-mindedness, if it continues, may lead to God's just punishment, as Moses warned in Deuteronomy 13. When false prophets arise and the people heed them, it signifies a lack of love for God and a failure to remain steadfast in His fear. If we are prone to being light-headed, we must arm ourselves with these exhortations from saints like Paul. When heresy emerges, we should understand that it serves as a trial for those who are truly devoted. Let us be aware that our inconsistency in God's Word and our faith faltering in the face of temptation are due to our own carelessness. This should motivate us not only to seek sustenance through God's Word but also to resist Satan and his allies, defending ourselves against all assaults that may come our way.

As our Lord pairs His sacraments with His Word, let us derive benefit from them together. With the Holy Supper approaching next Sunday, let us recognise it as our spiritual armour, designed to fortify us against Satan. It serves as a further strengthening of us after we have been instructed in God's Word. Therefore, we must not, through our ungratefulness and frivolity, let the means provided by God go to waste. Instead, let us heed St. Paul's counsel.

On the other hand, we should acknowledge our own weakness and the need for divine assistance. God's coming to us in this manner is an invitation for us to draw closer to Him and offer thanks for His kindness. Let us make an effort to complement the Word with the sacraments and the sacraments with

the Word. This should inspire us to turn to our Guardian, who will aid us on the path of salvation. In the end, it should become evident that our journey has not been in vain, and our expectations have not been disappointed.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, confess our sins, and pray for the grace to deeply feel our faults, leading us to repentance. May we not only be sorry for our transgressions but also resist the sinful desires of our flesh, which hinder our obedience to God's Word and the governance of our lives accordingly. Recognising that the path to both of these goals involves profiting from His Word, may God grant us the continual benefit of His Word, enabling us to use it wisely and strive for growth in it.

May He work within us through His Holy Spirit, so that His Word takes root in us, bearing fruit in our lives until the end. May we be so firmly grounded in Him that our love and fear of Him continue to grow within us. Ultimately, may He gather us into His inheritance. May this grace be extended not only to us but also to all people and nations on Earth.

The Twenty Seventh Sermon, the Seventh on the Fourth Chapter

> "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,

maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." - Ephesians 4:15-16

We have learned here that we must maintain the order God has established among us in order to make progress in God's school throughout our lives. Since God has not ordained anything superfluous, we must conclude that we will never achieve perfect learning while we live in this world. We will always need to continue learning, and we will not reach our destination until the end of our lives.

Recognizing that we have only scratched the surface of what we must attain and that our faith will always be somewhat weak, we should strive all the more to be strengthened and draw closer to God. In doing so, we will not resemble little children who waver and are swayed by every wind, lacking stability in their faith. By diligently seeking to learn from God's Word, we will be equipped to withstand the tricks of Satan and the deceit of wicked individuals.

Even though God may not bring us to perfection instantly, allowing us to remain somewhat feeble, we will always have a good remedy if we receive what He offers us and apply it wisely. The means to achieve this, as shown here, is to follow the truth and love one another. St. Paul seems to suggest that the knowledge of God and love for our neighbors should not be separated. He emphasizes this because our unity would not be as effective without Jesus Christ as the bond of our harmony, and it is grounded in God's Word.

St. Paul's intention here is to differentiate between us and the heathens and unbelievers. All would agree that chaos ensues among people when they behave like dogs and cats. Throughout history, across nations and among various cultures, it has been considered a fundamental principle that unity and agreement among people are valuable. Even those who did not

understand true religion recognized the benefits of harmony and cooperation, although they often lacked a solid foundation for it.

Therefore, St. Paul begins with God's truth, suggesting that we should not only unite among ourselves but also let God lead us. We must obey Him and gather under Him, making Him our ruler. We must choose to stand together against the whole world rather than turning away from Him. The key point in this text is that God doesn't want us to come together without a purpose. He desires us to agree in worship and service to Him and to place our complete trust in His infinite goodness. Jesus Christ should be our head, and we should all be members of His Body through the power of faith.

Once we understand that we have a heavenly Father who has adopted us as His children and that Jesus Christ has taken on our flesh and substance, making us one with Him, we should be motivated to love one another, care for each other's salvation, and help one another to the best of our abilities, as granted by God. As it is said in the Psalm, the friendship of brothers is precious, and the Prophet likens it to the anointing oil poured upon the priests. This illustrates that living in peace and harmony with one another is a blessed thing.

The brotherhood that we intend to form must be consecrated and dedicated to God's name. Just as the anointing oil was poured over Aaron and his successors, it should symbolize that our unity is sanctioned by God. Otherwise, our fellowship may exist, but it will be cursed, and its ultimate end will only lead to confusion.

To lead a good life, we must ensure that our unity is grounded in truth. This warning is especially relevant today, as critics often accuse us of causing division and unrest in the world due to our efforts to seek truth and revive faith. In the past, there was no debate as everyone simply accepted the status quo. Now, to drive the devil out of his possession, we must diligently seek and follow the truth.

Unbelievers often resist God and cannot tolerate the truth. Their stubbornness and opposition to the truth have led to conflicts and religious wars. We desire that everyone should submit to God's Word and unify in faith. We seek a true unity based on the simplicity of the gospel. However, the papacy opposes these ideas and criticizes us. Our doctrine only aims to have unity in worship and following God's word while eliminating corruption in His service.

On the other hand, the papists cling to their errors and abominations, unwilling to give preeminence to Jesus Christ. They have stripped Jesus of His officers and distorted His saints, treating them as advocates who can obtain favor with God through their merits. Their doctrine is riddled with errors and superstitions, and they even oppose God Himself, attempting to eradicate the memory of Jesus Christ through violence and persecution.

What should we do in this case? There is no compromise with them, except by renouncing God's truth. We know the order taught to us here by the Holy Ghost. St. Paul could have simply said, "Agree, my friends," but he foresaw that this would be insufficient and that his doctrine could be misinterpreted. Therefore, he says, "Let us be united in the truth." We should be willing to forsake all worldly friendships and incur the anger of unbelievers and rebels against God rather than deviate one inch from the truth.

If we aim to have a harmonious agreement in the truth, none of us should be self-centered. Instead, we should seek the welfare and salvation of our neighbours. This is the harmony that should exist among us. We must be cautious about compromising with God's enemies, striving not to please them. While it is important to seek peace and unity with all people as much as possible, God's truth must always be upheld, and we must value it more than anything in the world. Those who seek to please creatures while turning away from God's truth will ultimately find themselves unhappy.

Therefore, let us remain steadfastly loyal to our God, placing ourselves under His yoke and not shrinking away in any way. Even if there is no one else to stand with us, we should defy the whole world if necessary. On the other hand, if we can win the world over to obedience and faith, we must make every effort to do so, avoiding the two extremes of offending God to gain favour with men and being proud and self-reliant, caring only for ourselves.

We must learn to combine these two inseparable aspects: yielding to God through obedience and faith, adhering to the pure simplicity of His Word, and at the same time, not despising our neighbours but striving to win them over to submit quietly to God. Through the Holy Spirit reigning in our hearts, both the great and the small among us can speak with one voice and share the knowledge that God is the author of our salvation and has adopted us into His household. This unity is essential because He is the God of peace.

Even if we are compelled to contend with the whole world, let us take comfort in knowing that the angels of heaven are our companions in cleaving to God. In these times, should we separate ourselves from the multitude of people who rely on their wealth, status, wisdom, and more? No, let us regard all of these worldly things as insignificant. Despite being called schismatics, we should consider ourselves content knowing that the angels of heaven, the holy patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the martyrs stand in agreement with us. God's chosen people throughout history are sufficient company. We can dismiss any accusations when we possess God's truth and the assurance that we are His children. God cannot deny Himself, and He will always be with His church, as long as she clings to His Word.

In the meantime, let us not forget to seek peace to the best of our abilities, as mentioned in the text from Romans that I cited earlier.

Therefore, let us not willfully separate ourselves from the world, but let us extend our arms to welcome all those who willingly submit to God's obedience. We should strive for unity and work towards it. The reason St. Paul tells us here that faith and obedience to God should not inflate our hearts with pride, causing us to reject others and become self-absorbed, is that we should follow the example of our Heavenly Father. He calls those who were far off and is ready to reconcile with His enemies.

Just as God showed this through our Lord Jesus Christ, providing us with an excellent model, we should also hold the doctrine of peace in our thoughts and hearts. We should make every effort to bring those separated from the Gospel into union with it. If those who were once staunch enemies of God now willingly come forward like lambs and sheep of the flock, we must be ready to receive them.

Let us bend ourselves to this task and not focus solely on our own interests. Since God has bound us together, each of us should employ our abilities and resources to draw our neighbours closer, forming one body where Jesus Christ reigns as our head. This is the reason why we must grow, for our life is a journey, and we must continue progressing.

We must not become like little children in understanding but continue to grow, recognising our weaknesses and seeking to improve. Our journey is ongoing, and it is not enough to start; we must keep making progress until our dying day. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we possess the power or understanding necessary for our salvation. Instead, we should consider how the Holy Spirit exhorts us to grow.

Lowliness must always accompany faith. The greater a person thinks themselves to be, the more they blind themselves to their need for God's instruction. Thus, we must continue to be like little ones, not in understanding, but in naughtiness. Recognising our weaknesses should

encourage us to seek God continually and be zealous in His service, confirming ourselves in His Word.

This order should also motivate us to serve Him and strengthen our faith. Many are afflicted by sloth and apathy because they believe they are already sufficiently knowledgeable. To prevent God's gifts from fading away, we must remember that we need to continue growing. The Holy Spirit instructs us to grow under our Lord Jesus Christ, so He may rule over us. All, both great and small, must submit to Him.

Experience has shown that this lesson is not given in vain. Many seek personal renown and would rather bury our Lord Jesus Christ to elevate themselves. They mix Jesus Christ with so many superstitions that His true essence is obscured. In this way, Jesus Christ loses His preeminence. Among us, too, some desire fame to such an extent that Jesus Christ becomes insignificant to them. They neglect Him in their pursuit of recognition.

St. Paul teaches us that our growth must be in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is akin to John the Baptist's statement: "I must decrease, and He must increase." We must follow this example so that the excellence found in the Church continues to shine, while Jesus Christ remains our chief anchor. Stars may have their brightness, but the sun must shine above them. All must recognise that it is Jesus Christ who provides true light. Therefore, let our Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, be regarded so highly that nothing can diminish Him or obscure our vision of Him. Our faith should focus solely on Him.

That is why St. Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ must be our head, and we must grow in Him, resort to Him, and fix our minds upon Him. To illustrate this further, he adds that Jesus Christ is the One who knits the entire body together through its joints, providing it with sustenance and life according to each member's measure. When this is achieved, the body is well-

proportioned. Without love reigning among us, there will be nothing but confusion. If greatness is present, it will be excessive, leading to a monstrous state rather than a natural body.

Now, in saying that our growth comes from Jesus Christ, that He is the source of the body's unity, and that He sustains our life, He shares our ingratitude. We fail to give Him the honour He deserves, for we do not acknowledge the greatness of the Son of God who gives us everything, yet we do not glorify Him as we ought. He does not demand recompense from us, nor is it necessary, but He seeks glory. Therefore, since we are so enriched by Him and yet deprive Him of His honour, we must be worse than devilish. Let us take note of what Paul aimed for and intended here: to reprove the world for its ingratitude and failure to give our Lord Jesus Christ the honour He deserves. He is not exalted among us, nor do we think of Him or place Him in supreme sovereignty, where all should pay Him homage.

With all this, we act almost foolishly when we fail to honour and exalt Jesus Christ as we should. For there is no man who does not naturally seek his own profit. Therefore, in forsaking Jesus Christ, we seem to have conspired to bring our own downfall, to be deprived of all His grace, and to become weak and decayed members. He is like the head of a man's body or the root of a tree, the source of our life and sustenance. Therefore, if the hands, feet, belly, stomach, legs, and all other members conspired to abandon the head, what would be the outcome? Or if they conspired to hide the head and tuck it into the belly so it cannot be seen? The entire body would suffer, just as it does when people diminish the glory and majesty of God's Son and fail to acknowledge His purpose, which is to provide all their well-being and salvation. It is as if they are attempting to put down their own head.

St. Paul tells us that there should be no unity in the body apart from that which comes from the head, from which everything originates. Veins

distribute nourishment throughout the body, and sinews hold the bones together and allow them to move, but they all must be rooted in the head. So, if we disregard God and diminish the glory of His only Son, it will lead to our downfall. Jesus Christ can sustain us, but we will perish miserably, like rotting carrion, if He does not provide everything necessary for our life.

Thus, you see the importance of what Paul is teaching us here. Additionally, he emphasises that there is a certain measure for each member, and the provision comes from the head, nourishing the entire body. It is all in proportion. When he says "it is in measure," he means that the excellence we see here does not diminish the perfection in Jesus Christ. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, everything in man is imperfect, so we must turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who remains faultless and should not be mingled with other creatures.

The other reason is that the measure and portion present in every member does not have its own distinct source. For what could the hands do if they were not continually nourished and sustained by the head? The bond that holds us all together must necessarily come from there. Also, the natural heat and movement must come from the head, so much so that the hand would wither every minute if the heat did not continually flow. The same relationship exists between Christ and His Church. Even if we consider someone to be as angelic as possible, they still have their limits. Why? To ensure that Jesus Christ does not lose the honour that rightfully belongs to Him. Since each of us has our portion, as previously explained, it is only reasonable for each of us to be humble and not seek to take on what God has reserved for His only Son.

Another aspect to understand is that the same measure comes to us as a free gift, as previously mentioned. It is not without reason that St. Paul repeats this point. It reflects the foolish presumption of men, where each one desires to be a Lord and protect their rights to the end, wanting to be

esteemed and advanced. To counteract this arrogance and cleanse ourselves of such vices, St. Paul reminds us once again that we possess nothing that has not been given to us. Therefore, we must turn to what he says in the first Corinthians: "Who are you to think you have made yourself so excellent by your own cunning? Do you have anything that you can claim as your own? No, everything has been given to you, so humble yourself." His meaning, then, is that all the connections and all the provisions come from the head. It is not enough for us to be created and formed; we must also have our members continually maintained in their condition. This is why St. Paul adds the word "furniture" or "shutting down," as if God pours His workings into the head, and the head distributes these workings throughout all the members. That's what St. Paul means when he says that Jesus Christ is our spiritual head, who has received all fullness of grace, as mentioned in the first chapter of St. John. It was not given to Him for Himself alone but for us, His brethren.

Therefore, let us understand that all the grace we have received from God flows into us through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are fully supplied through Him. These strengths and workings pass through every member and come from the head. They will be in the shoulder before reaching the arm, and afterward in the arm before reaching the hand. Yet, despite this, will the arm boast in itself and not share its power with the hand? No, for every member understands its role and naturally inclines to serve the rest of the body. They are bound to this duty and know that they need each other's help. It is true that my hand cannot judge anything, but God has instilled in it the desire to serve the entire body. Similarly, the foot carries out its function without needing an order, as if God had given them the wisdom to understand that they all receive their power from heaven and must use the gifts they have received for the benefit of the body.

If someone were to ask whether all members in the church are equal, St. Paul, in speaking of portion and measure, does not mean that God has

distributed the same portion to every member. The leg is not the same as the eye, yet the leg has its own qualities and functions that are needed. Therefore, diversity exists in the church, and some members are more excellent than others. Just as the eye is more excellent than the foot, it is honoured accordingly. St. Paul addresses this diversity and emphasises that it should suffice us if the church is edified as a whole. If our neighbours are enriched with God's gifts, it partially benefits us as well. Conversely, if we have received a larger measure of grace, we are more obligated to share it with those in need. St. Paul's point in this passage is that if this unity is maintained, the body will be well-built and complete. Here, he continues to emphasise that we must be so closely connected according to the gospel's doctrine that Jesus Christ may reign over us. The Heavenly Father has given Him to us on the condition that we all unite under Him and maintain brotherly unity among us. Above all, we must be subject to Him, who holds supreme dominion. We must understand that, since the Heavenly Father has placed Him in this role, we must all aim at Him and remain obedient to Him until the end.

And with all, let us understand that this cannot be done without love, meaning that we must overcome the selfish desire for personal gain, for it is evident that this self-interest blinds us and causes us to disregard our neighbours. Therefore, it is even more essential for each of us to strive to relinquish our own rights and realise that God has not distributed His gifts in such a way that each person can be a world or a church unto themselves. Instead, since every person needs their neighbours, this should be the means by which we are held together. It should also motivate us to do what we can for one another. Although there is one source from which we receive all spiritual gifts, namely our Lord Jesus Christ, God has arranged for the fullness of His grace, which He has placed in Jesus Christ, to flow like channels so that each person receives their appropriate portion.

So, with this doctrine firmly instilled in us, many of the troubles in the world today would be easily resolved, and there would be fewer disagreements and disputes. Ambition and vain glory are the root of all heresies. When individuals seek to elevate themselves, they inadvertently push Christ aside. Superstitions also arise from this, all because people fail to appreciate the immeasurable benefits brought to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, which are presented to us daily through the gospel. This tendency has made the world restless and driven by its own desires. It has caused people to forsake their patrons and advocates and to overstate their own merits. It has led people to invent various forms of satisfaction, many means to please God, and new services, all because they were not content with Jesus Christ. This happens because people fail to understand the manner in which we should cleave to Him, acknowledging that we should trust in Him completely, recognising that there is nothing but filth within us, and that our spiritual life comes from Him. This is not a one-time occurrence, but a continuous process of Him working in us, strengthening and advancing us until we attain perfection through Him.

This is why the Holy Supper has been given to us as a reminder that our Lord Jesus Christ is the one in whom we should seek everything related to the life of our souls. When we partake in this, we proclaim that He is our nourishment, completely satisfying us. Therefore, the reason we gather to eat and drink is to remind us that in Jesus Christ, we have not just a portion but the entirety of our spiritual life. When we are fed by Him, we should be content with Him and not seek anything elsewhere. In this manner, when we approach the holy table after examining our own sins and recognising our insignificance, we should seek to understand how God calls us to Him and how we can continue on our path until we are fully united with Him. This can be achieved by acknowledging that Jesus Christ has given us everything that is good and lacking in ourselves. Therefore, we should hold our Lord Jesus Christ in such high esteem that we regard Him as our sustenance. Our faith should not waver but be firmly rooted in Him,

knowing that there is no righteousness, holiness, merit, power, or anything else within ourselves. Everything we need can be found in Him, and as we partake in Him, we also partake in all the blessings that He has received from God His Father. Since all the blessings that God has placed in our head are shared with us through Him, we should humble ourselves and not seek to exalt ourselves to the point of robbing Him of His honour. Instead, we should confess simply and without fail that everything given to us by His free goodness is preserved and increased in us through Him.

Furthermore, let us understand that we cannot possess the blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ or gain any benefit from them unless we first receive Him. This is why He offers Himself to us, along with all the benefits of His righteousness, His merits, His sacrifice in His death and passion, His obedience to God the Father, and all the gifts He received from God. He not only gives us a portion of them in His sacraments but declares, "I am yours; possess me." So, it is not sufficient for us to seek our needs from Him; we must also consider how He has offered Himself to us.

He says, "Here is my body, delivered for you; here is my blood, shed for the remission of your sins." He does this so that we may truly know that He dwells within us through His Holy Spirit and that we live by His very substance. It is not without reason that it is mentioned here that the body is needed, and He is the one who provides it. Since we lack the grace and gifts essential for our spiritual life, we must draw them from this source. If we continuously approach Him in faith according to the Gospel, we will feel ourselves increasingly strengthened and established in all grace until He has purified us of all imperfections and weaknesses. This process will allow us to partake in His heavenly glory alongside Him.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that we may become aware of them, feel remorse for them, and resolve to work diligently to be cleansed of our

imperfections and vices day by day. May our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of all purity, pour forth the grace of His Holy Spirit upon us so that we may become new creations, giving our Sovereign King the honour that is rightfully His. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Twenty Eighth Sermon, the Eighth on the Fourth Chapter

> "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Ephesians 4:17-19

Considering how corrupted we are by nature, it is not sufficient for us to receive goodness unless the vices deeply rooted within us are also corrected. It would be like trying to sow corn in soil overrun by nettles, thistles, weeds, and thorns. Therefore, even though St. Paul has previously presented the true rule of a godly life, he now adds that it is essential for each person to understand the need to undergo a complete and thorough transformation. We must become entirely new individuals because until God cleanses our minds, hearts, and all parts of our souls, we will remain in a state of impurity.

The doctrine we have heard before would not fully benefit us if what we are now learning had not been added. The Ephesians, to whom St. Paul is

speaking, were once immersed in ignorance and lived lives marked by wickedness and debauchery. St. Paul emphasizes that those who have not been taught by God are spiritually blind, unable to distinguish between good and evil. They are like brute animals, driven by their innate instincts, which grow increasingly hardened until they descend into such excess that they resemble monstrous creatures, no longer appearing to be fashioned in the image of God.

So, St. Paul's intention is clear: after declaring God's sovereignty over us and explaining how our conduct in this world should reflect our submission to God and our preparation for the heavenly life to which He calls us, he now reveals that we will never truly obey God or willingly accept His yoke until we change our dispositions and minds. This change is necessary because we are inherently corrupt. There are two parts to the instruction provided: the first shows us the purpose for which God calls us, and the second reveals that we must battle our own sinfulness and utterly abandon our old selves to become teachable, so we can receive the doctrine that God has set before us.

Recognizing the difficulty of this transformation, St. Paul does not merely offer guidance but also admonishes and, in a sense, seats us before God's judgment. We must acknowledge our need for transformation to motivate those to whom he is speaking further. This is a significant undertaking because individuals tend to deceive themselves, believing they possess virtues even when immersed in wrongdoing. They often attempt to conceal their faults through hypocrisy or justify them willfully, refusing to admit guilt even when their shortcomings are evident to everyone. In sum, the battle is arduous when one must relinquish their self-perceived wisdom in self-governance and tame their passions to become subject to God, with nothing within themselves that opposes His will. Our flesh is stubborn in this regard.

We hear it said in another text that all of man's thoughts and everything he can conceive is enmity against God. Likewise, in Genesis, even during a time when the world was relatively sound, it was stated that anything originating from the recesses of our minds is entirely corrupt and rebellious against God. Therefore, it was necessary for gravity to be employed in this regard. Hence, Paul also uses it when he says that he not only teaches us but also exhorts those to whom he speaks. This is so that they may realize that they are, as it were, in God's presence and should not fall into the trap of self-flattery. Just as the devil has many deceivers to beguile us, conversely, God's word must illuminate us. Even if we are sluggish in acknowledging our vices and would rather conceal them, we must understand that it is more beneficial for us to examine what lies within us. This is why St. Paul, in his effort to exhort the Ephesians to change their lives, sets forth this solemn and formal mode of bearing witness, as though he were standing before God's judgment seat.

When there is an agreement between individuals, the formality and ceremony of swearing often prompts them to take their promises seriously. At the very least, it makes them consider what they are pledging, unless they are completely unreasonable. However, there is no notary here to document their oaths, and customary human practices to ratify agreements are not in place. St. Paul stands in the place and person of Jesus Christ, from whom he derives authority not only to require but also to summon us to give an account if we fail to fulfil our duty. He informs us that we cannot casually dismiss his words or hear them with indifference, as God is present to punish our negligence in disregarding His Word.

Since we have learned to avoid self-flattery, as is the habit of many who pretend to be deaf to the truth, we should take heed. Regardless of the expressions they make, they remain unchanged in their ways. It is essential for us to recognise that God, in His grace, teaches us not to provide excuses but to understand that He will not tolerate the contempt of His Word. If we

do not give heed when He is gracious enough to speak to us and to assure us of our salvation, we should not be surprised if He punishes us for our carelessness.

Now, let us consider the substance of what is conveyed here. St. Paul says, "Do not be like the rest of the Gentiles." I have previously mentioned that they, to whom he is writing, were once fully immersed in wickedness and devoid of the fear of God. From birth, they had been steeped in various forms of idolatry. Yet, they believed they had fulfilled their obligations when they made sacrifices to their idols. Similarly, in today's society, those who engage most passionately in frivolous pastimes often consider themselves the most devout. They imagine they are absolved of their obligations to God once they have performed some trivial rituals. For this reason, St. Paul presents the Ephesians with this analogy. By observing the rest of the Gentiles, they can see the state they were in before God called them into His church. They should reflect on their former condition, for there they will find images of themselves, before God reached out His hand and rescued them from the abyss of unbelief. Before, they were no different from those Gentiles.

Now then, at least, one should consider the grace that has been granted to you so that it may bear fruit in you. Let us note that when using this speech, "the rest of the Gentiles," Paul here encompasses all of mankind. He is not referring to just two or three individuals, nor to any single nation or specific country. He speaks generally, stating that all those who have not been instructed in the Gospel are spiritually blind, as we shall see. In summary, he reveals what kind of beings we are until God's grace intervenes, so that we do not dismiss this exhortation or delude ourselves into thinking we are exempt from what we shall see next. Therefore, in order that we do not take a privilege to exempt ourselves from the common condition of humanity, Paul includes himself and all others in this bundle, like children of Adam.

He highlights that there is nothing in all of mankind except wickedness and corruption. Thus, two points should be noted here.

Firstly, we should use this passage as a mirror to see our own state until God's grace touches us. This will prevent us from imagining ourselves exempt from the common human condition. Secondly, when we observe the enormities committed throughout the world, the shamelessness and evil-doing, or rather, the complete bewitchment and senselessness that some display, it should remind us of our former state before God touched us and led us out of such a condition. Before His intervention, we were no different from the worst and most disorderly individuals in the world.

Now, consider that we would have remained in the same state if God had not shown us His mercy. This realization should deeply affect us so that we do not allow the grace God has granted us to become dim and ultimately extinguished, leaving us bereft of it. Therefore, we should apply this text to our instruction. When St. Paul speaks of those who have not yet been enlightened by the faith of the gospel, he means to shame those trained in the Gospel if their lives do not demonstrate the transformation they have experienced. We are called to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ to separate ourselves from the stumbling blocks of the world. Thus, we must not excuse ourselves based on our upbringing in evil customs or by the examples that condone wickedness. Even though there is nothing but wickedness around us, since God has adopted us as His children, we are expected to live accordingly.

Therefore, we must understand that faith demands a transformation in our lives, so that we live as new creations. We can learn from this passage that after St. Paul speaks of the vanity of mind, he adds the terms blindness of mind and blindness or stubbornness of heart. This description serves to remove all pretensions from individuals who trust in their own wisdom and righteousness. The philosophers often praised the nobility and worthiness of

human nature, placing reason as the supreme law and discretion as the guide between good and evil. Yet, this verse challenges such beliefs by declaring that human reason is flawed, filled with vanity, falsehood, and deception. It claims that all human thoughts are futile and lead to greater confusion, like a blind person wandering aimlessly in the dark.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is the only competent judge who can reveal the truth about our inner selves. This prevents us from becoming too self-assured by allowing us to see ourselves as we truly are. It is easy for individuals to be blinded by their own high opinions of their worthiness and be unable to admit their own wickedness. The philosophers held such beliefs because they did not understand God. The wisdom of the world cannot lead us to divine light; it is a special gift from God and cannot be found within ourselves. Even the wisest people in the world could not come close to comprehending God's truth. When it came to God's service, their wisdom often led to confusion, turning things upside down. Therefore, the wisdom of the world cannot bring us to the heavenly light, as it is a unique gift from God, not something inherent in ourselves. We can see how even the greatest minds have deceived themselves, leading to complacency in their foolish beliefs.

Yes, and we observe that this foolish, or rather devilish, arrogance has found a place even among the Jews. They have always been of the opinion, much like the people under the Pope's dominion today, that they possess free will. To be sure, the Jews concede more than the heathen, admitting that we are tainted by original sin. However, their belief is that despite the infirmity inherent in human nature, there remains some residue of goodness within us. They argue that we still possess understanding and willpower capable of guiding us toward good actions. In their view, humans can judge matters according to their natural understanding, almost as if humans were as pure and uncorrupted as angels.

The Jews, persuaded by numerous passages in Scripture, concede that we have strayed from our original state and that there are many vices in us. However, they insist that this does not prevent us from still being pure and able to do good through our own efforts. They claim that once we humble ourselves before God, we can overcome our shortcomings and do good on our own, provided that God aids us and extends His hand to us. They refer to this as "concurring," which is the combining or marrying together of God's grace and the residual goodness in humans, despite our corruption.

As I mentioned earlier, we should instead listen to what God Himself, the only competent judge, has declared unequivocally. He states that all those who rely on common reason and the inherent human understanding, which is itself distorted by sin, become irrational. What then shall be the outcome of relying on human reason? Although people may believe it enlightens them and shows them the way, it is certain that it only leads them into the pit. While they may consider themselves well-informed, they become like dumb animals. God continually emphasizes this to make us understand that He must reform us entirely, not partially, throughout.

Now, one might ask whether those whom God has abandoned are truly devoid of understanding and discernment. Are there examples to support this claim? It is certainly true that they are not like horses or dogs. However, we must recognize that whatever understanding and discernment we possess serves no other purpose than to render us inexcusable. This means that we cannot use our limited understanding as a shield of ignorance, as we often try to do. Even if someone has not been exposed to the written law, they still bear the sentence of damnation within their hearts, as the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 2. God compels them to perceive their guilt, often through painful experiences, so that they confess, "I am guilty in this matter and in that." The remaining understanding in humans serves only to increase their guilt before God, not to guide them toward salvation.

As for our affections, it could be argued that many individuals live upright lives and appear blameless, even if they have never encountered the gospel. However, beneath the surface, their hearts may be filled with malice and stubbornness. Undoubtedly, all those who have not been transformed by God's Spirit still harbour a sea of wicked and malicious desires within them. Therefore, we should not rely solely on outward appearances.

But let us consider the significance of God challenging us for searching men's hearts as His exclusive prerogative, and therefore, this task must be reserved for Him. Also, recall how John states in his epistle that we do not see all the sins within us, but God, who sees much more clearly, is the ultimate judge of them. However, regardless of one's efforts, people cannot absolve themselves of condemnation when they stand before the heavenly judge. This is especially true since even the stars are not pure in His sight, not even the angels. So, if He were to rigorously examine them, they would not be able to attain His perfection. Therefore, let us recognize that until God has visited and subdued us, we will remain ignorant and blind wretches. Our understanding will be futile, filled with nothing but vanity. Our hearts will be tainted with pride and presumption, and our desires will be so far from righteousness that they will rebel against God. We will oppose His justice and all that is right.

Indeed, we have witnessed the consequences when people attempt to govern themselves solely by their own intellect. What false forms of worship have emerged in the world? Did these require great cunning or skill? No, we see that God has generously bestowed His gifts in various sciences and knowledge. However, the most important knowledge, that of coming to God, has eluded them. In this regard, they have all faltered, straying into falsehood and deceit. The more they attempted to advance themselves, the deeper they sank into the mire. Therefore, we should recognize that although there is light, as stated in the first chapter of St. John, we, being in darkness, can only perceive it dimly. As St. John

explains, from the beginning, God set humanity apart from beasts by imprinting His image upon them and granting them the discernment to distinguish between good and evil.

The purpose of human life is not merely to eat and drink but also to comprehend a higher purpose and common order on Earth. It involves understanding that there is a God who governs all, as seen in the light that existed before the creation of atoms. This light still persists, but it shines within the darkness, a darkness that has not comprehended it but has, in fact, quenched it entirely.

So then, if we possess even a small understanding or purpose, we should consider it as nothing more than a fleeting spark that quickly fades away. However, when it comes to our own nature, the ability to recognize goodness, seek it, follow it, and remain in it is utterly impossible. Why? Because our understanding is completely blind. Indeed, there is nothing in us but vanity, as the Scriptures declare that God scrutinized the thoughts of humanity and found nothing but vanity and falsehood in them.

To express this even more clearly, Paul states that our understanding has been darkened, and we are estranged from the life of God. This eliminates any excuse that people might attempt to offer, for they often argue against God, claiming that if everything is vanity within them, it is because God created them that way. However, Paul tells us here that our understanding is clouded by our own darkness, a result of the corruption that entered humanity through Adam's fall. In short, Paul makes it clear that when the Scriptures declare us to be ignorant, blind, and brutish, we must not attempt to justify ourselves by arguing that God should have made us differently. The evil that has affected us stems from Adam's disobedience, which left us all impoverished.

Paul's words close off all escape routes that people typically employ to appear righteous and innocent before God. He points out the vanity of our

minds and our blindness, emphasizing that we dwell in darkness due to the extinguished light that God originally placed within us at our creation. Since this is a difficult concept to accept, Paul directs our attention to the life of God, which mocks the feeble human imaginations that have been devised to uphold the notion of free will, reason, and discernment. As mentioned previously, philosophical writings abound with such ideas. Even in the present day, there is ongoing debate within the Church regarding free will. Some argue that everything is ruined unless humans possess some inherent self-motivation and capacity to prepare themselves to receive grace, making them equal partners with God, able to bring grace to fruition. According to their reasoning, humans not only become God's equals, but they even possess greater capability, with God merely adding a small contribution. However, Paul maintains that, despite our self-assured opinions, we are as good as lifeless in relation to God. In His eyes, we are akin to dead bodies or even putrid and decaying corpses. Therefore, let no one, through their foolish arrogance, claim to possess reason, wisdom, and free will.

But if they would examine their own condition, let them lift their gaze and understand that their true life must be the life of God, not the life each person imagines for themselves. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, confesses that he once considered himself alive before his conversion to the pure doctrine. In his pride and hypocrisy, he believed himself to be like a little angel, untouched by God's law. However, when the law of God finally revealed his sinful desires, it wounded him to the point of death. He came to realize that the life he had lived was, in fact, a state of spiritual death, a delusion like that of fools who believe themselves to be kings and princes, only to be consumed by lice or suffer from hunger and cold. Thus, St. Paul confessed that, before his conversion, he appeared alive to himself and even celebrated it. But once Christ had humbled him and made him experience God's judgment, he relinquished that false life, recognizing it as spiritual death.

Similarly, St. Paul teaches us that even if the world regards us as alive, applauds our virtues, and we ourselves are ensnared by that perception, it amounts to nothing. We must turn to God to discover that He possesses a unique life reserved for His chosen ones, a life concealed as a treasure for them. While God's common grace shines upon both the good and the wicked, He does not scatter the blessings reserved for His chosen. As the psalmist says, "How great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up in store for them that fear thee." Therefore, when St. Paul speaks of God's life here, he indicates that living according to our natural inclinations does not originate from God. But isn't God our Creator, the source of our being and movement, as stated in Acts 17? Indeed, our common life derives from God as our Maker. However, God's life is that which He imparts upon choosing us, revealing the path of salvation, and renewing us through His Holy Spirit. In this way, Jesus Christ dwells within us through faith, and His power is manifest as He crucifies our old selves, even burying them so that we may be raised anew, free from the uncleanness of the world. This transformation sets us apart from unbelievers, who remain imprisoned under Satan's dominion, driven by evil.

This is the reason St. Paul speaks of God's life, so we may awaken to it and heed this exhortation. Let us no longer deceive ourselves with our own opinions or the judgments of others, which often praise things of little worth. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us in the Gospel of Luke that what appears great and excellent to humans may be utterly detestable before God. To prevent further self-deception, we must understand that until God makes us new creatures, regenerating us by His Holy Spirit, our understanding remains blinded, and there is nothing in us but vanity and ignorance, resembling mere beasts. This is the essential point to remember. Whenever we follow our own inclinations and lean on our own understanding, let us learn to bring ourselves before God, carefully considering the life that He has reserved uniquely for Himself. It does not

serve only Himself but is bestowed exclusively upon His children, signifying His choice of us, as we have seen in the first chapter.

Now, hereupon, St. Paul immediately addresses the hardness of their hearts. By hardness, he does not mean a physical hardness but uses the Greek word to signify a thickened or muddied state, like when clear wine becomes troubled, filled with sediment, and turns murky, losing its clarity. In the same way, St. Paul states that the heart becomes thickened when it is so blinded and hardened that it cannot submit to obeying God. In this state, there is no clarity; rather, it is troubled like a muddy puddle. In the Scriptures, the term "heart" occasionally refers to all the desires, inclinations, and thoughts of a person, sometimes even encompassing their understanding. However, since St. Paul distinguishes between a person's understanding, mind, and heart, we can infer that he is referring to the will, along with all the ponderings and debates we engage in within ourselves when discerning good and evil. Essentially, he is pointing out that humanity is so corrupted in all aspects due to Adam's sin that there is nothing within them, neither will nor understanding, that does not lean wholly towards evil, utterly immersed in it. Therefore, just as St. Paul previously condemned the inherent beastliness within us, he now illustrates that we are like stubborn blocks, unable to yield and follow God, despite His calls. We remain obstinate, with stiff necks that refuse to bow, a trait mentioned by Moses when rebuking those who rebelled against God, likening them to having necks of iron or brass. Our nature is such that God must change our hearts to save us, transforming them from stone to flesh, as stated in Ezekiel. This metaphor illustrates what we are until God works a transformation within us. We are inherently hard-hearted, enemies of God, resisting all truth until He softens us, correcting our stubbornness and rebelliousness that impedes God from reigning and exercising His rightful authority over us. In essence, all our desires act as hostile warriors, waging war against God to prevent His rule and authority, revealing the true nature of our fallen humanity.

Now, let us not boast about our own free will or reason, as we see these wretched pagans do, who continue to rely on that string. Instead, let us humble ourselves willingly. As I mentioned earlier, let us acknowledge that, as St. Paul has pointed out, all of us, from the greatest to the least, are plunged to the very depths of hell until God pulls us back. Moreover, let us consider all the wickedness that occurs throughout the world and recognize that we would do the same if it were not for God's mercy. Let this realization urge us to restrain ourselves, lest we go astray, knowing that God has drawn us to Him. We must avoid returning to the wickedness of unbelievers. It is no surprise that they stumble, tumble, and drift aimlessly, for they have no guiding light. But our Lord shines upon us through His Word and grants us His Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should not be like them.

St. Paul exhorts us here and adds the height of all wickedness: people go astray after their own kind, continuing from bad to worse. They delude themselves with flattery, numbing their consciences until they no longer feel any remorse or grief. This is the path to making them irredeemable. First and foremost, we must take heed to prevent the divine vengeance that should stir us to vigilance. When we hear that those who remain in their sinful nature indulge themselves to the point of losing all conscience and becoming like brute beasts, insensitive to the matters of life and death, we must fear and tremble. We should not allow sin to become a daily habit, lest we harden our hearts in such a manner. We witness how those who become beastly in their behaviour, possessing hearts too stubborn to be moved by anything, eventually become so bold in their evil that they are beyond correction.

Regarding the first point, we must be well aware that God's vengeance against those who indulge in vice and allow themselves to become brutish, like donkeys and dogs, will be severe and dreadful. Now, for the second point, if God deals so rigorously with those who have never been exposed to the Gospel, what will He do to us if, after receiving the way of salvation

for a long time, we continue to behave like those who have never had good instruction? Do we not believe that the punishment will be even more severe and terrifying for us? As St. Paul explained in his letter to the Romans, God gave people over to shameful lusts and disorder because they failed to acknowledge Him despite having knowledge of His existence through creation. But we cannot make such excuses. Our sinfulness and vanity due to Adam's fall do not blind us completely, for God has given us His Word, a lamp to guide us. We have the Gospel in which our Lord Jesus Christ declares Himself as our guide. Yet, despite all this, if we persist in willfully provoking God by neglecting the doctrine of salvation and choosing to live in sin, as some do even today, we should contemplate the consequences. We must walk in the fear of God.

Let us carefully consider that St. Paul has not mentioned this as the worst of sins without reason. He does so to show us what punishment God will inflict upon those who do not yield to Him at the appointed time and instead indulge in wickedness, as if they have escaped His grasp. Therefore, we should be cautious not to overstep our bounds to such an extent. Even if we have strayed far, God is fully capable of drawing us back to Him. Let us fear lest God execute the judgment He has pronounced, just as He does upon others. As Solomon says, when the wicked man is in extremity, he despises everything, including his own life. He behaves recklessly, much like a brute beast. So, let us tremble at such warnings, fearing that God might carry them out when we cannot endure reproof for our vices.

Conversely, let us heed Solomon's advice when he says, "He is the man whose heart pricks him and quickens him up night and day." We must learn to be our own accusers and convict ourselves of our vices. When we fall into them, let us be ashamed and condemn ourselves until God, in His mercy, provides relief. This is how we should apply St. Paul's teaching, so that when God has bound us to Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ and given us life, we may take great care not to tarnish and extinguish this life

within us through our own wickedness and ingratitude. Furthermore, we should cultivate humility, for it is humility that leads us to turn to God. Our humility should be accompanied by self-awareness so that we do not delude ourselves but, through that awareness, strive vigorously to combat our vices and lusts, never allowing ourselves any respite until we are entirely freed from them. Meanwhile, let us always gain some ground, even if it is minimal, so that it may constantly be evident that our Lord Jesus Christ is at work in us, allowing His grace to prevail as we progress in goodness, so that we may continue to grow until God takes us out of this world.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins, and pray that He touches us to the core, leading us to true repentance and enabling us to persevere in it throughout our lives. Let us be utterly humbled and emptied of ourselves, learning to seek all our well-being in Him. May He guide us through the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ as we seek it there and continue to advance in the proclamation of His gospel. May He also grant this grace not only to us but to all people and nations, etc.

The Twenty Ninth Sermon, the Ninth on the Fourth Chapter

> "But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." - Ephesians 4:20-24

St. Paul, by using the example of heathens and unbelievers, illustrates how wretched human life becomes when one allows themselves to be led solely by their own desires and lusts. We are so blinded by Adam's sin that we cannot distinguish between good and evil, even though this may not be apparent at first glance. However, if you observe the entirety of a person's life, you will find that they do not follow a certain path but wander aimlessly and eventually become like dumb beasts, without a hint of remorse or conscience. Hence, the diversity between the lives of Christians, who have been nurtured in the Gospel, and the lives of ignorant individuals who have no knowledge of God's will is evident. St. Paul is asserting that those of us who have been enlightened by God's light and have Jesus Christ, the "Son of Righteousness," shining upon us should lead a different kind of life. It is a shame if we mix with those who lack any direction when God has provided us with the light and Jesus Christ as our guide. Thus, using the example of heathens will not excuse us; instead, it will double our condemnation. God places them before us as mirrors in which we can see the true nature of ourselves and our own blindness when we are not guided by the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, we have our Lord Jesus Christ to show us the path to life. It is significant that He declared Himself to be the light of the world, emphasizing that those who walk in Him will not go astray. He is also the way in which one cannot go wrong. Therefore, St. Paul adds that this does not apply to us because we have learned from Jesus Christ. As a result, any excuses about ignorance or inability to understand the Gospel are invalidated. People often hesitate to admit their foolishness, except when they are held accountable to God. They may seek to evade responsibility by claiming that they are simpletons and incapable of comprehending such matters. Some might argue that the Gospel is too profound for them. St. Paul's response to all these excuses is summed up in one word: we have heard Jesus Christ. In essence, he is saying that we cannot shift the blame, as the Gospel has been preached to us sufficiently. It is not our inexperience or ignorance that is at fault, for God has provided us with a good and faithful teacher. To put it succinctly, if we persist in our ignorance after hearing the Gospel's doctrine, we have only ourselves to blame. It is not due to any failing on God's part, as He knows what is suitable for us.

And that is also why the wise and poor preacher has no veil in his preaching, so that people might see Jesus Christ there if they are not blinded by Satan through unbelief, leading them into destruction. However, whatever the case may be, we cannot escape the responsibility God has placed upon us to be guided and governed as is suitable for us. If we paid diligent attention to the things He has shared with us in the Gospel, we would not fail Him. If those who do not profit in God's school could see Jesus Christ even a little, their ignorance might be excusable. But as we continuously hear His teachings day after day and have been strengthened in our faith, yet still persist in our beastliness, there is no excuse. He has shown that if all this does not stir us up day and night to come to God and offer us the food of life to nourish us, then we remain at our elementary stage, like young beginners who do not know the rules of a good life. We cannot blame anyone but ourselves. We cannot claim to be ignorant souls or

that God speaks to us in a dark language. We have not lacked training in the knowledge of the truth. St. Paul tells us that God has not ceased to preach His truth to us just once or twice but has ordained that the Gospel should be preached continually throughout our lives. The things we did not grasp or understand at first are repeated and presented more familiarly in a known language so that we may have greater confirmation. If we do not profit from His constant calling to us, it shows our ingratitude because we still do not know Jesus Christ after having heard the Gospel for so long.

Therefore, we should learn to count the years when those who have known God's truth since childhood reach adulthood. They should think to themselves, "I should be a great teacher," as the apostle also mentions in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It has been 15 or 20 years since I reached the age of discretion, and there are still many others behind me. It is God Himself who has called me, and the preaching of the Gospel to me is not by chance but demonstrates God's care for my salvation and the love He has for me.

Seeing that I have heard the gospel for such a long time without ceasing, or could have if the fault were not in myself, must I not necessarily expect a terrible condemnation when I continue in my beastliness? Let those who have been in darkness for some time and have afterward been enlightened think like this: it's been around 5 or 10 years since God opened my eyes through His word and rescued me from the darkness I was in. If He had left me there, I would have been a wretched lost soul. Now that He has chosen to enlighten me with the knowledge of His precious truth, why should I be careless in hearing and receiving it?

On the other hand, God, in His compassion for my ignorance, has accommodated Himself to my limited understanding. He has stooped down, so to speak, to reveal His secrets to me in a gentle and loving way, as if one were to chew food for a baby, making it easy for the baby to swallow. Yet, should I persist in my dullness?

Let us ponder all these things well and keep in mind the words of St. Paul when he says that we have not only heard about Jesus Christ but have also been taught about Him. It is through God's goodness that the Gospel has been preached to us not for just one day but has resounded in our ears for a long time already. We should note that when speaking about the doctrine of the Gospel, it is closely linked with Jesus Christ, as we have been told before. Therefore, we should pay attention so that we do not wonder why we do not find profit in God's word, and always have a certain goal to aim for. Many people read through the Scriptures diligently and can discuss it at great length, yet they do not understand the essence of it. They miss the point because their focus is not on our Lord Jesus Christ.

We should take heed and remember that when we know the benefits brought to us by the Son of God, His power, and the treasures He offers us, then we truly understand the Gospel. Without Jesus Christ, we have nothing. We should be motivated by the example of those who call themselves Christians but wander aimlessly, swaying with every wind, due to a lack of steadfastness in our Lord Jesus Christ. They are justly punished for not seeking Him, and in the end, they will realize that their own ideas and imaginings amount to nothing.

Therefore, let us understand that Jesus Christ is the sure anchor to which God the Father calls us, and we must not be drawn away from Him by anything. We must apply all that we have to Him. This is why, in God's name and authority, Paul exhorts and warns those who have heard Jesus Christ and been taught by Him through the Gospel doctrine. Furthermore, he says, "If you have learned Him well, according to the truth in our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is mentioned purposefully because there are many fickle and fantastical individuals who loudly proclaim themselves as Christians, as if they had fully absorbed the entire Gospel. Yet they lack wisdom and

discernment. Examples of such people abound in the world today. If one were to ask them if they have the Gospel, they would reply affirmatively without hesitation because saying so comes easily. However, upon closer examination, it is rare to find even one among a hundred who genuinely understands what pertains to Jesus Christ. They may know that it's lawful to eat meat on Fridays and dismiss various superstitions of popery as trivial matters. But if asked about regeneration, patience, newness of life, and being conformed to the image of God, most of them would reveal that they have never truly tasted the essence of the Gospel. They merely skim the surface and never delve into its substance. This is not a recent issue, for even in St. Paul's time, many people misused the name of Christ, claiming to be great Christians yet lacking a true understanding of the Son of God.

Therefore, let us pay close attention to what is being said here. It's as if St. Paul is finding fault with himself, not because the things he has spoken need any correction, but to give a stern rebuke to those who have wrongly used Christ's name and abused His Gospel by using it as a cover for their wickedness. St. Paul, appearing somewhat humble, says, "Yes, indeed, I pray that I have learned Him." It's as if he's saying, "I speak indifferently to all those who have heard the pure doctrine of God. However, because some merely scratch the surface and grasp only a fragment of the message, I fear they may not have a solid foundation to build upon. In short, they lack the root of faith. Yet, despite this, they may appear to be well-versed, and therefore, I urge you to be cautious. Do not make empty professions, lest you are found guilty of falsehood before God and His angels. Let not the name of Jesus Christ, which should be holy to you, be taken in vain. Even if you boast of being a Christian, be aware that you may not know what Jesus Christ was given by God His Father, how we partake in Him, what our redemption means, or how we can enjoy all His benefits. If you do not know these things, your boasting will come at a great cost because you have loudly proclaimed yourselves to be Christians without knowing the qualities of your Christianity or how to apply them."

This is essentially what we should ponder. St. Paul tells us that if we have been educated in the Gospel, we should stand out from the ignorant and unbelievers. God has set us apart, enlightened us, and positioned us in a unique way. His purpose is to lead us out of aimless wandering and the darkness of ignorance, so that we may know the path to salvation. Especially considering that God continues to guide us and provides us with the means to strengthen our faith, we must be careful not to profane something as sacred as the truth of the Gospel and the pure doctrine of God. Let us not profane it by failing to understand why God has given it to us and bearing in mind that many fantastical individuals may appear to be Christians on the surface, but they lack depth and substance. Therefore, let us ensure that we know the purpose of our calling and that we do not disappoint God's intent when He takes on the role of a teacher toward us. Let us remember how He has shown us the way to life and salvation. Just as He is a good and faithful teacher, let us be diligent and receptive students to Him.

Now, let's turn our attention to the truth that the Apostle Paul is emphasizing, which is that you must put off the old man who is corrupted by earthly desires, in accordance with the conduct you have followed until now. He expresses this even more clearly, highlighting that those who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ but continue to lead a lawless life, causing offense in the church, are like counterfeit deeds. Therefore, we must be mindful that it is a cursed deception when we declare our intention to be Christians and profess it with our mouths, yet our actions contradict our words. As St. Paul says in another place, "For the one who takes the liberty to commit all kinds of evil while still expecting to be counted among God's children undoubtedly denies Jesus Christ through their entire life, no matter how much they confess Him in words."

Hence, we must examine ourselves and understand that if we aim to be accepted by God, we must learn to put away our old nature. In Scripture,

the term "old man" signifies all that we inherit from our natural birth. As we know, there are two sources of humanity, namely Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning our first birth, we all come from the source of Adam and are tainted with sinfulness. Therefore, there is nothing within us but corruption and moral decay. Consequently, we must be transformed in Jesus Christ and become new creations. This entails shedding the old man, signifying relinquishing everything inherited from our earthly forebears.

So, if someone is left in their original state, they will undoubtedly be morally bankrupt, steeped in rebellion, and estranged from God. In short, they will incline entirely towards evil. This is what is meant by the "old man." It's important to clarify that the Apostle's intention is not merely to rebuke the outward vices that are visible to others. For instance, when people reprimand someone who has been engaged in reckless behavior, they might say that they need to "cast off their old ways."

However, there is another important aspect to consider: our innate inclinations are entirely perverse. Within us, there isn't a drop of goodness or uprightness. All our thoughts tend towards wickedness, and our desires and affections rebel against God and His justice. Furthermore, when he speaks of "putting off," it is a common metaphor intended to convey that we must completely abandon everything that is of our own making and cast it aside. This is so that we may be clothed anew with different qualities, as he will explain shortly. Here we see that there are two aspects to living a life in accordance with God's will and coming under His authority. First, we must renounce ourselves, and second, we must submit to the governance of God's Spirit.

Indeed, all that is of our own nature must be set aside before God can take charge of guiding us. This is because our thoughts, driven by our sinful nature, are incompatible with God's doctrine and His commandments by which He intends to rule us. These two are like fire and water—

irreconcilable. Therefore, we must begin by forsaking ourselves. This is the very order that St. Paul follows in this passage when he instructs us to "put off the old man."

Secondly, we must understand that Jesus Christ was sent to us for the purpose of restoring us to the image of God. While it is true that He reconciled us with God the Father through His death and suffering, His shed blood purifies us from all our filthiness, delivering us from damnation and eternal death. His self-sacrifice satisfied our debt, so that if we turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, God, in His boundless grace, accepts us as righteous, despite our wretchedness and sinfulness. We receive this grace through Jesus Christ.

However, we must not separate this reconciliation from the second aspect, which is our sanctification by the Holy Spirit. As Isaiah declares, "The Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of might, the Spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord shall rest upon him." This was not for His own need but for ours. He possesses the fullness of all grace so that we can draw from Him according to His will. Therefore, if we desire to receive God's mercy through the death and passion of His only Son, and to have our sins pardoned because Christ has made full payment for them, we must also acknowledge that God has given us His Holy Spirit to make us holy. We must be governed by His Spirit.

If we are determined to begin governing our lives properly, we must first abandon ourselves and wage war against our own nature. Additionally, we must understand that there is no true Christianity within us, and we cannot comprehend the Son of God, His power, or His office until we recognise that we are to be renewed by Him according to the image of God. These are the two crucial points we must pay close attention to. It is true that this deserves a more detailed explanation, but for the sake of coherence, let us briefly note that we can never gain God's approval or perform any service

acceptable to Him unless we engage in the battle of forcefully subduing all our thoughts and affections, making them obedient to God, and utterly eliminating the impure ones. This concludes the discussion of the first point.

To ensure that this teaching is not dismissed as unnecessary, St. Paul reminds the Ephesians of their former state. We know that people are often unwilling to accept rebuke; they are averse to it and would rather avoid it. When warnings are given, they tend to push them aside. On the other hand, people are often so eager for novelty that if they are not entertained with something new, they consider it contemptible. For example, if someone speaks to us about living in the fear of God, many might respond by saying, "Don't we already know that God must be loved, honoured, and served? Shouldn't we refrain from theft, extortion, lying, deceit, blasphemy, adultery, and all such sins? Isn't this common knowledge?" However, knowing something and living by it are two different things. Those who respond in this way may think they are well-acquainted with these truths, but they are often the most neglectful of God and right conduct.

St. Paul reminds us to listen carefully. He encourages us to put off the old self. If we think we know ourselves well and remember what we were like when God called us to the knowledge of His gospel, we will realise that we were lost and utterly abandoned. Therefore, when St. Paul exhorts us to strip off the old self, we should understand that it is not without reason. We have not completely shed the old self; it once clung to us like a double garment, and we must now labour earnestly to remove the remnants that still linger.

Furthermore, St. Paul emphasised that they should not be troubled by these exhortations, as if the matters spoken of were already familiar to them, especially considering that their past behaviour showed they did not know how to order their lives properly. It is not enough to merely know what we

ought to do; we must also demonstrate through our actions that our lives are in accordance with God's doctrine. If our conduct reveals that we have been rooted in such a way that we can conform ourselves entirely to God's will, then we can truly be called well-learned. However, if our previous lives reveal us to have been like stray sheep, or even more accurately, utterly consumed by our own lusts, and if traces of our former state still linger, indicating that we have not been sufficiently cleansed, then we should be receptive to the things that are beneficial and necessary for us. Thus, St. Paul spoke not only for the Ephesians but also for all of us. Whenever we feel that we can do without frequent reminders of certain matters, we should examine our lives. If we find that we have not completely rid ourselves of the vices we are being reminded of, we should continue to be taught, recognising that it is not enough for us to have God's doctrine swirling in our minds; it must be deeply embedded in our hearts so that our lives genuinely reflect our earnest learning.

St. Paul, having mentioned the old man, states that this old self is corrupted by deceitful desires. When he says "corrupted," he draws a parallel between the ageing process of our souls and that of our bodies. In old age, a person becomes weaker both physically and mentally, abandoning many of their desires and ambitions. In essence, they are as good as half-dead, with death awaiting them. St. Paul uses this analogy to describe the aging process of the soul. As I have previously explained, putting off the old self means forsaking our own nature because it is entirely corrupted. We do not bring anything good and pure with us from our mother's womb. Therefore, if we follow our own fleshly desires, give in to our affections, and indulge our own reasoning, the soul is in a state of corruption. In other words, there is no divine life within it, as previously mentioned. We must understand that we are corrupted as long as we remain in the old self, which means continuing in our natural state. It is worth noting that we may mistakenly believe ourselves to be vibrant during this state.

But this is like madness, and all the delusions that we try will only lead to our downfall until we have forsaken and given up both our thoughts and our desires. This is why St. Paul specifically mentions the desires and deceitful lusts. He shows that people are so blinded that they do not discern how the devil deceives them through the temptations he sets before them. For whoever is not moved by a true fear of God will let themselves loose. If someone says to them, "Unhappy soul, you will destroy yourself," they will answer, "No, for it does not seem to me that I serve the devil." And why is this? Because the delusions with which I was enchanted by Satan cling to me so strongly that I have become utterly infatuated, and I am ruined unless I learn not to flatter myself in my own conceits or fall asleep in them.

Paul tells us that our desires are full of deceit. This means that when you think you are in a good state and everything is going your way, when you have all your wishes fulfilled, and fortune is smiling upon you so that you prosper in all things and lack nothing, all your happiness is but an illusion. In short, Paul means to warn us that we should be suspicious of all our desires. Therefore, if a person intends to govern their life well, they must first and foremost disapprove of themselves and recognize that all their imaginings are nothing but Satan's illusions with which he deceives and entices them. They are all traps to ensnare you from every side. Once we understand this, we will have greatly profited, not only for a day but for our entire lives.

Seeing that so many wretched souls cast themselves away, hoping for some imagined benefit of their own making, let us be cautious not to follow the same path, not to pursue our own good intentions as we conceive them. We will not hurl ourselves into destruction if we follow the course our own nature compels us to take. Why? Because all our own desires and inclinations are deceitful. There is no other option but to set aside the reason we think we possess, along with all the enticements of the world. We must cast it all away and equip ourselves with the knowledge that the sweetness

of these things only serves to deceive us, preventing us from recognizing the deadly poison hidden beneath. In essence, we must remember how Paul tells us that until we have learned to deny ourselves, to consider ourselves as prisoners under God's Word, and to rid ourselves entirely of what we possess by nature, we do not truly understand what Christianity means. We do not know where the Gospel leads or to what end it is preached.

It is not enough to have put away the old man once; we must continue to progress in this, as warned here. St. Paul had indeed taught the Ephesians, and they had received his doctrine. Nevertheless, he exhorted them for a long time afterward, as we can see. This shows us that we must cultivate patience throughout our entire lives. Even though we may have made great efforts to subdue all our affections, lusts, and desires, we will never have so fully mastered ourselves that we are completely reformed. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to exert ourselves continually and labour for this all our lives. In short, we must possess the determination to forsake all our own desires and wicked thoughts.

Now, we must move on to the second point, which is that we must be renewed. It is not enough for people to dislike themselves, hate their vices, and avoid them. We must also conform ourselves to God's will, as indicated by the command, "Hate evil and do good." So, the things that St. Paul has spoken here are preparatory steps to putting our lives in good order. It's similar to when a person intends to yield a good crop in their field. They must first clear it of brambles, bushes, and weeds. Afterward, they plow, harrow, and sow it, and then they will reap the fruits of their labour.

If we aim to bear fruit unto God and desire to order our lives in a way that glorifies His name, we must first clear the ground within us. We are filled with wicked affections that are like thorns and thistles. Therefore, these harmful tendencies must be cut away and uprooted completely. Afterward, we must be cultivated, just as a plow passes over the soil. When our Lord

makes us feel His justice, we should be deeply remorseful for our inclination towards wrongdoing, making our hearts fertile ground for God's work. This is what has been previously discussed.

Now, we must prepare ourselves to receive good seed, so that God can gather the fruit He expects from us. This means we should honour Him in our actions and demonstrate that we acknowledge our indebtedness to Him in all things. This is why the next step is being renewed in our minds and understanding. It signifies a complete transformation in all aspects of our lives, showing that we have not only abandoned our old selves but have also allowed God to reign within us without resistance. This renewal should extend to our affections and thoughts, aligning ourselves with the holiness that God deserves.

Let us, therefore, humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults. We should pray that He helps us recognise our faults, leading to sincere repentance and a steadfast commitment to follow the path He has set for us. By doing this, we can fulfil our purpose and truly understand why our Lord Jesus has sent us. We should ensure that His incredible sacrifice for us is not in vain due to our negligence or indifference. Instead, being renewed, we should learn to serve our God with holiness and righteousness, demonstrating how highly we value His most noble and excellent redemption, in which He spared not His only Son for our sake. And so, we all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father," and so forth.

The Thirtieth Sermon, the Tenth on the Fourth Chapter

> 'And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Ephesians 4:23-26

We shall now present the second aspect of the well-ordering of our life as outlined by St. Paul, which is that we must walk in newness of life. This transformation is necessary because we need to be reformed by the Spirit of God. To illustrate that our change must encompass our entire being, St. Paul chooses the aspect of human nature that is most esteemed - knowledge, understanding, wisdom, reason, and all mental faculties. Even though reason itself is generally considered commendable, we are so corrupted by Adam's sin that we cannot even think a single pure thought without it being tainted by malice and rebellion against God. Even if this impurity is not immediately evident, there will always be hidden hypocrisy, enough to condemn us before God.

Therefore, the essential task before us, if we intend to please God, is to discard all our own notions and affections and allow a new guide, God's Spirit, to lead us. St. Paul uses similar language in Romans 12 when discussing Christian life: "It behooves us to be transformed not only in our sinful affections but also in what appears faultless - our reason." In short, we must undergo a spiritual transformation, or else our lives will remain unholy and impure. St. Paul explains this transformation as the process of putting away and mortifying all that originates from ourselves. Our true perfection lies in waging war against every aspect of our own nature and allowing God's Spirit to govern us fully, thereby demonstrating a complete change.

It is insufficient for our lives to merely possess some outward morality that earns the commendation and respect of the world. Ambition and other

hidden vices within us must be purged, with the guidance of the Lord taking precedence. This is why St. Paul insists that we should be renewed according to God, specifically in true righteousness and holiness. He had previously condemned the old man, which, as I've explained, encompasses all that we inherit from our birth. Now, he asserts that we must become new creations, just as our Lord Jesus Christ serves as an example. In Romans 6, he mentions that we must be crucified and die with Christ in relation to the old man, but also be conformed to His resurrection to walk in newness of life. While different words are used, the core message remains the same - that as Christ is the second Adam, we must be fashioned after His image.

Certainly, this transformation cannot be achieved by our own efforts alone. However, this exhortation is essential because when Holy Scripture directs us towards our Lord Jesus Christ, it does not mean for us to be passive like blocks of wood. Rather, it calls us to offer ourselves to God, so that He may work within us. In reality, these two concepts are not in contradiction: that the power within us should come from God, for He moves us toward goodness and enables us to do His will, as we have seen in other passages.

And yet, by God's gracious favour, the good works that are done are called ours, and in good service. When we are so led by Him, we go, and it is not to be wondered that God's goodness extends so far as to make the things ours which are His, and of which He alone deserves the praise. For we call the bread we eat our own, though we have it only as a gift. Even though men labour for it, it could not benefit them if not for God's free blessing. Thus, whatever He has given us, we call it our own.

Similarly, when Paul exhorted us to put on the new man, he didn't imply that we can do it all ourselves. Jesus Christ must clothe us with His righteousness and grant us the gift of His Holy Spirit. So, what does it mean to put on the new man? I have previously explained that it involves a transformation of our thoughts and desires, indeed, all aspects of our soul.

This change is not something we can achieve on our own, as it is a special work of God through the gift of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, St. Paul does not mean that we can do anything solely by our own power, but rather that each of us must strive to follow this path set before us, relying on God's grace.

He also warns us that our entire life remains perilous and evil until this transformation occurs, until the newness is evident in us. Moreover, the new man is created after God and His image, which underscores the point I am about to make - that we cannot achieve this new creation by our own will or power. St. Paul addresses this doubt by stating that the new man is created by God. In essence, he is saying, "My friends, do not abuse the grace offered to you by the gospel. Even though you may exert yourselves to dedicate yourselves to God's service, you can do nothing without the work of God's Spirit." In another passage, St. Paul explains that we should work out our salvation, as though we could do something on our own, but he adds that it must be done with fear and trembling, denoting humility and a recognition that we depend on another. God grants both the will and the ability to accomplish it, solely out of His gracious goodness.

Therefore, our efforts should be accompanied by humility, fearing that we are weak and unable on our own to do even the smallest thing without God's grace. St. Paul encourages us to remain humble and diligent, understanding that God's power is at work, and that all praise should be directed to Him alone, with none left for ourselves.

In this passage, St. Paul reminds us of Adam's fall, which is a spiritual death that has cut us off and separated us from God's creatures. Our fall from the state of grace in the person of our forefather Adam is evident, and it serves as a spiritual death that separates us from God's creatures.

After this dreadful declaration, that God repented that He ever made man due to human wickedness, He abhorred the corruption and sin within us.

Not that God possesses human emotions, but to emphasize His utter dissatisfaction with us until His image is renewed in us. It is written that God initially saw all that He had created as exceedingly good and faultless. However, after our father Adam's fall and his self-imposed separation from the source of life, he was stripped of all goodness. Being separated from God, what could he be other than utterly lost and beyond hope of recovery? Can we find life, righteousness, holiness, soundness, or uprightness outside of God? No. Therefore, Adam was as if cut off from the ranks of creatures, not even deserving to be counted among frogs and other vermin of the earth. However much we may boast of our nature, we bear a greater curse from God than all the lice, fleas, and worms of the earth. This is why St. Paul reminds us that God cannot recognize us as His children until His image is restored in us, which is accomplished through this new creation.

Just as Adam drew us all down and plunged us into the abyss of death with himself, so we are recreated anew by God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who referred to Himself as the resurrection and life. We must rise again in Him if we truly desire to live. However, this resurrection cannot occur unless we have first experienced spiritual death, as explained earlier today. Therefore, we should always keep this in mind: we cannot make ourselves righteous or render our lives acceptable before God. Instead, we must firmly resolve and believe that God will only accept what He recognizes as His own. Without Him, there is nothing but evil. Adam's sin caused His image to be effaced in us, and so it is imperative that we are made new in Jesus Christ.

Now, he has shown us how this may be achieved, saying, "in righteousness and holiness." By the word "righteousness," He meant soundness and uprightness, so that we live with our neighbours without deceit, malice, or harm, rendering to every man what is rightfully his. When such soundness reigns within us, we will demonstrate through our deeds that we have been remade in God's image in righteousness. However, it is not enough for

people to have their rights, unless God also has His. What purpose does it serve for us not to steal from our neighbours but to betray God? Therefore, righteousness must be matched with holiness. The two tables of the law are inseparable, and under the word "holiness," St. Paul encompasses all that pertains to the service of God.

The newness of our life, therefore, consists in walking purely before God, eliminating all corruption and uncleanness, separating ourselves from the defilements of the world, offering ourselves as a sacrifice to God, and simultaneously living honourably and uprightly with our neighbours. The fulfilment of these two things is all that is required for the perfection of a Christian life. It is certain that God's law has not taught us only partially what we must do; God has shown us the correct rule, to which nothing can be added or taken away. Our righteousness is contained in these two points: that God is honoured with all fear and reverence by us, and that we serve one another without causing harm.

Since people are prone to hypocrisy and doing good things merely to appear virtuous, St. Paul speaks of truth, suggesting that we may be considered the holiest people in the world but still condemned before God if we are not cleansed of all hypocrisy. We must walk in sincerity before God, so that He may be our witness and judge, attesting that we are not double-minded or filled with deceit, but rather, we are straightforward and sincere before Him. Even though our hands may be free from theft, extortion, and other acts against charity, if we have lust lurking within us, we will still be impure before God. Therefore, St. Paul mentions the word "truth" because we often content God with outward appearances, displaying vanity and falsehood. It is necessary to add that as God is a spirit, we must also be faithful and true before Him. He abhors all duplicity, which the Scripture terms "double-heartedness." If we make divisions within ourselves and keep some hidden thoughts, everything that comes from us will be corrupt and polluted, originating from an evil and contaminated source. Thus, if we wish to have

our hearts approved by God, the fountain must first be cleansed, and truth must reign within us.

Now, we see in practice what we should devote our efforts to as long as we live in this world. To boast of being Christians without considering the condition that Jesus Christ, our Head, has set for us is to turn everything upside down, as has been mentioned this morning. Whatever manner we desire to be regarded and esteemed among men, the same must we be before God and His angels. Therefore, we must combat our own vices until everything that is of our own nature is eliminated. This may not be achieved in a single day, but we must continually strive towards it.

Furthermore, let us be certain that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us as a pattern and example. Moreover, it is His role to transform us by the Spirit of God, His Father, so that we may walk in newness of life and become God's creatures. We should also contemplate the fifth of the things that God allows us, which is the guideline for leading a virtuous life. Firstly, we must honour and serve God, and then we should treat our neighbours with kindness, striving to do good for those in need and refraining from all kinds of evil and harm. This doctrine is straightforward to comprehend if our own wicked inclinations do not corrupt our understanding.

In truth, every person can expound these principles to others, but, as clear and well-known as these concepts may be, no one can effectively apply them to their own life due to the corruption of their own sinful desires. However, there will be no excuse for us when we must give an account before the great judge. Therefore, we should keep this doctrine in our hearts and pay close attention to it. It is a valuable lesson for us, as it shines its light throughout the world. Among believers, there is ample discussion of serving God and living in holiness. Yet, the world witnesses how these unfortunate souls buzz about insignificant trifles, and despite all their

exertions, they make no progress; instead, they distance themselves from God.

What is the cause of this? The reason is that each person devises their own rule according to their liking. Consequently, God's clear and straightforward word often goes unheard, while people immerse themselves in things that are of no benefit. As for us, even though we have the light of the gospel and can identify the superstitions and trifles of others, we are still far from adhering to this doctrine.

If one were to scrutinise our lives, where is this true holiness to be found? Where is this righteousness? As for the gospel, most individuals take from it what they fancy and readily trample God's truth underfoot as they please. To be sure, you will discover that those who most boast about their piety today are often unholy and impure people. Indeed, for the most part, even those who vociferously denounce God despise His truth and revile His word, except when they dismiss it as irrelevant or insignificant.

Such is the holiness of many who would nowadays like to be regarded as great Christians and pillars of the church. They would elevate themselves above God if they could. Although they are but worms and lowly creatures, they do not hesitate to blaspheme and hurl their thunderbolts and madness to assert that people should speak as they wish or they will confront God about it.

Regarding righteousness, where can one find it? Every person claims, "There is nothing but deceit, nothing but craft, nothing but falsehood, extortion, outrage, and violence." Everyone complains about their neighbours, and their neighbours complain about them. In any case, righteousness seems to have been driven out of the world. Therefore, considering how shamefully the name of Jesus Christ and His gospel is profaned by those who falsely misuse it, it is all the more necessary for us to recall what St. Paul says here: that God will disown us until we bear His

mark and are recreated anew in Jesus Christ, striving to be truthful. As I have already stated, even if we were esteemed as angels, our hypocrisy would always be apparent before God if we are not cleansed of it and if we do not endeavour, with a sincere and genuine affection, to devote ourselves to serving God and assisting our neighbours.

Therefore, St. Paul divides this doctrine into various points and applies it to specific exhortations. First, he declares that every individual must forsake lying and speak the truth to their neighbours because we are all members of one body. Not without reason does St. Paul present particular aspects of the doctrine that he had previously discussed generally. We frequently try to evade the doctrine, hoping it will evaporate into thin air and not apply to us. It is not that God's general admonition would not suffice if we were as teachable as we should be, ready to receive His guidance. However, because we are so deeply entrenched in our vanities, if God merely states in general terms that we must be conformed to His image and wholly deny ourselves, we pay it no heed. Therefore, He is compelled to expound it piece by piece, as though He were conducting a dissection of our thoughts and affections, revealing the devices we keep hidden within us. This is what St. Paul is presently doing. Having stated that it is necessary for us to be transformed into the image of God by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the new man and the head to whom we must be conformed, he could have stopped there. However, such a doctrine would have been accepted without objection, but it would not have benefited anyone as a living instruction. Therefore, St. Paul proceeds to speak about fornication, theft, deceit, drunkenness, hatred, lustful desires, and the cunning tricks that occur between neighbours.

When matters are presented in this detailed manner, people become more attentive. Although everyone may initially recoil, invent excuses, and contrive ways out, we must surely feel some constraining pressure within us. This is the approach that St. Paul follows here. Therefore, let us

understand that it is not sufficient for us to be taught our duty in a single word or a fleeting glance. God needs to admonish us and reveal to us how deeply our own nature is inclined to self-indulgence and how easily the devil can ensnare us with temptations and wiles. In short, God must direct our hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouths. He must enable us to see where we might go astray in this direction or that, so that we may be well-armed on all fronts and not leave any openings for the devil to exploit. This is what we should bear in mind, so that we do not regard ourselves as so capable that hearing a matter just once is sufficient for us. We will be amazed to see how the devil can still deceive us in many ways. Therefore, let us be diligent in paying close attention to all the warnings we receive, for they are not given to us in vain.

Since St. Paul had spoken about truth, he now advises, "Put away lying and speak the truth, each one of you with his neighbour." He uses the word "truth" here in a different sense than before. When he called holiness and righteousness "truthful," he meant that there should be no glossing over or deception, but a sincere simplicity. When God looks into our hearts as a witness, He should find no duplicity in us. In this context, "truth" implies straightforwardness, such that we lay bare everything in our hearts when necessary, without attempting to gain another's favour through subtlety and cunning, or seeking personal gain at another's expense. On the contrary, St. Paul uses the term "lying" to encompass not only outright falsehoods spoken in speech, such as when someone claims that white is black (for instance, if one were to ask the price of an item, and someone were to sell it for a crown when it is not worth a shilling). St. Paul is also referring to deceit and cover-ups, as well as all the strategies and tactics people employ, in other words, all the worldly wisdom and cunning that men value. St. Paul refers to these strategies as plain lies. Why? Because nowadays, a person is not considered clever unless they can scheme and deceive, using hidden and covert methods that others will not notice. Such behaviour is worse than robbing a chest and breaking the iron locks to steal money, or than

murdering a man when a thief with a drawn sword approaches a poor traveller to cut his throat. Therefore, these cunning murderers, who wish to be regarded as upright individuals, may disguise themselves through hypocrisy, but they are indeed described here as deceivers, thieves, and murderers. Not that they appear this way to people, but God, who sees deeper into our hearts than we do, will judge their actions as they truly are. What will people gain by making excuses? Nothing. Therefore, if we carefully consider this matter, we will see that when St. Paul condemns lies, he is denouncing those things that people value most highly: cleverness, wit, and the ability to conduct oneself skillfully in all company. The world says that a person must be flexible and adapt to any situation; they must be cautious so as not to be taken advantage of and always act preemptively rather than being caught off guard. The prevailing custom in the world is for each person to be on their guard, ready to ensnare others with their nets and entangle them countless times before they realise it. But St. Paul says we must use integrity and straightforwardness, speaking the truth to one another. He brings us back to the point he previously addressed: that we are all one body.

Now, let us turn to our own members. If one of my hands were to employ trickery and seize everything for itself, to the detriment of the other, if my foot were to conspire against my leg, or if my belly were to play some petty trick on my stomach, what a chaotic state we would be in! Therefore, if we are members of our Lord Jesus Christ, is it not a separation from His body when we resort to such cunning and petty deceptions? Even if they are not condemned by men, no doubt we will declare with our mouths that we are Christians. However, whatever we pretend, Jesus Christ will not be reshaped according to our desires. Just as He is one, He desires us to be one within His body, with the condition that each of us serves our neighbors. This can only happen if all deception is first eliminated. We see that the hand readily yields itself to serve the rest of the body, and likewise, the foot and every other member performs its duty. If any part is in danger, the rest

does not shrink away but all strive to help it. There is no self-interest or rivalry among them, but they work together according to the order of nature. Likewise, we should prove ourselves to be members of Jesus Christ through this kind of straightforward conduct.

St. Paul then applies this to a specific exhortation, that if we are cleansed of all hypocrisy and pretense before God, it will be evident in our entire lives. When we interact with one another, we will use no deceit but walk honestly. That is one point. Furthermore, we must not provoke or anger one another. We see that even a slight provocation can send us into a rage, and our passions are so extreme that reason and moderation are forgotten. When people are carried away in this manner, they become unreasonable and impervious to persuasion. Therefore, St. Paul says that if we do not live in peace with one another, we cannot be united in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, as much as anger prevails in us, we obliterate God's image within us by allowing our passions to take control and become so hot-tempered towards one another.

Now, it seems likely that he borrowed this common saying from the fourth Psalm, not to quote the psalm in its intended sense, but to apply it to his own purpose. We often use many verses of Scripture and apply them to various situations without altering their original meaning. In this case, St. Paul employed the saying, "Be angry and sin not," as though it were a well-known proverb. David uses a word that originally means to storm or rage, which he employed when rebuking those who wrongfully persecuted him. They were so hardened in their malice and consumed by venomous rage against him that they no longer feared God or acted with conscience or integrity. Therefore, David says to them, "Be angry, but do not sin," teaching us that the reason for their uncontrollable rage against him was their complete lack of fear of God, honesty, or conscience, turning them into savage beasts. This is why he says, "Be angry," implying that they should pause for a moment to reflect and reason with themselves. They

should examine their actions, and then they will not sin any longer. If each of them goes into a private place and reflects carefully, they will realize that their previous conduct was driven by diabolical rage.

This doctrine is absolutely necessary for all people. We can see the extent of our stubbornness; as soon as we conceive an idea in our heads, we immediately, without seeking God's will or asking for His guidance, consider our own thoughts as good and try to force everyone to conform to our wishes. The reason we often go astray is that we do not critically examine the matter, giving God the rightful authority and reverently paying attention to what He reveals to us in His Word. Therefore, we should be provoked, that is, grieved with ourselves, and complain about ourselves for indulging in such self-deception. If we do this, we will not sin, meaning that the great wickedness deeply rooted within us will soon diminish, for we will be striving against God. When our emotions get the better of us, God will intervene and ask, "Why are you waging war against Me unknowingly?"

In light of this, Paul advises us to "Be angry, and sin not." In other words, he is saying, "My friends, why are you quarreling with each other? Even over the smallest fault, you immediately get into a rage and are willing to move heaven and earth to avenge the offense. Yet, in the meantime, each of you has enough reason to be offended with yourselves. You do not need to look beyond your own person to find a cause for anger, for how many times do you offend God every day? You continually provoke Him. And yet, if someone merely touches your finger, you instantly become furious. What is the reason for this? It appears as if you have conspired with Satan to torment yourselves. You believe that once you have taken revenge on those who have wronged you, you will find peace. But it is a cursed peace when people are content and at rest only after taking revenge on those who have offended them. The way to quell all these wicked outbursts is for each person to understand that there will be plenty of reasons to be discontented

with themselves, to be angry with themselves, and to take vengeance on themselves. This is according to what St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, explaining what true repentance is, saying that godly sorrow, which arises from the knowledge of our sins, brings with it a grief that does not allow us to be at ease and rest. Instead, it incites us to be angry with ourselves when we contemplate the terrible wrath of God we have provoked. Yet, this godly sorrow does not prevent us from having hope and relying on God's goodness and mercy. Therefore, when we come to the point of being angry with ourselves upon recognizing our sins, and we do not seek revenge on our enemies but are prepared to do good to them and pray for them, it is a good practice. Every person should engage in this battle. These are indeed righteous and holy emotions when a person's anger arises from a zeal for the glory of God and love for Him. If we do this, that is, if each of us is grieved by our own faults, we will never find time to be at odds with other people or to harm our neighbors. But if we possess a true zeal for the honour of God, we will undoubtedly forget the offences committed against us and will not be quick to say, 'I will protect my honour or reputation,' for there will be another significant impediment to restrain us: the remembrance of our own sins against God, which have dishonoured Him as much as we can in our weakness. This will counterbalance our tendency to be upset by the offences committed against us. Thus, you can see what we need to consider in this regard, as St. Paul teaches us that we should turn our attention away from the occasions that might cause us to seek revenge on others. For instance, a fly buzzing around our eyes immediately irritates us, to the extent that we need no further provocation to quarrel with anyone who annoys us in the slightest way. Therefore, let us learn to abandon ourselves and focus on our own faults, so that we may be displeased with ourselves, and this displeasure may dissipate our anger, which, in turn, causes us to be at odds with God. It also urges us to be angry with the multitude of vices to which we are too prone. This is the first point to remember.

Regarding the second point, we will postpone it until next Sunday, God willing, when it will be discussed in more detail. Let us now humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, confessing our sins, and praying that He will make us increasingly aware of them and enlighten us with the doctrine of the Gospel. Through this, we can recognize our sins and shortcomings, feel ashamed of ourselves, behold the righteousness revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and strive to be conformed to it. We can draw closer and closer to it day by day until we fully adhere to it. In the meantime, may God bear with our weaknesses, granting us the grace to amend them daily, in the hope that He will show His mercy towards us. Thus, we become our own judges, condemning all that we find in ourselves, and may it please Him to bestow this grace not only upon us but also upon all the peoples and nations of the earth, etc.

The Thirty First Sermon, the Eleventh on the Fourth Chapter

> "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."- Ephesians 4:26-28

Last Sunday, we discussed how if each of us were to reflect on our own faults, we would have sufficient reason to restrain our irritability and anger from venting against those who offend us. We are already so discontented with ourselves that even a minor incident can easily provoke us to lose our temper. This happens because we spend too much time focusing on the faults of others while forgetting our own. The remedy prescribed to prevent

us from quickly and easily taking offence at the behaviour of others is for each of us to introspect and chastise ourselves when we realise how wretched we all are.

Now, after demonstrating that it is much better and more appropriate for us to be displeased with our own faults than to be upset by trivial provocations when others do not act according to our wishes, he added this injunction: "Let not the sun go down upon your anger." By this, we should not assume that Paul intended to condone those who become quickly enraged and quickly pacified, for this is a blameworthy vice. Although it is more forgivable than nurturing displeasure that turns into bitterness or hatred, it is still not easily absolved. We do not need to have struck a blow or committed an overt wrong to be brought before a magistrate; even if we have merely been provoked to the point of harbouring resentment, or have expressed our displeasure, no matter how slightly, we are already liable to God's judgment and the danger of hellfire, as we have been warned by our Lord Jesus Christ.

When St. Paul prohibits us from harbouring our anger, he does not entirely exonerate those who are gentle, easily reconciled, and quick to forgive, for they are already blameworthy, as I mentioned earlier. Rather, he proceeds gradually, as if to say, "My friends, if each of us were to reflect on our own sins, we would undoubtedly be moved to dislike ourselves because we provoke God's anger against us. One who keenly feels his own faults will use this self-awareness as a shield against himself. We ought to be zealous for God's Word, as if we were His advocates, and this zeal should compel us to condemn evil wherever we find it. However, anger is ever-present, residing within us, so we can never attain the perfection we desire as long as we are in this world. Nevertheless, regardless of the circumstances, we must take care not to allow ourselves to be consumed by uncontrolled passions. If we harbour intense anger and go to bed with it, it will surely poison us, and the harm will not be easily undone. It is akin to someone

afflicted with an internal ailment who, already infected, avoids the physician and distances himself from any possible treatment. When he finally seeks remedy, it is often too late because the ailment has become incurable, having grown too powerful and overwhelming him, rendering medical intervention useless. Similarly, persistent anger is like an internal and unchecked ailment. The longer it is allowed to fester, the more it settles in and proliferates, becoming nearly impossible to rectify. This is the second degree that St. Paul addresses. First, he instructs us on how to be blameless before God concerning anger and resentment, namely, by each of us reflecting on our own faults, condemning them, feeling sorrow for them, and experiencing a profound remorse that leaves us nearly unconscious. This is a righteous anger, one that God permits us to feel. Nevertheless, even when we have offended God, we should not allow this anger to multiply against Him. The devil might seize us, making it difficult for us to return to the right path, as our passions overpower us, causing us to follow them unrestrained. We must be vigilant against this.

That is also why he says that we give place to the devil when the sun goes down upon our anger. It is true that we have no sooner stumbled than the devil has already gained power over us. However, God restrains him in such a way that if we recognize our faults and correct them, God does not allow the devil to hold us captive like prisoners. But when we are so foolish as to nurture our anger, delighting in our own irritability, and then continue to entertain harmful thoughts that fester within us, then we have opened the door to Satan. He seizes control, takes possession of us, and afterwards, it is too late for us to desire a return to righteousness. The harm is deeply rooted and has grown so strong that no remedies can heal it, as I explained earlier. Now that we understand Paul's meaning, let us embrace this doctrine.

The first point is to thoroughly examine the evil within us, so that we may become angry with ourselves. Each of us should be our own adversary, driven by zeal for God to hate and abhor our own vices. Let this be the first

matter we focus on, and then we will have sufficient reason to curb our anger and resentment. We will no longer be so quick to take offence at those who have wronged us, but will instead show patience to those who have greatly offended us, because we will be occupied with uncovering our own imperfections. As I mentioned earlier, we will find it easier to bear with the shortcomings of others when we are aware of our own faults, not only in relation to other human beings but also towards the living God. After all, why should we make such a fuss over every wrong done to us when we beg for God's forgiveness every day due to the offences we have committed against His Majesty, transgressions that have violated His righteousness? Therefore, the most effective way to subdue all wicked and excessive anger is for each of us to be indignant and displeased with ourselves, considering how many sins and vices we are guilty of.

As for the second point, if we happen to stumble and fall due to our human frailty, we must not be so terrified of God that we become paralyzed by fear and feel filthy before Him. Instead, let us be cautious not to harden and immerse ourselves in wrongdoing. As soon as we sense any excessive agitation within us, let us intervene promptly and make an effort to control it. We must exert self-discipline to subdue our passions that threaten to carry us away, leading us to rebel against God and our neighbours. In this way, we must fight to rein in our anger and resentment, and if excessiveness has already escaped us, we should quickly return to reason and seek to remove it. We should view it as a malady that requires a swift remedy, or it will grow to a point where any treatment will be ineffectual. Keep this in mind.

Now, if St. Paul had said nothing more than this, "My friends, do not let the sun go down on your anger, for if bitterness takes root, it will not be easily removed," that warning would have been sufficient for us. However, the ominous statement he adds, "give no opportunity to the devil," should make us shudder. Some have interpreted it as referring to enemies of the faith

seeking opportunities to slander it. Yet, by considering the words themselves, it is clear that Paul intended to warn us of something we should be even more fearful of, something that should truly terrify us. Namely, the possibility of the devil gaining mastery and dominion over us when we harbour grudges and bitterness against our brethren.

Now, which of us will not tremble with fear upon hearing of our submission to Satan, as if we were bound in his chains like prisoners? Yet, despite this, we often disregard the warnings given to us. Paul has conveyed God's verdict, which is that if we persist in our anger and bitterness towards those who have wronged us, it is as if we willingly enter into a contract with Satan, offering ourselves as slaves under his tyranny. Therefore, it is essential for us to be cautious, so that even if we cannot completely rid ourselves of this vice at first, we should at least ensure it does not take such a firm hold on us that we cannot be reconciled or that we pursue endless quarrels, making it impossible for others to reason with us until some satisfaction is reached. We must be vigilant not to fall into such bondage to Satan.

For this reason, it is said that when people engage in mutual anger and resentment, they are divided into two, and why is this so? Because God is already offended by my neighbour's wrong towards me. If I also react with indignation and maintain a grudge, allowing it to fester on my part, I willingly submit to the devil's dominion. I should rather show compassion towards a soul that is already in great danger, on the verge of perdition. I should seek reconciliation and mend the breach as much as possible. However, if I let my anger escalate and submit myself to the devil's yoke, then I willingly accept his curse, allowing him to gain mastery over both parties. Let us, therefore, keep this warning in mind, for the Holy Spirit intended to rouse us from our slumber, so that each of us may remain vigilant and avoid nurturing excessive anger, lest we allow it to take root within us and become so intense that it cannot be appeased.

Furthermore, Paul adds another admonition, as I mentioned earlier, in which he reproves common vices that contradict the rule given by our Lord, with the intention that we, as God's children, should live according to our calling. He now addresses deceit, theft, and extortion, which occur when individuals become overly preoccupied with themselves and disregard the harm they cause to others. Those who used to steal must refrain from stealing and instead engage in productive labour, working with their own hands to provide for their own needs and to assist those in need. When Paul speaks of theft here, he does not only refer to thieves as commonly punished with whipping or hanging, but to all forms of cunning and craftiness employed to gain ill-gotten wealth through dishonest practices, such as extortion and bribery. Although these deeds may go unnoticed or those who are deeply involved may manage to conceal their actions skillfully, Paul labels them all as thefts and robberies. This is because the prophets and apostles did not use the ordinary language of earthly courts of justice but had their focus on God's judgment seat. Deeds that may be excused or even justified before human beings will not escape condemnation there, for God sees much more clearly than mortal creatures.

Again, favouritism or partiality may often sway legal matters, leading to concealment, deceit, and judges turning a blind eye, allowing individuals to escape with their ill deeds. This might please many, but it is not the case with God. Therefore, let us understand that the prohibition against stealing is not like the enactment of some civil law for temporal governance. We are summoned before the heavenly judge who reveals hidden things and condemns all wicked greed as theft. We must be cautious not to seek our own profit excessively at the expense of our neighbour. Under the term theft or stealing, St. Paul encompasses all the wicked practices used to deceive others and all forms of extortion that strip people of their possessions and livelihood.

Now, we see that there are thieves of all degrees. For there is no one who is not inclined to grasp for themselves, except those reformed by God's Spirit. Even among seemingly wealthy people, there are many schemes and cunning, traps set for the inexperienced who do not discern them. Craftsmen have their skills to counterfeit their products, deceiving those who cannot tell the difference. Price manipulation is rampant; all is fair to them as long as they can sell their goods, for they believe it is permissible. The same goes for labourers and farmers. In short, there is no group of people without countless faults and acts of extortion. Each person seeks to enrich themselves and assert dominance. When you consider the wealthy and those living off their rents, it is even worse, as they fleece the poorer folks who cannot resist them. Yet, they all justify themselves, for they do not realise that God has sounded His trumpet to call them before Him, and they do not understand the kind of purity and perfection He demands.

Therefore, we must examine not only our outward actions but also the wicked desires that tempt us to enrich ourselves unjustly. Paul intentionally mentions that the thief should steal no more to emphasize that a significant change should occur in our lives when God brings us back to Himself through the gospel. We should no longer resemble unbelievers who walk in darkness but should understand that when we are called into God's law, it is with the condition that we become new creatures. This highlights that Paul is not merely talking about common thefts that are condemned and punished by the world. Otherwise, it would imply that all converts to Christianity were thieves. Instead, he uses the term "steal" intentionally to prompt us to renounce all forms of craftiness, malice, cunning, and the unjust acquisition of others' possessions. When he says, "Steal no more," it is to make us reflect upon ourselves.

Alas, although I would like to excuse myself, and it may not seem amiss to me, I must not rely on that perception. For in the meantime, my faults will be recorded before God, and I must give an account of all things that have

not been done in accordance with uncorrupted justice and right. I must be considered a thief before God, even if the whole world has acquitted me.

Now, let us consider how well this doctrine applies to us. We find that those who have converted to the Gospel often take the most liberty to do evil. It seems that many have learned nothing else from the Gospel but to engage in crafty schemes to acquire the possessions of others. Some used to show greater simplicity when they were blind, wretched, and knew nothing of God and the pure doctrine of salvation. They at least had some honesty and straightforwardness in their dealings with the world. However, they have regressed in God's school, becoming even more unscrupulous and convinced that everything is permissible for them. Moreover, they shamelessly defend and justify their actions, acting as if they have been greatly wronged when they are criticized for their clearly known deeds, even though even young children could judge them. So, we should be even more condemned, as Paul tells us here, that although we used to enrich ourselves through cunning and extortion and showed no remorse for seizing others' property before we received good teaching, we should at least be more cautious in our dealings with our neighbors now that we have been enlightened by God's word. Therefore, the lesson to be taken from this text is that we must allow the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ to govern us in such a way that each of us can set aside our craftiness and deceitfulness.

Furthermore, many people make excuses, saying, "What shall I do then? I have no trade to earn a living unless I continue with my dishonest ways." St. Paul says, "Let him who has been stealing steal no longer, but let him labour, working with his hands." It's as if he is telling them that their excuses to avoid honest work and endure hardships are insignificant before God. All these justifications hold no weight in God's eyes. If anyone fears that they will be in want, they should not refrain from labouring. Take note of this one point.

We should learn to forsake these self-deceptions, which many people use to lull themselves into complacency. They believe that once they have said, "What shall I do? How can I earn a living if I do not continue my unethical trade?" it is as if God's judgment no longer applies to them. They feel so self-assured that they are entirely blameless as long as they can provide reasons for their actions. However, this is pure folly. Instead of being complacent, we should be willing to work hard for our livelihood, even if we have become wealthy by deceit and theft, relying on petty schemes and unjust gains. Let us not be ashamed to labour and make an effort to sustain ourselves honestly.

In short, as Christians, we must renounce all ill-gotten gains, no matter how we try to justify them. This warning is as relevant today as ever. We must refrain from all cunning and deceit when God calls us to be His children and live as a community of believers. Many of us may need to abandon our dishonest trades. While there are countless ways to earn a living in the world, when we stand before God, we should always remember that we are not answering to an earthly judge but to the One who sees all and before whom nothing can be hidden.

So, let us ponder this carefully. Even though there are numerous practices tolerated in society, which sustain a considerable portion of the world's population, these practices are not only futile but also abhorrent in the eyes of God. Firstly, there are the priests and monks, along with all the inhabitants of monasteries. Secondly, there are those who benefit from them and live off them. These individuals, like mercenaries, gain some profit from these practices and exploit them through various means, hiding under the cover of a very long tail that twists and turns like a labyrinth.

Again, there are many who devote themselves entirely to pursuits that are worthless. They remain in such ignorance that they cannot distinguish right from wrong. In their darkness, they even perceive black as white.

Regardless of the situation, there is no excuse for men in this matter. Each person must consider whether, until now, they have gained their living by means that God condemns in His Word. If they have tarnished themselves by consuming bread that did not come to them lawfully from God's hand, but rather through their own dishonest practices, then they must change their ways. They must learn to work in such a way that they can honestly say that their sustenance comes as a blessing from God.

This lesson from St. Paul is crucial, especially considering the prevalence of thievery in the world today. Many individuals deceive themselves, arguing that the belly demands its fill, and that everything necessary is justified. However, this reasoning should not exempt them from God's Word. Whether in abundance or scarcity, we must be subject to God's commands. For although we are naturally inclined to seek provision by any means, lawful or unlawful, we must contemplate the importance of St. Paul's message here.

Furthermore, St. Paul takes this message one step further, instructing all believers not only to refrain from defrauding others and stealing their goods but also to strive to help those in need. Although it may seem challenging to abstain from all wrongdoing and replace our comfortable living with hard labor, we must remember that, by nature, we are inclined to seek our own profit. Every one of us desires to be well-provided for and is inclined to store up wealth. However, we must recognize that we have a responsibility to care for the members of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as we care for ourselves. Therefore, we must make the effort to do good for them. This requires a significant change in our affections, and we must earnestly dedicate ourselves to this task so that we can truly claim that the bread we eat comes from God's hand and that we are sustained by His goodness, much like children provided for by a loving father. Let us, therefore, resolve to act accordingly.

Furthermore, we should not consider it sufficient to merely refrain from all cunning, deception, and the unlawful acquisition of wealth. We should also endeavour to do good with the little we have and help those in need. There's another important aspect to note – St. Paul encourages us to labour in what is good. Why is that? Consider the numerous trades, crafts, or occupations in the world that serve no purpose other than corruption and toil for money's sake. People often overlook this fact because they are content with the extravagance of the wealthy, or they invent new schemes every day to extract money from foolish purses. Those who are prone to excessiveness and luxury perpetuate the illusion that nothing is lacking for them.

St. Paul distinguishes here that it is not sufficient to say, "I work hard, I have my occupation, or I have such a trade." That is insufficient. We must evaluate whether our work is good and beneficial for the community and whether our neighbours may benefit from it. The ultimate goal of all trades, occupations, and states should be to contribute to the common good and the well-being of society. This aligns with our comparison to the members of a body, meaning each part should work for the benefit of the whole without harming others.

So, if someone engages in a trade or occupation that serves no purpose except to breed offences, indulge in excessive pleasures, or promote immoderate pomp, it is outside the realm of godly vocations or callings. God disapproves of such things. People might boast of their success in such pursuits, but they serve the devil. Just as the devil has his martyrs, he also has his servants. We see how superstitious individuals torment themselves without reason and become obsessed with their actions, often to the point of madness. The Scriptures use similar comparisons to illustrate how the devil can lead people astray. Many people needlessly torment themselves, becoming what one might call the devil's martyrs.

Similarly, many people work diligently in various trades or occupations to earn their livelihood, but upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that their work is nothing but corruption and vice. Their efforts often nurture pride and excess. In short, it amounts to a direct provocation of God and a reckless squandering of the resources that God has provided with the command to use them wisely and soberly. It's no wonder that St. Paul has made this distinction.

Hence, every individual should carefully evaluate their own actions. When parents intend to guide their children towards a trade or occupation, they should not only consider what would be the most profitable according to common custom, but they should also weigh two essential factors. First, they should assess which trade would best enable their child to provide for themselves and their future household when they eventually marry. Second, they should ensure that the chosen craft or occupation serves the needs of their neighbours and contributes to the common welfare of society.

So, the primary concern for parents when directing their children toward trades and occupations should not solely revolve around maximising profits. Instead, they should focus on ensuring that their children remain disciplined and do not deviate into unethical practices. When our desires lead us to be so driven by profit that we can't see past it, we are essentially shaking hands with Satan. Such enticements can become traps set by him. Just as a hungry fish is easily caught when it sees bait, similarly, individuals who act without further consideration because a certain trade appears lucrative may find themselves ensnared in wrongdoing.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to heed St. Paul's advice. When individuals are eager to earn a living, they must act with careful consideration, rather than blindly following the customs of others without evaluating the rightness or wrongness of their actions. They must always bear in mind that they are accountable to God, not just to human society.

Let us pay close attention to what is being conveyed here: to have compassion for the suffering of the needy. St. Paul's intention is clear—to remind us that the Lord, in placing impoverished individuals before us, is testing our nature, determining whether we possess kindness or are as cruel as wild beasts. This should stir feelings of compassion within us. When the Scripture discusses acts of charity and almsgiving, it not only employs the term "mercy" but also emphasizes that our hearts should be moved when we witness our brethren in need. Therefore, the sight of our neighbors' necessities should prompt us to acts of generosity and assistance.

We should not wait until they cry out from hunger or until we are compelled or shamed into action. Rather, each of us should consider that these individuals may have endured hardships even before they come to our attention. It is as though they have summoned us, sending us their agents or collectors to gather what is rightfully theirs—just as landlords send their representatives to collect rent. Our Lord asks us to pay Him His tribute, signifying our acknowledgement that the possessions we hold are His, granted to us freely. He sends us neither tax collectors nor enforcers, but instead, He sends the poor. These individuals are His true representatives, and this should be sufficient reason for us to offer assistance. Their needs are presented before us so that we may be moved by pity and compassion, prompting us to do good.

In summary, we must grasp several important points from St. Paul's words. Firstly, we should forsake any trades or livelihoods that are contrary to God's word, as they will always brand us as thieves in His eyes if we engage in wicked practices. Even if we are confident that our occupation is lawful, we must conduct it in an honest and non-deceptive manner. Secondly, we must understand that there is no excuse before God. Whether we claim famine, poverty, or necessity, these justifications will not absolve us. We must work diligently to earn our livelihood lawfully and refrain from unscrupulous means. Lastly, apart from abstaining from wrongdoing and

employing devious methods to acquire the possessions of others, we must also be committed to doing good and extending assistance to those in need, using what God has provided us. These offerings and sacrifices are our way of expressing gratitude for His blessings.

We are aware that acts of charity are referred to as sacrifices. Therefore, when we perform them, we must approach with a sincere and genuine heart, recognizing that we come to offer homage to God for all that we possess through Him. If there are any ill-gotten gains in our possession, it is certain that our sacrifices will be tainted, and our charitable deeds will be transformed into repugnant acts.

Therefore, let everyone be cautious not to acquire wealth with one hand only to give it away with the other. Each of us should maintain clean hands and a single-hearted purpose. We must strive with utmost integrity to earn our living in ways that, if God blesses us with profit, we may receive it as His gracious gift. In truth, even Moses forbade us from withholding any portion of our gain through our own efforts or labour, for God desires us to acknowledge Him as the source of all. Therefore, when we engage in acts of charity, let us do so with the understanding that, in response to God's generosity and His blessings bestowed upon us, we willingly offer Him homage with what we have received. Let us demonstrate through our actions that we do not intend to hoard the gifts He has granted us but instead employ them as He has ordained, primarily to alleviate the needs of those who require assistance.

Now, let us humbly kneel before the majesty of our gracious God, acknowledging our faults and seeking a deeper awareness of them, so that we may genuinely repent and ask for His forgiveness. May we continually progress in His reverence, forsaking our worldly desires, and may we grow in our love for Him while diligently adhering to His holy commandments. In unity, let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Thirty Second Sermon, the Twelfth of the Fourth Chapter

> "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." - Ephesians 4:29-30

St. Paul provides us with correction of a vice here, which is very dangerous. Yet, it is so common among men because, at first glance, they fail to see the harm it brings. Thus, they readily engage in it. People may argue that engaging in pleasant conversation, all the while harboring no ill intentions, is innocuous. They might contend that it is possible to poison someone's mind with words, yet still, it should not be considered harmful. Convincing individuals of its peril can be challenging, despite the Holy Ghost's admonishment.

I affirm that engaging in light or lewd conversation, which tends to promote immoral behaviour, is akin to offering poisoned words to the soul. It is essential to be cautious about this, for it is precisely what St. Paul has advised us against. People may deny that their speech is filthy or lewd, but experience bears witness to the contrary. It is not without reason that it has been said that evil words corrupt good manners. Even if one is modest, chaste, pure-minded, and inclined to goodness, if they partake in wanton talk, it can penetrate their heart unnoticed, tainting them before they realise it. Thus, it corrupts thoroughly.

Indeed, if a woman listens to messages that seek to seduce her, one might aptly say that she has already fallen into a state of promiscuity. The evidence is clear. It is certain that all unchaste and lewd speeches are harmful. While those who engage in such talk may not always have ill intentions, regardless of their intent, Satan is the instigator. As mentioned earlier, if unchaste and loose talk is given free rein, it is inevitable that we will be poisoned quickly. Therefore, it is not without reason that St. Paul admonishes us not to let unclean or filthy speech come out of our mouths.

On the contrary, we should engage in conversations that edify, benefiting those who listen. As even the heathens acknowledge, it is beneficial to be in the company of someone from whom one always hears wise and virtuous words, departing with newfound wisdom. Thus, nature itself leads them to say this. Therefore, let us learn to avoid and abstain from engaging in such conversations. When a person's speech is filled with obscenities, and various individuals take opposing sides in conversations, and instead of gaining good from the discourse, one feels attacked by Satan, we must recognise them for what they are—stings that Satan delivers secretly and cunningly to pierce our hearts. Considering this, is it not justified to disdain someone who willingly engages in such harmful discourse, viewing them as a perilous contagion?

The first thing to emphasise is that the Lord has given us tongues to express our thoughts to one another. Their purpose is to benefit our neighbours, and so we should use them accordingly. The tongue is referred to as the "meant" to convey our hearts and minds to others or to guide all other parts of our being, indicating its superiority. Therefore, we should employ it primarily for honouring God. The order of nature should engrain in our hearts that our words should be necessary and contribute to our neighbours' well-being.

Our Lord intends all parts of ourselves to serve the greater good, with our tongues being especially important. The essence of our speech should be to

edify, whether by offering counsel, issuing warnings, giving rebukes, reminding others of something, or teaching those who are ignorant. In the context of the spiritual life, the primary purpose is to teach the ignorant and show them the path to salvation. However, if someone is negligent or unruly, they may require exhortation or admonishment. The tongue serves to comfort those in distress, prevent them from despairing, and guide souls away from destruction.

We must also provide warnings to those who may be deceived. Once we engage in these activities, we will be continually serving our neighbours in countless ways, both for their physical and spiritual well-being. It is evident that there are numerous opportunities for us to make a difference. If we remain silent and care neither for the bodies nor souls of those with whom we should be united, it is a clear disregard for God. Our tongues are meant to glorify God, confess our faith, call upon Him, and serve our neighbours in various ways.

Therefore, the first point to consider in this regard is the lawful use for which God has designed our tongues and their application in promoting our neighbour's salvation and well-being, both spiritually and temporally. It is a grave matter if we misuse our tongues, forsaking the fear of God, and serve Satan with loose talk, promoting dishonesty, and encouraging sinful behaviour. Such misuse defiles our tongues and disrupts the natural order.

Let us learn to engage in good and necessary conversations to avoid polluting ourselves with wicked communication, which are cunning tricks of Satan meant to corrupt those who are inclined to serve God. The more loose and sinful talk there is in the world, the more spiritual corruption there is, as I mentioned earlier. Even though many may not believe it, the evidence is clear through experience. We should not be foolish and refuse to learn until we face significant harm. Instead, we should heed the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

It should not surprise us that the world is increasingly inclined towards wickedness. Jesting and scoffing talk are now considered virtuous, and no one sees anything wrong with them. There is a multitude of jesters and mockers whose aim is to eliminate all sense of shame, encouraging people to behave shamelessly. This licentiousness is all too common and tolerated, and we are now witnessing its consequences.

Consider the prevalence of frivolous and immoral songs and love-making. When young women sing foolish love songs, they often fall into promiscuity before even understanding the concept of chastity. They become bold and hardened towards immorality, and the devil gains control over them before they comprehend the importance of keeping their faith and vows intact until marriage. Young women who involve themselves with such songs are on a perilous path. It is unfortunate that this problem persists, suggesting that Satan is actively working to corrupt our moral values. If it weren't for his influence, we might have an easier time eradicating this filth from our memory. Unfortunately, it seems impossible to fully address this issue, even with severe punishments in place.

Both married women and unmarried girls should take heed and avoid falling into the trap of being regarded as harlots. They must correct the vice that corrupts the whole world and restrain their foul tongues, which only serve to spread filthiness. However, even with this warning, we will have little excuse. Those who close their ears and harden their hearts against the Holy Ghost will be held accountable not only for their numerous offenses against God but also for poisoning the souls of others, a much graver and more horrific deed than merely killing their bodies. Those who poison animals are driven out of society, and they deserve it. What, then, should be done to those who not only harm the body with their poisons but also assault the soul and persist in corrupting all goodness, fear of God, and honesty with their immoral speech?

We must remember that God has appointed our tongues for a specific purpose, as mentioned earlier, which is to serve our neighbors and benefit them both physically and spiritually. We must diligently use our tongues for this purpose. Above all, we must avoid corrupting those who are inclined to serve God and leading them astray with our speech, which may challenge their goodness, tempt them towards evil, increase their licentiousness, and make them negligent. Evil speech corrupts good manners in many ways. Some individuals are blatant scoffers of God, unrepentant of their actions, while others downplay their faults, considering them venial sins. Some cloak their wrongdoing, while others argue that we need not be so strict and serious in our lives. Such talk slowly erases the fear of God.

We must be vigilant against the various types of people who spread this harmful talk. Above all, each of us must speak chastely and avoid using inappropriate language. We must also distance ourselves from those who jest improperly.

Despite the fact that they are welcomed into our company for the sake of amusement, and at times even generously treated, we should learn to keep such individuals away from our gatherings. We wouldn't willingly offer our throats to a dagger when we see it drawn, nor would we seek out someone to harm our bodies. So why do we eagerly expose our souls to something much worse? Let us, therefore, avoid those who can only extinguish the fear of God within us, make us shameless and callous, and lead us away from all decency and godly sorrow. We must be cautious not to associate with such people, lest we receive the punishment we deserve from God. Therefore, let us strive to prevent such plagues from infiltrating our midst.

Do not be deceived, as St. Paul warns us about these scoffers who only serve to incite our lusts, deprive us of our conscience, diminish our fear of God, and corrupt us in such a way that sin becomes pleasing. Beware that none of you are deceived by deceptive words, for this has been a common

occurrence throughout history. Let us heed St. Paul's counsel and not only watch out for ourselves but also ensure that others are not corrupted in the same manner. That is the lesson we should take from this.

We must recognize that we are already weak and prone to evil, even without the presence of lewd songs and ungodly talk. When the devil finds an opening and lures us into further wickedness with his flattery, hardening our hearts in the process, we become entirely subject to his will. We should not grieve the Spirit of God, for we are marked and sealed for the day of our redemption. Furthermore, we must consider how perverse it is to misuse our tongues, which God has designated for His honour and our neighbour's benefit, by polluting them with filthiness and corrupting those who are dedicated to serving God. We should not lead them towards beastly immorality, causing them to abandon their shame and honesty. If we were not so foolish, we would realize the gravity of perverting the natural order in this manner.

St. Paul warns us of something that should concern us even more: "Grieve not God's Spirit." Why? Because we are marked with it, and it dwells within us, bearing witness to our hope of salvation in our hearts. It is also the source of life that assures our everlasting salvation. When we take the liberty to do evil and speak evil, we are opposing God's Spirit just as much as resisting His life-giving influence. It is like taking the bridle in our teeth to engage in all manner of wickedness, which only causes Him grief. This is the message Paul intended to convey.

However, let us first note that he speaks here in the common manner of Holy Scripture. We know that there are no emotions in God; it is the nature of humans to feel sorrow or grief. God is unchangeable. Yet, because we cannot comprehend His infinite nature and boundless Majesty, Scripture employs such expressions for our benefit. When it says that God is angry or grieved, it does not imply any change in Him. Instead, it aims to turn us

away from our sinful deeds, to make us abhor evil, and to make us see that we provoke Him to anger through our wickedness.

The Scripture does not suggest that God is subject to change when it says He is angry or sorry. Instead, it directs us to consider our own actions and to abhor our vices even more. St. Paul is not speaking of God's anger alone; he also mentions that the Holy Ghost is sorry or grieved. We are not God's children by nature, given our wretched state, being cursed in Adam and children of wrath. Yet, His Holy Spirit dwells within us, calling us to the incredible honour and dignity of being His children.

This allows us to call upon Him as our Father and have familiar access to Him, all of which is done by the Holy Ghost. This is why the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of adoption. The inheritance of Heaven does not belong to us by our own merit or nature, as I mentioned earlier. It is solely by the free and gracious goodness of God.

He has sealed all of this in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. This is why it is said that we possess a mortal body. This does not merely refer to our physical body, including our feet, hands, skin, bones, and flesh. It also signifies the presence of corruption within us due to the dwelling of sin, which leads to nothing but death. Throughout our lives, we are constantly reminded of our mortality, facing various diseases, infirmities, and the effects of aging. We can see well in advance that we are on a path toward our own graves. Considering the multitude of deaths we encounter in our bodies and the even greater darkness of death that awaits our souls, how can we hope that God will welcome us into His kingdom?

However, it is said that the Spirit is life. Even if there is only a single grain or a tiny spark of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ within us, we can be certain that we will share in His glory. He has risen from the dead and conquered death through His Holy Spirit. In this manner, we are quickened with Him, eagerly awaiting our deliverance from the corruptible nature that

surrounds us. Therefore, it can be said that we are sealed by the Holy Ghost, as I mentioned earlier, which is affirmed not only here in this chapter but also in other places, such as the second letter to the Corinthians.

This analogy is quite fitting. While God's promises should be sufficient in their own right and hold full authority for us, our tendency towards disbelief often prevents us from fully trusting and relying on them until they are confirmed and assured to us. We need to be able to say, "Look, it is indeed God Himself who is speaking." On one hand, we are plagued by doubt and suspicion, and on the other, we cannot fully place our trust in the things declared in God's name. This is because His promises, though undeniable, remain inaccessible until they are imprinted in our hearts, which is achieved through His Holy Spirit. Just as a document is authenticated by the addition of a seal, God confirms and seals His promises of our salvation in our hearts with His Holy Spirit. This is why it is frequently mentioned that God's Spirit serves as a seal, guaranteeing our inheritance of salvation in our hearts. Another apt comparison is found in the notion of an earnest penny. When a deal is made, even if no immediate payment is made, the exchange is concluded with the giving of an earnest penny. Neither party can later retract from the deal. The buyer cannot say, "I've changed my mind and want to cancel the purchase," nor can the seller say, "I feel deceived and want to keep my goods." Both parties are bound: one to make the payment and the other to deliver the goods.

Even so, it is said that God's Spirit is the earnest penny of the life of our souls. Why? Because, as I mentioned earlier, God binds Himself to us due to our weakness. It is not because He owes us anything, but rather, we have all the more reason to magnify His goodness because He willingly binds Himself to us. He does this knowing our feebleness and frailty. When He swears an oath, it is not because He needs to add anything to His word, for He Himself is the truth, and what comes from Him must not be doubted. It might seem, therefore, that making an oath is unnecessary for Him and that

He abuses His own name. However, this is not the case. He does so because He recognizes our weakness and our tendency towards unbelief, and thus, He uses oaths as a means to strengthen our faith. When God swears in His steadfastness and faithfulness to us out of pity for our wretchedness, and when He seals and confirms His promises in us through His Holy Spirit, it is because it is impossible for us to believe in Him on our own. We cannot be sure of the things He promises to us, nor can we call upon Him and overcome the temptations of the world without this means. Therefore, we need to keep this text in mind where St. Paul says that the Holy Ghost dwells in our hearts.

From this, we can draw an important lesson that should humble us. We will never give God the highest honour He requires with our own efforts unless He Himself draws us to it and grants us the grace to fulfil it. Above all, we must recognise that His word holds absolute authority over us, and we should revere it so highly that as soon as He speaks, we immediately respond with complete obedience, which is the primary sacrifice God demands. However, on our part, we often do the opposite. We tend to reply against God's word, being filled with our own desires. While we may not openly declare His word to be vain, and we do not accuse Him of lying and deceit, we protest that we wrong Him when we do not fully believe His words.

How long will this people slander Me, saying, "God has robbed me of my honour"? This is a complaint made by God through Moses and in many other places in Scripture. Indeed, if St. John's statement is true, that when we believe God, we set our seals that He is true, meaning that we affirm His faithfulness, then conversely, if our faith is not grounded securely, and if God's word does not dwell in us so deeply as to make us wholly subject to it without contradiction, it is as if we consider God a liar. Although we may detest and avoid uttering such blasphemy, if God complains that we have

reproached Him in this way, it is not without cause. Therefore, we see how unstable our nature is until God remedies it.

Furthermore, concerning how the Holy Ghost seals His promises in our hearts, let us understand that this is because He has chosen us. We have previously discussed how He called us to Himself and illuminated us with the truth of His gospel, in accordance with His choosing of us even before our birth and before the creation of the world. Therefore, we should recognise that God's Spirit is a special gift, not given to all people indiscriminately, but reserved as a treasure for His chosen children. For this reason, we should always remember the honourable title that He is the Spirit of adoption.

The prevalence of unbelief throughout the world serves as clear evidence of God's goodness in engraving His Word in our hearts. It is certain that in those who resist God or are as unresponsive as brute beasts, the Word has no effect. We can see our natural state and what we would still be if the Lord, out of His mercy, had not touched us with His Holy Spirit. This is what we need to keep in mind. Therefore, whenever the doctrine of our salvation is expounded, we must be cautious not to rely on our own understanding but remain humble and meek, so that the Lord may enlighten us with His Holy Spirit.

When we realize that we have already received such grace, we should not bury it but give thanks to Him who deserves it. On the other hand, when we experience doubts, turmoil, and restlessness, and find ourselves tossed like a ship on the verge of capsizing and sinking to the depths of the sea, we should consider our own weakness. Even though we have been instructed in God's Word, there will be no stability in our hearts unless God works within us. In such times, let us turn to the remedy and pray to God to safeguard the seed He has planted in us from being choked and to ensure that our confidence in our inheritance does not waver. Despite Satan's relentless

efforts to destroy what God has placed within us, may it be strengthened in us day by day as necessary.

In this context, when St. Paul mentions that we are sealed and marked by God's Spirit, this is what we should keep in mind.

And now, he warns us that it is an exceedingly grave offense to grieve Him, even an intolerable act of treachery. I have previously explained that this analogy is not meant to attribute excessive passion to God's Spirit but to shame us and make our hair stand on end. Look, says Paul, God's Spirit has chosen to reside within us, as it is said elsewhere, that not only our souls but also our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. He is delighted to be in us, to dwell there continuously, and to make it His permanent abode. Therefore, when we indulge in spiteful behaviour, as if we intend to drive Him away from us, it is a devilish act. Yet, when we seek to obscure our minds with licentious and loose talk, and employ other sinful means to divert us from the fear of God, and to lull our consciences to sleep, it is as if we deliberately tried to banish God's Spirit and declare that we want no further association with Him. Mustn't we then be the most wretched and cursed beings when we push ourselves to such extremes? This is what Paul had in mind. Thus, whenever we are tempted by evil, and the devil strives to make us take pleasure in it so that all conscience is driven away, let us remember what is stated here and say to ourselves, "Are you now rejoicing and revelling in the service of Satan?" On the contrary, "Let Him go; that is life, the earnest pledge of your salvation, and the foundation of the happiness acquired so dearly by the buyer, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us ponder this carefully."

Furthermore, it is certain that every faithful person should experience what is described here. If the Lord has touched us and granted us the seal mentioned here, it will grieve us when we are tempted to do evil. Therefore, the Spirit that guards and protects us must hold us back, and if we despise

this benefit, that is, the inner working that God has granted us, it is as if we grieve the Holy Ghost. This is a most certain experience, revealing that what the Holy Ghost has instilled in us is diametrically opposed to all evil. Thus, there must be a battle and conflict between them, such that none of God's children can sin without being immediately filled with fear and self-reproach. It is a lamentation that I am referring to, and it is not something we should avoid. However, if we persist in evil, it is as if we take pleasure in driving away God's Spirit. The prophet Isaiah states that we embitter God's Spirit when we reject the good doctrine He has provided for us, but Paul goes further here. For indeed, it is a kind of provocation of God's wrath when we do not submit to His doctrine, which is a sure testimony of His concern for our salvation and His love for us. But each of us must consider this personally. God has engraved the belief in His gospel in my heart so that I may be assured of my salvation. He has also chosen me for His dwelling place and to reside in me by His Holy Spirit. If I erase His grace, it is as if I deliberately intend to separate myself from God. Therefore, let us beware of such an extreme and hold ourselves in reverence. Additionally, Paul concludes by stating that God's sealing and marking of us in this manner by His Holy Ghost is for the day of our redemption. This indicates that to overcome Satan's allurements, the lusts of our flesh, and all the temptations of the world, we must continually set our minds on the heavenly life promised to us and labour towards it. Therefore, since God's Spirit has been given to us by Paul not to be taken away once we have experienced His grace and power, but so that His seal and mark may remain with us until the day of our redemption, when we will be delivered from this transitory life and all the miseries that surround us, let us ensure that He always retains the possession He has taken within us.

And we also enjoy the inestimable benefit of His continuous presence with us, guiding and upholding us throughout our entire lives. The reason for intentionally directing our attention to the last day is to remind us to live soberly, understanding that just as we continually need to be guided by the

power of God's Spirit, if we were to be deprived of it, estranged from Him, and left devoid of His grace, we might fall into a reprobate mindset concerning the day of our redemption. By "redemption," we mean the happiness we hope for, which is still hidden from us. It is true that we were redeemed in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who set us free from the bondage and subjugation of death and sin by paying our ransom and making our atonement. Therefore, we can say that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer in the sense that He has delivered us. However, when we look at ourselves, we do not yet experience this redemption. Thus, both in this passage and in Romans 8, St. Paul mentions that the day when Jesus Christ will appear is the day of our salvation and deliverance. We are surrounded by numerous miseries and carry them within our bodies and souls. Therefore, we should seek a better state than what we currently see. This is why it is said that our salvation lies in hope, for we hope for what we do not yet see, and God intends for us to anchor our hope in Him. When He withholds from our eyes the things He promises, it is so that even if we possess worldly riches, we do not cease to rejoice in Him, knowing that we will not be disappointed while waiting for the inheritance He has purchased for us. This is what the word "redemption" means in this context.

Therefore, let us learn to be armed and fortified with God's Spirit to combat all of Satan's temptations so that he never finds us unprepared or in disorder. To achieve this, let us pray to God to engrave His truth in us by the same Spirit, granting us victory over all that opposes our salvation. As we continue in our calling to take courage and be patient, let us wait for our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our life, to appear. Our life and complete happiness will also be revealed in Him at His coming.

Now, let us humbly bow before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and entreating His mercy. We implore Him not to impute the multitude of our sins against us, as they make us blameworthy in His eyes, but rather to bear with our weaknesses and cleanse us from them

day by day. In doing so, we may grow in His gracious gifts and cast away all evil that may lead us astray. By these means, we may draw nearer to Him until we are fully united with Him at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He grant this grace not only to us but also to all the people and nations of the earth. Amen.

The Thirty Third Sermon, the Thirteenth upon the Fouth Chapter and the First upon the Fifth Chapter

> "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
>
> Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." Ephesians 4:31 - 5:2

We know that all of God's children should not only be peaceful themselves but also strive for peace to the best of their ability, seeking reconciliation in cases of disagreement and strife. This aligns with the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we are to bring together those who have grievances against each other and promote brotherly reconciliation, or if we aim to calm their anger when they are overcome with frustration and passion, we must first ensure that we ourselves are free from strife and turmoil, refraining from shouting, yelling, and raging. Without doubt, Paul

rightly states that all bitterness, resentment, anger, and malicious speech should be put away from the faithful, along with all forms of spitefulness. He identifies spitefulness as the root that produces the fruits he mentioned. By spitefulness, he means a self-centeredness that causes a person to withdraw from others, showing no regard for their feelings. For a person who loves themselves excessively will inevitably despise their neighbors and reject them in a way that precludes any kindness. Thus, if we wish to avoid strife and quarrelling, we must begin by eliminating this spitefulness.

Out of this spitefulness comes bitterness, which manifests when we become peevish and easily provoked. This bitterness is rooted in an inflated sense of self-importance, where we consider ourselves superior to everyone else and hold others in contempt. When we are puffed up with pride to the extent that we think the world revolves around us and we take offence at the slightest inconvenience, we tend to view everything negatively, looking for opportunities to be unkind. Many people fall into this pattern, not only getting upset when wronged but also seeming to be constantly on the lookout for any reason to complain. Even if someone tries their best to please them and meet their preferences, they still find something to be dissatisfied with. When asked why they are constantly dissatisfied, the only answer lies in their own stubbornness and the pride that fuels their disdain for others. In essence, they have developed a bitter disposition and an inflated sense of self-worth, leading them to hold their own desires in high regard while showing contempt for others.

So, as Paul has shown us, the true remedy for maintaining peace and avoiding quarrels is to keep ourselves from becoming bitter and to curb our tendency towards self-importance. In the same way that a physician advises his patient to be cautious of fever or any other ailment, we must also examine ourselves and identify our inclinations, recognizing the things that may lead us astray. We should then take heed, for if we do not, we risk falling into sickness or other troubles. While we may be diligent in

following medical advice for the sake of our physical health, we should also be equally diligent in adhering to the guidelines provided for our spiritual well-being.

When it concerns the soul, we tend to be negligent, revealing that we do not value our salvation. This negligence arises from failing to recognize that, on one hand, the devil is constantly trying to deceive us, and on the other hand, we are so weak that we cannot resist evil unless the Lord equips us with His Word. Therefore, it is crucial to observe the guidance provided here: to live in harmony, avoiding contention and strife. First and foremost, we must not be blinded by excessive self-love but instead strive to eliminate pride, allowing us to value our neighbors and live humbly with them. This approach will prevent us from becoming bitter and touchy, taking offense at every little thing. In this context, Paul advises us that once we have rid ourselves of spitefulness and bitterness, we should also refrain from allowing our anger to escalate into resentment and outbursts. He addresses the sudden fits of rage that lead people to act impulsively and later regret their actions. To prevent this, we must cultivate self-control. When we are self-disciplined, we can easily cool down our anger and even extinguish it. However, when we are consumed by wrath, there is no restraint, and our anger knows no bounds. Therefore, the primary lesson here is that God's children should live in peace and harmony. To achieve this, we must strive to control our emotions and understand the consequences of anger and resentment.

It is essential to realise where our irritable moods lead us, which is into the devil's grasp, where we lose control and act without reason. Therefore, we must remain vigilant and not give the devil an opportunity, as previously discussed. While avoiding strife and conflict, we must learn to cleanse our hearts of bitterness and irritability. To do this, we must genuinely appreciate those who are connected to us and to whom we are bound. Ultimately, we should be gentle, kind, and courteous to one another, as this counters the

bitterness and spitefulness mentioned earlier. Paul circles back to the foundational principle that, as humans, we are created in God's image. Through belief in the gospel, we are renewed and made anew in His image. This truth should encourage us to display gentleness. We must recognize that we cannot disregard anyone without dishonouring God, for every individual is made in His image. It is intolerable for a mere mortal to elevate themselves so highly as to disregard their Creator. There are no valid excuses for this behaviour. God has honoured humanity by creating them with such an exceptional nature. It is only right that we show reverence and honour to His Majesty and do not trample upon those who represent Him to us.

Once again, if a person examines themselves carefully, they will see their own nature reflected in all their neighbours. Even the most prominent individuals in the world cannot claim to be made of anything different from the rest of Adam's children. Since this is the case, why should we be so proud as to despise those who are akin to us in such a way that the bond cannot be broken? There is yet another, more specific reason in the case of the faithful. God has renewed His image in them, which had been marred by Adam's sin. Therefore, let us learn to be gentle and courteous to one another, and not so unapproachable that no one can approach us, nor so aloof and disdainful that we separate ourselves from the common assembly and company of other people. This is what Paul meant by the gentleness or courtesy he mentioned. He goes on to add "mercy." If we have compassion for one another, this compassion extends far and can be seen as the source that moves us towards gentleness. A mild spirit is undoubtedly a remarkable virtue, one without which we cannot exist in the world. How can we maintain it among us? The sole means is this compassion, a disposition of mind that causes us to think that when we see a despised individual, they are still our neighbour, our own flesh and blood. Though they may be despised and have nothing to be esteemed for, we should consider that the miseries in them could also befall us. With this consideration, our hearts

will be moved to sympathise with someone who has been dealt such a great injustice compared to others, be it due to physical weakness or a mental infirmity. It will grieve us and stir us with pity for their situation, which is the essence of gentleness within us, fostered by compassion. If we encounter a poor person who is afflicted or moves slowly due to a physical ailment, should we scorn them? No, quite the opposite. If we were not utterly heartless, like wild beasts, we should be moved to pity their condition, at the very least, if we were fulfilling our duty. Similarly, if someone lacks wit or understanding, perhaps struggling to comprehend one thing out of a hundred, unable to distinguish white from black, having no compassion for them can only be attributed to one's own cruelty, which causes them to forget common kindness that binds us all together. Thus, even a small drop of compassion will prevent us from rejecting those related to us and from despising those who merit compassion and mercy. In all cases and at all times, we will naturally be gentle and courteous towards our neighbours. In short, just as the miseries that God knows exist within us move Him to show us mercy, the miseries of our neighbours should serve as spurs to motivate us to be compassionate towards them. Moreover, even their vices should not kindle anger and indignation within us but rather provide an occasion for us to pity our neighbours. For instance, if someone wrongs me, it is often the devil that drives them to do so, and the wretched individual only harms themselves by provoking God's anger against them.

Now, if there was nothing more in me than the common nature to which God has bound us all, I should not be heartbroken when I see a soul deceived by Satan's cunning heading towards destruction. Indeed, we should not allow the wrongs done to us to carry us away, nor should we be so provoked as to lack pity for those who err. This is because they are blinded by Satan, provoking God's wrath and working against their own salvation. Consider this: the very remedy that enables us to be gentle is to be compassionate and to have pity, as mentioned in the previous passages. There is not one of us who would not wish to be treated with forbearance,

without which we would struggle to survive a single day in this world. Even the most perfect individuals among us have some weaknesses, to the extent that if everyone were to deal with them harshly, they would be scorned and disgraced. Furthermore, where can we find a person who does not have many imperfections in them, which require others to be patient, rather than to reject them due to some vices that may warrant withdrawal? If we expect others to be patient with us, shouldn't we also show compassion to others? When we see someone with a flaw or fault, shouldn't we think that we too are prone to the same? After thorough examination, we may discover more in ourselves that deserves condemnation. Nevertheless, we would hope to be treated with forbearance, even if we were convicted to a great extent. Therefore, just as we desire others to forgive us, we should learn to have compassion on them, for they are no more angels than we are. This is what St. Paul meant to convey. He concluded that we should forgive one another because if compassion is not present, we tend to scrutinise every minor issue excessively, becoming greatly displeased, as experience has shown far too often. Thus, even the slightest provocation can upset us, as there is no pity in our hearts. But if we are touched by mercy, we will readily forgive and let many things pass unnoticed. Furthermore, we will not be easily provoked but will have a restraint to hold us back, and we will not hesitate to admit back into friendship those who have offended us greatly. Therefore, this is the order St. Paul encourages us to follow to lead us to charity and to maintain it. The entire lesson revolves around being God's children, meaning we must love one another and be united in good harmony to maintain peace among us. However, this can be challenging because every person tends to measure themselves too highly.

Again, their minds differ as much as their manners and conditions differ as well. In short, we have countless reasons to distance ourselves and isolate from all company. If every person gives in to selfishness, charity will never find a place among us and will be banished far from us. So, what should we do? First, we must rid ourselves of all scornfulness and pride, as I

mentioned earlier. Afterward, we should cleanse ourselves from bitterness and irritability. We should strive not to be easily angered or touchy but instead learn to control ourselves and subdue our own emotions. However, this can only be achieved if we are gentle and kind-hearted. We are creatures fashioned in the image of God and bound together by an inseparable bond. Yet, even this is not enough unless we learn to recognise our own weaknesses and faults. Each of us should be critical of ourselves because we see the need for improvement and the presence of many vices within us that are similar to those in our neighbours. Therefore, we need this bond to hold us together, and this can be achieved when we are merciful and compassionate.

If common courtesy should compel us to help those in need, it should also drive us to reconciliation. When our Lord Jesus exhorted us to be merciful, it wasn't solely for the purpose of providing food and drink to the hungry and thirsty or helping those who have fallen into decay. While all these actions are encompassed within it, He primarily intended to demonstrate mercy in forgiving the mistakes committed. We should not be so severe as to completely reject those who are not entirely commendable or in whom we discern many vices. We should not indulge in flattery, for true friendship does not tolerate that, as it would be harmful to us in the end. If one person is a friend to another and allows them to indulge excessively in food and drink, leading to their own destruction, can we truly say that their flattery and enabling of foolish desires is an act of friendship? No.

So then, if we see a poor man on the verge of throwing himself headlong into destruction, we betray our friendship rather than show it by not attempting to pull him back. The compassion which our Lord Jesus has elevated us to is not to lull us into inaction in our weaknesses through flattery. Instead, it is to keep us in check, tempering our harshness so that oil may always be mixed with our vinegar, as the saying goes. That is, in essence, what the Apostle Paul intended for us to understand. Even though

each person may strive to be compassionate, avoiding any excessive severity towards their neighbour, it goes against our nature. As I mentioned earlier, our self-love blinds us to such an extent that we perceive the slightest transgressions as unpardonable sins and offences. Consequently, if anyone angers us, we deem their fault to be beyond forgiveness. Thus, true meekness is rarely found in individuals unless they struggle against their own inclinations with all their might. Mere teaching will not suffice in this regard. Our churlishness is deeply ingrained in our hearts. Even if our duty is clearly explained to us, it can only mildly influence us. Paul used God's example to illustrate this, showing that God forgave us through His only Son. He immediately added that our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not spare himself for our redemption and salvation, is the key to breaking down our hardness, moderating our excessive passions, reforming our cruelty, humbling our pride and haughtiness, and sweetening our bitterness. To accomplish all this, we must look to God's behaviour towards us. He loved the world so much that He sacrificed His only Son for our sake. When we compare ourselves to God, the gap between us is immense. Therefore, the greatest wrongs that could be inflicted upon us are insignificant compared to the smallest transgression against God. Breaking even the slightest aspect of God's will constitutes a challenge to His sovereign dominion, a violation of His majesty, and an affront to His righteousness, which I believe is too precious to be abused. What human being or thing can be said to be so sacred that if it is mistreated, it should be considered an infringement of God's righteousness? Now, we have ample reason to condemn ourselves for not serving God as we should. We were His enemies from the beginning, even from our mother's womb. As we age, we continuously grow in wickedness, sinfulness, and unrighteousness. Yet, despite all this, God did not withhold His infinite mercy in sending us His only Son. When we consider this, all pride should be set aside, bitterness should be assuaged, rebelliousness should be tamed, and spitefulness should be eradicated from our hearts. All falsehood should be cast away. Indeed, what is the reason for our waywardness? Why do we, once set on a course, not cease to spur

ourselves forward so easily into contention and strife, to the point where the entire household rings with our quarrels? The root of the problem is our ingratitude, for we fail to contemplate God's incomparable goodness towards us. He did not spare His only Son, even though we were His deadly enemies, engaged in warfare against Him, and cursed by nature due to the corruption within us. Despite all this, as I mentioned earlier, we cannot truly experience God's mercy unless we are moved by compassion and cleanse our hearts of the cursed desire for revenge. It is these very factors that make St. Paul's demands so difficult, even entirely contradictory to our nature, and impossible to achieve without God's intervention.

Yet, notwithstanding the declaration that has been shown to us here, it should prevail with us to make us forget all wrongs. For, admit that another man has offended me. What then? Can I proclaim my righteousness and guiltlessness when I shall come before God? Alas, there are so many iniquities and transgressions in me that I should be confounded. If one fault committed against me is unpardonable, shall a million, yes, a whole million that I have committed against God, be nothing? What am I in comparison to the sovereign majesty? So then, following this warning of St. Paul's, whenever we are moved to impatience due to any displeasure or wrong, such that we desire revenge, let us learn to gather our wits about us and consider who we are.

First of all, if a man has committed any fault against us, we ourselves have done the same or far worse. On the other side, let us consider how God has redeemed us, especially through that most precious pledge of the blood shed by His only Son. Have we deserved that? Again, what moved God to be so merciful towards us? Nothing else but our wretchedness. Now, since He, who is so good and not of our nature, has had compassion on our wretchedness, what shall we do? Should we not have much more compassion for one another, because we find in ourselves the very things we pardon in our neighbors? God can find no infirmities in Himself, and

how then shall He be moved to forgive us? Truly, it is because He is the wellspring of all goodness and mercy.

But when I see the same faults in me and my neighbor, if I examine myself closely, I shall find the same or even more. Should not all these things persuade me to show some compassion, if I do not forget myself too much? The way to easily forgive many faults and bear with many vices that may displease us in our neighbors is to cast our eyes upon the inestimable love that God has shown us through His Son.

As I mentioned before, if we were not so ungrateful, there would be a different kind of gentleness among us, and we would not so quickly quarrel over every wrong done to us. For, not to think early and late, day and night, about the grace granted us in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Day-Sun to enlighten us, would be brutish. Should we not consider that He makes His spiritual light shine upon us to guide us to salvation? And how is that done but through God's mercy?

Again, when we behold the favour that God shows us in maintaining us in this present life, are we worthy to receive it at His expense? No, it all comes to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it should become us, in our rest and in our labour, when we eat and when we drink, both while sleeping and waking, to always consider the mercy God shows towards us and keep it in mind as our continual exercise.

This grace should especially come before our eyes when we pray to God. For how can we approach Him familiarly, discharge all our cares and griefs into His lap, and call Him our Father if we are not drawn to Him through His freely bestowed goodness in our Lord Jesus Christ? He forgives us our transgressions.

If we fail to consider all these things, we would be too dull-headed and brutish. It becomes clear from this that we shall always be mistaken if we

boast of being God's children, His household, and faithful children.

If we are not willing and glad to forgive, we may indeed boast of our formality and be esteemed by others, but we will still disgrace ourselves. So, if we are reluctant to forgive, it is because we do not consider the infinite goodness of our God, as He shows it in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the intended effect St. Paul wanted to bring about. He added that we must be followers of God as beloved children.

One might reply, "It is true that God's mercy should astonish us and amaze us, for it is a wonderful thing, and all our affections should be fixed upon it. But can we be like God?" No, for He is the source of all goodness, and we are flawed and untamed. God possesses the fullness of all goodness, while there is not even a drop of it in our nature. Yet, despite all this, St. Paul adds the phrase, "be followers of God." In other words, follow Him, make Him your example or pattern.

Although God is the very essence of goodness and we possess nothing but evil inclinations, such as malice, spitefulness, pride, and excessive passions, we should not consider ourselves utterly against Him. Even though Adam's sin separated us from God, we must not think that our nature cannot change when God reaches out His hand to gather us to Him and reunite the things that were scattered. Thus, St. Paul says, "as God's dear beloved children," to show that our mouths will be shut unless we respond to God in goodness by bearing with one another, just as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Follow your heavenly Father, who causes His sun to shine on both the good and the bad.

To claim that we are God's children, to call upon Him, to identify as Christians, and yet be despised by God while showing that we draw no qualities from Him is against our nature. We should not deceive ourselves. We must recognize that we are not only full of hypocrisy but also shameless when we do not resemble God and still want to be considered His children.

While it is impossible to fully resemble God in every way, we should not lose heart. We must remember that the Scriptures say that if we strive according to God's Word, even if we fall short of our goal, God accepts our willingness and effort when we continually strive to move forward, even if we are slow, weak, and stumble. God does not hold our faults against us when we desire to resemble Him, when we aim at that goal, even if we fall short. This should give us courage.

If we were required to resemble God point by point in all respects, it would be impossible. Even the angels, who are entirely holy and shine with God's glory, fall far short of God's perfection. What then of us, who are so corrupted and flawed, filled with wickedness, and hindered by countless vices and temptations that Satan places in our path? Yet, we have reason to rejoice because the Lord bears with us and accepts all our actions in good faith as long as we continue to strive towards Him. This is the way to follow Him, as He has commanded. We must not fall asleep, as many do, saying, "I would like to be like God," and then merely wish for it. Instead, we must consider every day and every hour how little we have profited in truly resembling God. We must condemn ourselves for it and acknowledge that even though we had some goodwill yesterday, it has not increased, but rather seems to have grown colder. In this manner, we must continue our journey towards God.

We must stir ourselves and combat the obstacles that hinder us, so that we may strive to move closer to our goal, even though we are still far from it. Our Lord will not fail to consider us always as resembling Him and as true followers of Him if we willingly and without hypocrisy forgive those who have offended us, at least following His example. He has given us a pardon that surpasses all patterns that we can find among us. We should bear with the vices and weaknesses of our neighbors as He has borne with us. He could justly have cast us down to the depths, yet He did not hesitate to adopt us as His children. Therefore, since He loved us in such a manner,

despite our unworthiness, it is only fitting that we should imitate Him in this regard.

Even if we had no better privilege than our natural birth, we should recognize that God has not separated us from one another. Even the pagans understood this concept, for they believed that a person's life should be devoted to God and shaped in His image. They believed that this was the ultimate form of happiness. Furthermore, they added that we cannot resemble God better in anything than in showing kindness to one another, doing good, and being compassionate.

Therefore, let us consider that God has made us His beloved children, even though we were once His enemies, filled with filthiness and burdened by numerous vices. Yet, He did not hesitate to love us. It is only reasonable that we should overlook many things that might offend us and hinder our love and unity with our neighbors.

St. Paul, after speaking of God's love, also provides the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father loved the world so much that He did not spare His only Son but delivered Him to death for our sake. What did Jesus Christ do? He forgot Himself and did not consider His own well-being. The Lord of all glory humbled Himself to endure all reproach. The eternal life made Himself mortal. The omnipotent power of God made Himself weak for our sake. He who held all things in His hand became poor to enrich us. The one through whom all things are blessed subjected Himself to cursing.

Seeing, then, that our Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself in such a manner, St. Paul also set forth as an example for us. He took on shame instead of His glory and became sin in place of His righteousness. Not that He sinned or had any blemish, but He bore the punishment for our sins, which is why the Scripture refers to Him as sin. He exchanged life for death and willingly

accepted God's curse in this world so that we might have blessedness through Him.

To rid ourselves of pride, presumption, fierceness, scornfulness, and bitterness, we should consider how our Lord Jesus Christ reconciled us to God His Father. Reflecting on all these things should lead us to put away these wicked affections and strive against them until we overcome them. Therefore, let us be kind-hearted and patient with one another. Since God has gathered us into one flock and our Lord Jesus Christ serves as our shepherd, we should act like a flock of sheep, not like ravenous wolves.

Since our Lord Jesus Christ did not withhold anything, even offering Himself as a sacrifice to God His Father to atone for our sins, we should be moved to glorify God and give homage to our Lord Jesus Christ whenever we think about it. When it is said that the sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ was of sweet scent or savor before God, it emphasizes that there is nothing but stench in us. This is meant to encourage us to rid ourselves of our filthiness and infections that make us repugnant before God.

When we appear before the face of God in our prayers and supplications, our sins should not be counted against us. Despite our wretchedness and sinfulness, we can approach God with confidence, knowing that He will embrace us as righteous and innocent, and transform us into His image. This is possible because our Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse us of all our blemishes, allowing us to stand before Him with heads held high and experience the fullness of His mercy.

Now, let us kneel before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying for a deep sense of repentance. However, let us also have no doubt that He will always bear with us, granting us mercy and forgiveness as long as we seek it sincerely and follow His Word to reform ourselves according to His image. This way, we can truly call Him our

Father and become His true children. And so, we say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Thirty Fourth Sermon, the Second on the Fifth Chapter

> "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." - Ephesians 5:3-5

Given that we often find ourselves subject to various miseries in life, we must take great care. Just as a person looks out for their well-being against cold, heat, and other inconveniences, they should also ensure that no mishaps occur in their house, such as a fire breaking out. When going about their business, they should always consider potential adversities. However, we must begin by recognizing that there are far more dangers within us than outside. The devil lays snares for us, and numerous vices wage war against us. Therefore, we must remain vigilant, for if we conquer one vice, another may easily sneak up on us, catching us off guard. Those who abstain from open sin may be tempted to deceive their neighbor covertly. Even those who renounce worldly goods may have other weaknesses, such as lust, gluttony, or excessive indulgence in leisure activities like gambling. In short, every one of us is naturally inclined towards wickedness and sin. No one is exempt from facing an array of enemies. We are not only inclined towards one particular evil by nature, but many vices threaten even the most

virtuous individuals from all sides. Therefore, it is crucial to heed the exhortations provided here.

St. Paul has already warned us about numerous vices and offered guidance on how to confront and overcome them. Now he adds a warning against covetousness and foolish, vain chatter. We might think that a single word of godliness should suffice, but we must consider how the devil approaches us. If he cannot succeed in one way, he will try another, attacking from different angles until he finds a vulnerability. This is an important aspect of the exhortations given here.

Now, let's turn to St. Paul's mention of fornication and all uncleanness. Since these vices are often tolerated too easily, he reminds us that abstaining from actual physical fornication is not enough. We must also remember that God's command for us to be chaste and undefiled implies that we should guard against all temptations that could lead us astray. There are various forms of sexual impurity that society may overlook, but God does not. Therefore, St. Paul not only emphasizes bodily chastity but also insists that all forms of filthiness should be far from us. He associates covetousness with this warning, even though they are distinct vices. While a fornicator may have been prosperous and thrifty before, they can squander their resources in their debauchery. St. Paul's intention was not to classify vices but to show how the devil can deceive us in various ways. He wants us to be vigilant, to close the gates against him, and to be prepared for the dangers we face, so that he cannot easily find a way into our lives.

Furthermore, St. Paul added warnings against filthiness and uncleanness. When people allow themselves to be wanton, all kinds of rebellion gain momentum. For instance, if wantonness and foolish activities like dancing are tolerated, people might initially believe they can be indulged without consequences. However, once dancing, masquerades, and similar activities are allowed, the devil will exploit the opportunity, and it will undoubtedly

lead to madness. That's why St. Paul, in addition to forbidding covetousness, also prohibited all forms of revelry and dishonesty, along with frivolous talk.

Some might not consider it a grave offence to jest and flirt with a maiden or a wife, engaging in light-hearted banter. However, all these are tricks of Satan. If allowed, they invariably lead to moral decay, even in the most virtuous individuals. This is what we must keep in mind. St. Paul thinks it insufficient to say that God's children should abstain from covetousness and revelry, and from things closely associated with them. To emphasize the point further, he states, "Let them not even be named among you." There's a good reason for this assertion.

Regarding covetousness, people often perceive it as a virtue when someone amasses wealth diligently. They applaud such a person and praise their efforts. Even though they may privately regard them as a thief or a robber, people are inclined to condone covetousness as long as the person acquires wealth. Covetousness thrives on flattery.

Concerning revelry, we observe that without constant condemnation, this vice would persist, and people would grant themselves leniency. Moral standards would deteriorate. Therefore, Paul, recognizing the difficulty in restraining people from these vices, insists that not even their names should be tolerated among us.

If there were a plague in a town, everyone would stay within their homes, fearing to go outside where danger lurks. People would take precautions to prevent the spread of the disease, and general orders would be issued to maintain cleanliness in the streets to prevent the air from becoming contaminated. Objects that could contribute to the spread of the disease would be removed. Yet, in the case of these deadly vices, despite their destructive nature, people persist in their ways. It seems as though they willingly poison themselves with them.

In conclusion, it is not unprofitable for us to use the very names of these vices. Both God's law and St. Paul's teachings emphasize the gravity of these offences. God's commandment expressly states, "You shall not commit adultery," going beyond forbidding mere whoredom. It serves to underscore the enormity of breaking the marital covenant, equating it with whoredom. St. Paul, too, mentions these names to make it clear that they should not be treated lightly or spoken of in jest or sport, as people are inclined to do. This serves as a stern warning against trivializing such matters.

We observe that when ungodliness and lewdness are talked about with loose speech, many people readily engage in it. Over time, such practices become accepted as the norm, and people come to regard them as lawful. It's important to note that St. Paul's intention was not merely to mention the bare names of whoredom and covetousness. If you were to confront a whoremonger about his actions, he might deny it, claiming he was merely playing or joking around, much like these wicked individuals who indulge themselves in such activities. However, both whoremongers and harlots bear the name of their deeds. Why? Because they perceive it as something shameful, as if they were publicly placed on a scaffold to be embarrassed before the world.

Paul's counsel is clear: do not even mention the name of whoredom. The same can be said of covetousness. When people speak of covetousness, it carries a negative connotation, and no one wishes to be associated with it. Instead, they offer excuses such as, "I am providing for my wife and children; is it not lawful for me to seek sustenance for them?" or "Should I not plan for the future to secure their well-being?" Covetousness is so well-disguised with such excuses that it is nearly mistaken for a virtue.

However, Paul did not intend for people to merely avoid using the names of these vices, which might make the vices themselves appear repugnant and

detestable. He desired that whoredom be named as a vile and despicable thing, so that people would understand the gravity of the sin. Likewise, he wished people to comprehend that a covetous person is an idolater and forsakes God, that they are cursed and damned, serving the devil and tormenting themselves. These truths must be known and spoken of frequently.

Nevertheless, some individuals are inclined to gossip and engage in idle chatter. They delight in sharing anecdotes, saying, "I remember something that happened in my time," even recounting stories they heard from their grandfathers before they were born. If there were any misdeeds or thriftlessness in those stories, they are exposed. Why? To provoke curiosity and entertain, even though the devil may ensnare them in the process. These individuals revel in such tales, aiming not only to encourage delight in whoredom and shamelessness but also to make it seem lawful. They want discussions of these vices to become commonplace, a topic of conversation at feasts and gatherings, and ordinary talk in the streets and everywhere else.

Even among those with modest means who embark on a journey, we find that they cannot amuse themselves without offending God by sharing such tales. These tales serve to harden people's hearts, convincing them that everyone is involved in the same vices. It's no wonder that moral decay ensues when vices are made common and people believe they are all pursuing the same path.

For this reason, Paul advises that these vices must not even be named among us. The same goes for covetousness, which many consider a virtue if one spends their entire life accumulating wealth without ever ceasing to amass more by deceit and extortion. People even take pleasure in following such individuals, saying, "Oh, I know a person who knows how to use such methods and tricks well. He started with nothing, but he has managed to

prosper through cunning and shrewdness." Covetous individuals, when maligning one another, do not hesitate to say, "That scoundrel has nothing but greed. He's untrustworthy, cruel, and inhospitable." In spite of these accusations, they all desire riches. Thus, you can see how the covetous are quick to condemn one another, yet when they wish to justify their own wickedness, they speak of foresight, cunning, and thriftiness, all the while plundering others under the guise of good management.

Therefore, Paul's exhortation is essential. He instructs us to cast out all vices and admonishes that if anyone speaks of them, we should reprove them and not treat such matters lightly, lest we become tainted by them. Additionally, we must take heed of his warning against all wantonness and foolish or frivolous talk. As previously mentioned, it is evident that moral decay will ensue among people when they allow such provocations and opportunities for vice. Permitting these things is akin to willingly surrendering oneself to Satan. Let us, therefore, be cautious and distance ourselves from these temptations. It should be noted that where such recklessness and lewdness prevail, brothels and debauchery will inevitably flourish, not confined to some isolated corner of a city or town but widespread, corrupting every place.

Many people lament the perceived decline of chastity in the world today, and it is not surprising. There was a time when married women were known for their modesty and sobriety, but now, to some, it seems virtuous to be excessively bold, shameless, and audacious. They consider it virtuous to act more manly, brazen-faced, and utterly shameless. A woman's chastity is questioned unless she has been thoroughly tested. Some women boldly assert, "Whoever approaches me will quickly learn that they've met their match. I know how to handle them, and they will soon realize they've chosen the wrong person to speak with." Thus, a harlot plays the role of a chaste wife as if she were a paragon of virtue. Yet, simultaneously, she stands ready to defend herself against anyone who approaches her with

indecent proposals, as if she were a knight in full armour. Let us, therefore, pay close attention to what Paul is saying here. For women have been allowed to become excessively bold and, in addition to their wanton speech, their extravagant attire makes it difficult to distinguish between men and women. Every day, they must have new trinkets and embellishments, adopting ever-changing, ostentatious fashions. They adorn themselves like peacocks, with great cartwheel-like headdresses, making it impossible for someone to pass within three feet of them without feeling as if they are being swept away by a windmill sail. Moreover, they indulge in songs of revelry. In such an environment, how can chastity survive, when it is forcibly driven away? On the contrary, there is a constant clamour for excess and debauchery, with people seeking nothing more than to immerse themselves headlong into it.

Therefore, let us take note that when there is such disorder in gestures, countenances, speech, dancing, and all such frivolities and vanities, it is akin to diverting water from its natural course by cutting trenches to bring it elsewhere. If a river's flow is redirected by cutting off its path and diverting it elsewhere, it no longer follows its usual course. In the same way, if people engage in corrupting the world in such a manner, which has long been one of the devil's devious tactics, it will inevitably lead to devastation and irreparable damage. Thus, we must pay close attention to the counsel given to us here.

When we hear such admonitions that, in God's name, people will soon be prohibited from laughing, being merry, dancing, and talking freely, and that a man might not converse with another's daughter or discuss matters of love with her, and even speaking to a wife in jest would be deemed a crime, we should not respond by assuming an attitude of defiance. Instead, it is as if we are declaring ourselves to be the devil's advocates and promoters of the moral decay of the entire world, advocating for unrestrained lewdness,

gambling, and debauchery to the extent that people no longer consider them sinful. This is what we need to bear in mind.

Furthermore, St. Paul states that it is fitting for saints to condemn such behaviours without engaging in disputes or arguments. We must reach the point where we accept God's call to holiness, even though we acknowledge our human frailty. Some may argue that people are frail and that they should not be condemned for casting a flirtatious glance or engaging in light-hearted banter. However, we must consider our own condition. While God is aware of our weaknesses, He does not want us to wallow in them. He has chosen us for His service. Therefore, let us examine whether these loose behaviours and follies, which are embraced by Satan's followers, can truly align with the concept of holiness as described in the Word.

When we speak of holiness, we mean that we must present ourselves to God for His pleasure and control. We should become entirely His and free from the contamination of the world. If holiness encompasses all this and is a requirement for us to be considered God's children, then we should no longer justify our rebellious actions as light transgressions. Let us return to the honour that God has bestowed upon us by dedicating us to His service. We must acknowledge our true nature, that we bring nothing but disorder, curses, and sin into the world from birth. In essence, we are inclined towards evil in every aspect of our being. There is no part of us, from head to toe, that is not prone to sin. However, God has called us back from this state of sin. Is it not reasonable that we should be consecrated to Him, considering that He has called us to holiness and granted us this honourable title to restrain us from unrestrained indulgence, which we might otherwise desire?

It is crucial to understand how to combat our sinful desires because, if we follow our natural inclinations, we are all prone to vice. God's restraint prevents us from indulging in these desires. Each of us has the potential to

deceive ourselves, but we must not spare ourselves in this battle. We should not be discouraged, even though the devil is cunning and we are easily swayed. Instead, we should consider how God calls us to live differently—how He calls us to be holy in Him. St. Paul's primary message is to remind us of the state to which God, in His goodness, has called us. We must draw strength from this and not yield to Satan, even though we may be weak. God has chosen us for purity. After drawing us gently with His goodness, He now presents us with a stern command that should shock us into awareness.

God strives to bring us to Him through every means possible. When He calls us saints or holy ones, He uses words of sweetness and gentleness. It is as if He says, "My children, realise that I have not created you to live aimlessly in this world. I have adopted you to call you to heavenly inheritance. I have redeemed you with the blood of my Son and given you my Spirit to dwell within you. You are meant to be my temples and worship me. Will you now return to a life of wickedness and impurity, turning my holy temples into filth and letting your affections be mired in dirt and dung? Will you wallow in the mud again after I have cleansed you? If you want to be my children, remain as I have made you." God uses these words to draw us closer to Him, half-flattering us in the process.

On the other hand, because God sees that we are spiritually cold and that we often misuse His patience, not responding deeply to His grace but continuing to follow our own desires, He threatens us. It's like a father who, noticing that his child is unruly and not as obedient as he should be, might say something like this to the child: "Listen, even though I have been patient and endured much from you, you must now change your behavior and be obedient to me. Otherwise, you might as well go to the devil if you want to persist in your disobedience. If you choose to continue in wickedness, then you'll face the consequences, for I am not a father who will allow myself to be mocked without addressing it." In this way, a father

seeks to maintain his child's good behaviour, resorting to threats if necessary, all in an attempt to break the child's stubbornness. Similarly, God deals with us in this manner to correct our ways and bring us back to Him. This demonstrates His care for our well-being, as I mentioned earlier.

So, after informing us that we are considered saints and warning us that no covetous person, liar, or unclean individual will enter the kingdom of God or partake in the inheritance prepared for us, God uses these warnings to either frighten us into obedience or to awaken us from our spiritual dullness. Consider the gravity of being deprived of God's kingdom.

By the way, we should pay close attention to the words used here. It is stated that we will not inherit the kingdom of God and of Christ. This is not to suggest that they are two separate kingdoms, but to emphasize how this inheritance belongs to us. It is not through our birthright or our own efforts but through God's free gift. The kingdom of God represents heavenly life and our ultimate happiness, for apart from God, we can only find misery. Therefore, if we are excluded from God's kingdom, we will be plunged into utter despair. It is specifically referred to as the kingdom of Christ because it was obtained for us through His sacrificial death, and also because we are being restored to the state from which we fell in our ancestor Adam.

Moreover, we know that this inheritance has been granted to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, so that as His members, we become children of God through Him and share in what is uniquely His. In the book of Hebrews, He is called the heir of all things, not to exclude us, but because we can only be recognized as God's children by being incorporated into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom everything belongs. Therefore, if we were to be rejected by God, if we were to be deprived of all the blessings purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and if this were to occur due to our own ingratitude, it would be a great tragedy. Should we not be deeply troubled by such a loss? God has graciously extended His kingdom to us through our

Lord Jesus Christ's redemptive work, making us His brethren and co-heirs. We should also understand that we have received it as a free gift, not as a birthright or something we can claim as our own. It is an inheritance bestowed upon us.

Therefore, considering this precious inheritance, the kingdom of God, which has been freely given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, should we be so reckless as to let go of such a blessing when it is offered to us? Will we spurn God's gracious invitation to share in His glory, to partake in all the joy and happiness of the heavenly kingdom? He has united us with His own Son, granting us access to every good thing we could ever desire. And yet, will all of this mean nothing to us? Will we hold it in contempt and reject it? How is it that Satan can exert such control over us?

We can clearly see how St. Paul intended to awaken us earnestly here through various means. Even if we cannot be entirely drawn to God through love, perhaps the threat of His judgement can at least have some positive effect. It may move us to yield so that our desires can be restrained, and our lusts do not overflow so recklessly. But if we stubbornly resist Him, it is as though we are openly running towards Him, challenging His authority. Stating that, with His holy words, He has pronounced our banishment from the kingdom of heaven, yet we continue to disregard His teachings. This is indeed a grave matter.

Furthermore, St. Paul declares that neither fornicators, nor covetous individuals, nor those who are morally impure shall enter the kingdom of God. He does not imply that anyone who has sinned or transgressed is automatically rejected by God. Who among us can claim to be completely free of the vices mentioned here? Rather, he is referring to those who willingly engage in covetousness and immoral behaviour, those who take pleasure in their lusts and have become so hardened in their ways that the fear of God no longer restrains them.

We can observe what he said to the Corinthians, who, despite their faith, had been tainted by similar vices. He reminds them that those who indulge in such behaviours will never inherit the kingdom of God. He is essentially saying that those who live in wickedness, who do not strive against their lusts but instead revel in wrongdoing, will not gain entry into the kingdom of God. In essence, the message is clear: those who persist in a lawless and immoral life, without attempting to fight against their sinful desires, shall never enter the kingdom of God.

At first, even the faithful may be tainted by the sins to which all humanity is susceptible. However, through God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, they are cleansed and sanctified. Thus, it is crucial not to return to the mire of impurity. The true meaning of these words is that the wicked, those who lead licentious and immoral lives without resisting their lusts, shall never enter the kingdom of God. Even the faithful, initially stained by the sins common to humanity, must continually battle their sinful nature through repentance. Repentance remains relevant because sin still dwells within us. It is essential that we recognise this and engage in an ongoing struggle against it. St. Paul's exhortation in Romans 6 applies to all who hear it. Those addressed by St. Paul must surely have felt shame when reflecting upon their past lives, as they had strayed far from God, morality, and virtue. Similarly, each one of us should cast our eyes upon our own past with a sense of shame.

And yet, despite this, he tells us that sin must not reign in our mortal bodies, even though it dwells within us. It would indeed be ideal if we were completely free from sin, resembling the angels of heaven. However, St. Paul, recognizing the impossibility of achieving this while still in the world and until we shed our corruption and depart from this transient life, emphasises that sin must not dominate us. Even though we are tainted by various vices, we must strive against them, preventing them from becoming grievous sins that constitute rebellion against God. Instead, they should

remain as weaknesses that we acknowledge, seeking God's forgiveness daily. This is why St. Paul instructs us to pray for forgiveness of our sins, acknowledging our constant need for mercy.

Moreover, as we have already discussed in the context of the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul asserts that covetous individuals are, in essence, idolaters. While it would be worthwhile to explore this topic in greater detail, our previous discussion suffices to grasp the essence of the matter. In relation to other vices, they indeed cause us to forget God, as our sinful desires lead us astray and preoccupy our hearts and minds, causing us to neglect God. Therefore, it is accurate to say that all wicked desires are idols, as they divert our attention from God's majesty and incite us to rebel against Him, casting off His yoke to submit to Satan.

However, covetousness is rightly labelled idolatry because, once a person succumbs to it, they place their entire happiness in material possessions. Unlike gluttons, who may feel some remorse, or drunkards, fornicators, or other sinners who retain a sense of shame, covetous individuals feel no shame or remorse for their actions. Even when the whole world applauds them and remains unaware of their wickedness, they continue in their sinful ways without any self-reproach. This sets them apart, as they take pride in their wrongdoing. For instance, after cheating and deceiving others, they happily recount their gains, expressing gratitude for their prosperity. Even the most successful among them will proclaim, "Thank God, I have profited greatly today. I have accumulated wealth this month. My fortunes have flourished this year."

Nevertheless, if they examine their hearts deeply, they will discover that, in essence, they are no different from thieves, extortionists, cunning deceivers. The devil, it seems, has blinded their eyes, leaving them devoid of discretion and conscience, unable to recognise their evil deeds. Consequently, because covetous people have reached a point where they no

longer fear God enough to restrain themselves, they are referred to as idolaters. Yet, this is not the extent of their wrongdoing; there is another grievous aspect to consider. They place all their happiness in their wealth, becoming so self-assured that they believe no harm can befall them. This pride swells within them to the point where they distance God from themselves, as the proverb says, "if". Therefore, it is not without reason that St. Paul advises the rich of this world not to place their trust in their possessions or exalt themselves because their high opinion of their riches leads them to disregard God completely.

You can observe how covetous individuals misuse their wealth by wholeheartedly fixating on it, despite being expressly warned against this by the prophets and in the Gospels. They live as though they have already found paradise here on earth. This accursed disposition and insatiable greed of covetousness, which blinds and intoxicates all men, is justly called idolatry. It is also deemed the root of all evil because the covetous person always seeks his own gain. Whether it be through deceit, extortion, theft, perjury, murder, treachery, poisoning, or any other means, it makes no difference to him, as long as he can satisfy his desires. This unquenchable thirst for gain results in countless conflicts and bloodshed throughout the world, with some falling victim to poison, while others have their throats slit. All of this can be attributed to the insatiable grip of covetousness. While ambition, fornication, and similar vices bring about a host of vile consequences, it does not absolve the covetous from being tainted by them.

Therefore, it is imperative to understand that St. Paul justly proclaims covetousness as subjugating us to Satan, leading us to forget God, making us so insensitive that we no longer fear God or experience remorse. It inflates our pride to such an extent that God appears insignificant compared to our gold, silver, and riches. This constitutes rank treason, and it is why we are reprimanded here, as the Holy Spirit communicates through the apostle's words. Let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our gracious

God, acknowledging our faults, and pray for the grace of true repentance. May we be genuinely grieved and heartily sorry for our transgressions, seeking to dedicate ourselves entirely to Him, so that He may continually remove all corruption from us, causing us to forsake the world, as we were redeemed and cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for this very purpose. While bearing with our weaknesses in the meantime, may He enable us to rid ourselves of them more and more, until He calls us out of this world to unite with Himself in righteousness and holiness. May He grant this grace not only to us but to all the peoples and nations of the earth.

The Thirty Fifth Sermon, the Third on the Fifth Chapter

> "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." - Ephesians 5:8-11

We know how difficult it is to reform people from their evil customs once they have become hardened to them. The mischief easily takes root in us because we are naturally inclined and almost wholly given to it. However, we are not so easily changed when we have indulged in wrongdoing for a long time. It clings to us like a disease that has gathered strength and cannot be purged away. Many people are deeply entrenched in their wickedness and indulge in numerous vices before they are called by God and touched with repentance. Therefore, we need to heed the doctrine that St. Paul imparts here, which is to understand that when we have strayed from God

and deviated from the path of salvation, we must not deceive ourselves or make excuses, just because it has become commonplace for us. We should not excuse ourselves any more for that, but rather consider that God has had compassion on us. His drawing us away from the evil we were in was intended to change us and to better showcase His power and grace through our lives, bearing witness that we are no longer the people we once were.

That's why St. Paul says in this text, "You were once darkness, but now God has enlightened you," as if to say that we must not rely on what others do or what has happened in our lives to hope for justification and exoneration of our faults. When God has reached out His hand and shown us such mercy as to adopt us as His children and make us heirs of heavenly life, instead of being condemned and damned, that grace should greatly motivate us to become new beings. As for those among whom we live, if God gives them the reins and lets them go as abandoned people, let us understand that it was His will to rescue us from such a miserable state. Let them serve as mirrors for us to see how wretched it is for people to follow their own desires. Their multitude of sins should not excuse or cover our faults; rather, we should take their example as a warning to withdraw ourselves and submit to the fear and obedience of our Lord.

To better grasp the whole, let's first note that St. Paul is showing us the state of all humanity in general until God draws them to Himself. He tells us that there is no reason at all to boast in our virtues. This one statement, where he says that we were in darkness, means that there was neither light of reason nor any self-governance in us. Instead, we were like beasts, and this should humble us. Indeed, many may appear wise and receive commendation from the world as prudent individuals capable not only of guiding their own lives but also counseling and directing others.

Yet, despite this, when it comes to God's wisdom and reason, we are mere brute beasts compared to Him. This saying should remind us to humbly turn

to God and seek the necessary remedy for governing our lives, which is to let His wisdom be our master and teacher through His Word. I will elaborate on this further. It should also lead us to pray that His Holy Spirit may work in us, preventing us from being filled with pride to the point where we consider ourselves wise in our own conceit.

So, in essence, we need to remember the following from this passage where Paul refers to people with a derogatory term, saying they are darkness, and that there is nothing but utter brutishness in them. I have already discussed in the previous chapter that people deserve nothing and are prone to destruction until they are reformed. Now, on the contrary, Paul mentions that there is light in the Lord, to emphasize that all the wisdom we possess comes from supernatural grace. In other words, we don't inherit it, nor can we claim it as our own. It is entirely the result of God's work, and we must be connected to our Lord Jesus Christ to partake in this benefit. Scripture states that God's Spirit was given to rest upon Him in full perfection. Therefore, let us learn to distrust ourselves and recognize that whatever we can bring on our own is of no help; it only diverts us from the path of salvation. We have no wisdom unless it is freely given by God for the purpose of drawing us to Him and making us members of His Son, our true light.

As I mentioned earlier, it's as if St. Paul is saying that by nature, we are nothing but darkness in Adam, and we are enlightened again in our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should not seek excuses by claiming that we cannot shed our old nature or completely forsake our ingrained tendencies. Such excuses are trivial and hold no weight before God. Instead, we should examine ourselves, considering our true state before God's grace has worked in us. We should acknowledge that on our own, we bring nothing but corruption from our mother's womb. This realization should enhance the effectiveness of the grace God has bestowed upon us. St. Paul implies that this grace would have been choked and nullified by our ingratitude and

malice if we had not recognized why God extended His hand and showed such mercy to us. His purpose was to rescue us from darkness and bring us into the light. We are called "light in the Lord" not only because we have the guidance of His gospel, which is like a burning lamp, but also because He Himself, as the spiritual source and origin, inwardly enlightens us through His Spirit. We can see from experience that people do not necessarily improve when they are exposed to the truth through doctrine. One can make the effort to teach them, but it may often be in vain. Therefore, our Lord must also provide the spiritual insight to perceive the teachings of His Word. Just as the sun, no matter how bright in the sky, is of no benefit unless we have eyes to receive its light, God must grant us spiritual eyesight to understand the things taught to us by His Word.

You can see that the way we become "light in the Lord" is twofold. On one side, God shows us the way of salvation through the preaching of His Word and imparts a new spirit or mind to us, so that we do not remain in the ignorance that is natural to us. St. Paul clarifies this even further by adding that we should "walk as children of the light." In this, he not only praises and commends God's grace to encourage us to glorify Him, as we should, but also reveals its purpose. It's as if he's saying, make sure you do not disregard God's grace or render it ineffective. The calling to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ was intended to bring about a holy transformation into this light. If we were to have the sun but merely gaze at it idly, like people out of their minds, we might as well have perpetual night. The sun serves us to engage in the tasks we are responsible for, to work for our livelihood, each according to their duties and roles.

Hence, it would be an abuse of the sun, which brings us such great benefits, if any of us were not to apply ourselves to our known duties. St. Paul then applies this analogy to the spiritual realm, comparing it to the doctrine of the gospel. He asserts that this light shines not for us to engage in idle speculations but, rather, to put our hands to work, to plow, and for each of

us to identify our areas of service. In doing so, we make the light that is offered to us useful.

Furthermore, Paul, in one place, calls us "light," and then immediately adds "children of light." Both phrases serve the same purpose. However, it's worth noting that this title properly belongs to none but our Lord Jesus Christ, as He Himself said, "I am the light of the world. He that walketh in me shall never stray." This demonstrates that our Lord Jesus Christ alone is sufficient to provide us with light. If we distance ourselves from Him, we will find nothing but darkness, not in heaven, not on earth, nor in any other creature. Even when we speak of God's majesty, it is above all the heavens, and even the angels derive their light from our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the reason why even John the Baptist is excluded from that honour when he states that he was not the light, but that this distinction belonged peculiarly to the Son of God, who enlightens everyone that comes into the world. Similarly, the apostles and all those who preach God's truth are also termed "light" in their own capacity. It is not because they inherently possess this light, but because God uses them as instruments to deliver His Word and guide others in the path of salvation.

However, if someone who carries a candle to light others stumbles and goes astray, it is a significant matter. Therefore, as those entrusted with preaching God's Word, we must lead our lives in such a way that others may be edified by our conduct. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those enlightened by Him must not claim equality with Him. He alone remains the true light, while we are illuminated by Him.

As St. Paul said, all believers are like lamps burning in this world, bearing the Word of God. The light referred to in Scripture, both for teachers and those who are taught, is the Word of God. It should function as a lamp to guide our lives. We must live in a manner that draws unbelievers to faith

and reform or confound them when they see that God's calling to us as His messengers is not in vain.

This is the sense in which St. Paul states that we are "light in the Lord" because God's Word should act as a burning lamp, guiding not only ourselves but also showing the way to those who might otherwise go astray. He adds that we are "children of light" to emphasize that our light does not originate within ourselves; we borrow it from the true light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of this light, and through Him, we are illuminated by His gospel and the Holy Spirit.

As God works in us through faith and grants us spiritual rebirth, let us value His grace as it deserves. We should not squander it through negligence but walk according to God's calling, employing ourselves for His purposes. St. Paul warns that the fruit of this light is goodness, righteousness, and truth. In other words, this is not just a matter of following common human customs but a call to draw nearer to God and to understand the true purpose of being Christians. It reflects how the power of the Holy Spirit should manifest in our lives, leading us to live righteously, faithfully, and compassionately, showing kindness and patience towards one another.

Truth be told, there are other things required in a Christian's life, but Paul hasn't encompassed them all under a single category. It's as if he's saying, "My friends, God's grace towards us is remarkable in gathering us to Him when we were headed for destruction. He has freed us from the tyranny of the ruler of this world, the devil, and made us members of His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is an invaluable benefit, and now we must demonstrate how we respond to God's immense mercy."

This response must be evident in our lives as we interact with one another in goodness. This means we should not be cruel like dogs and cats, nor engage in guile, craftiness, and malice to deceive or manipulate one another. Instead, we should conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity,

ensuring that each of us strives to give others their due, so that no one pursues their own gain at the expense of others.

When our lives are ordered in this manner, people will see that we bear fruit in the light. In other words, the light God has given us is not dormant but active. Just as God has illuminated us, we should apply ourselves to doing what He has commanded and appointed. This is why Paul speaks of the fruit of righteousness, as I mentioned before. The gospel is not ineffectual; its impact should be evident in our lives, characterized by righteousness, kindness, and faithfulness.

In these words, St. Paul encompasses all aspects of the two tables of the law. Charity does not diminish the importance of God's service; rather, the scriptures direct us back to our neighbours because of our service to God. When we love our neighbours as we should and live with them according to God's law, God will always have His rightful place. Otherwise, we tend to love ourselves excessively, seek our own glory, and indulge in pride, vainglory, covetousness, cruelty, and deceit. Only when we willingly submit ourselves to God's authority, honour Him, serve Him, and bless His holy name will this change occur. Such submission and obedience to God will be evident when we give everyone their due, indicating our fear of God.

Now, to illustrate how we should live in the world, Paul outlines three important virtues: goodness, righteousness, and truth. Goodness signifies kindness and compassion towards those in distress, helping them in their time of need and patiently bearing their weaknesses. Righteousness denotes honest and upright conduct, refraining from taking what belongs to others, avoiding actions that harm our neighbours, and being content with what God has given us, without seeking to accumulate others' possessions. Lastly, truth opposes all forms of deception, cunning schemes, and dishonest practices aimed at gaining others' possessions. When we possess

these three virtues, it is certain that charity is fully and perfectly present in us.

These are the principles we should keep in mind in our daily lives. To demonstrate that our Christian upbringing in the Gospel has not been in vain and that we have not neglected the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must live virtuously and justly among people. We should show kindness by bearing with one another's weaknesses and helping those in need. We must also be faithful, avoiding craftiness and deceit in our dealings. Let us be steadfast and honest in all our interactions with others. Our Christian lives should reflect God's light and grace, leading us to be compassionate, just, and truthful.

The main point to remember is that God has enlightened us not to remain in darkness but to shine a light on those who still walk in darkness. We have a responsibility to guide unbelievers who stumble and wander aimlessly, like lost beasts. Their ignorance cannot excuse them because it is rooted in their wilful rejection of God. However, what excuse can we offer if we stray from the path when God has enlightened us with His Word and Holy Spirit and united us with our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true source of righteousness?

Here, Paul tells us to examine what pleases God, which goes beyond what he previously mentioned. It reminds us of the true rule: aligning ourselves with God's will. The fear of God is rightly called true wisdom because it prevents us from straying into evil. Those who fear God remember His name and majesty, keeping their desires in check. Even when tempted, they resist because they recognize that their lives are devoted to God's service. When our minds are focused on God, we gain strength against temptation. Paul advises us to examine what pleases God to counteract our natural recklessness.

In the disregard of God, there are two aspects. First, people become complacent, thinking they won't be held accountable, and they rest as if they can determine good and evil. Later, they recklessly rebel against God.

Therefore, it is not enough for us to avoid wilfully opposing God or behaving like wild animals or stubborn bulls, pushing in every direction with our horns. That is insufficient. We must be vigilant in thoroughly inquiring what is permissible for us. We should distinguish between what God permits and what He does not allow.

The first point that Paul emphasizes here is that our lives will never be well-ordered unless they are fully aligned with God's will. Mark this as the first point. Secondly, as I mentioned earlier, we should not assume that God forgives our negligence when we deliberately close our eyes and are content to go astray without taking heed. Instead, we should be on guard and diligently seek what God allows. These are the two key points we should keep in mind.

Regarding the first point, we can observe that throughout history, people have always taken liberties to follow their own inventions as they please. There has been a common saying that "the intention judges with men," which holds true to some extent. However, people have misinterpreted it. Under this pretext, individuals have imagined that God should consider them righteous if they had no intention to offend. Hypocrites often engage in this behaviour, creating superstitions and believing that God should accept their actions as good. However, God does not operate according to our imagination. The confusion in the practice of religion, particularly in Catholicism, arises from forsaking God's Word and disregarding His commands. Instead, they do as they please, inventing various rituals and traditions, all the while believing that their intentions make them righteous.

As I mentioned earlier, while it is true that intentions matter to some extent, simply performing commendable deeds is not enough. We may engage in

praiseworthy actions but still be condemned by God if they are not done for the right purpose. Even if our actions outwardly appear virtuous and honest, they are worthless and repulsive in God's eyes if our intentions are wicked and distorted. Therefore, we must not heedlessly follow every idea that comes to our minds. Our greatest wisdom lies in seeking to understand God's will. In accordance with this, Paul states that our reasonable service is to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, in obedience to His commandments, which will be well-pleasing to Him.

But if we rely solely on ourselves, God will reject it all. That is unreasonable; it is merely Satan's trash and nonsense. Therefore, let us pay close attention to what is being conveyed here: we must not discern good from evil by our own judgment but by weighing them on God's scale, not our own. We should not say, "It seems good to me; I think I will try it." Let us avoid such recklessness and be like weaned children, ready to learn from God and submit entirely to His guidance.

So, humility is the foundation of serving God well. We should not be puffed up with pride or act rashly by saying, "I think this is the right course of action." Instead, we should think, "Has God spoken of this in His Word? Even if it seems excellent, I would reject it if God forbids it." This is why it is explicitly stated, "You shall not do what seems good in your own eyes." Likewise, we are forbidden to be wise in our own conceit. We must recognize that being taught by God is the infallible wisdom. As soon as we deviate from what He has taught us, we are left wandering, thinking ourselves wise in the world's eyes, but in reality, we are foolish.

In essence, everything we can come up with by ourselves only condemns us. The only guiding principle is God's will, the sole measure by which we can judge what is worthwhile and good. Since the devil seeks to deprive us of this benefit, we must be even more vigilant to seek out God's will diligently. We are careful enough about our temporal profit, always

calculating and considering the potential dangers and advantages. However, when it comes to serving God, we are often hasty and reckless, pretending to have great zeal for the heavenly life but not valuing it. This shows that we merely go through the motions and treat it as a task.

Therefore, we should be aware that people are not as blameworthy when they rebel against God unintentionally as when they persist in their obstinacy. While it is true that people may do some things without much thought, they must still consider whether God approves of their actions. In all our doings, we should seek spiritual discernment to understand what God allows and follow His will.

Furthermore, Paul adds that we must not engage in the fruitless works of darkness but rather rebuke them. This addition is not without reason. Even if we are inclined to live according to God's Word, we must learn to resist temptations. Even if we do not see vices around us that would hinder our obedience to God, we already have enough vices within us that need correction before we can genuinely submit to God's will and say, "Lord, let Your will reign over us."

In any case, consider that even if we have subdued all our affections and are ready to submit entirely to God, the devil does not cease to attack us through various means: temptation, deceit, and open assaults. Therefore, we must be well-fortified and rely on the invincible power God has given us to resist all the strategies of the devil. That's why Paul says that we should not engage in the unfruitful works of darkness. It's as if he's saying, "I know that the allurements of this world can deter you from fulfilling your duty to God."

Even though you know that God should have dominion over you and that you should be subject to Him, when you associate with those who despise God and engage in unholy activities, it becomes very difficult for you to lead a righteous life. The more vices abound, the more likely you are to be

infected by them. Just as it is impossible to walk among thorns without getting pricked, it is nearly impossible to move through a world filled with corruption without stumbling upon some form of evil.

Therefore, we must be strong and resolute in our commitment to serving God. There is no excuse to say, "Alas, what can I do? I am a frail creature. If God had sent me alone, I could serve Him better. But I am surrounded by so many vices: some lie, some commit adultery, some are drunkards, some swear. I witness so much wickedness that it terrifies me. Given the circumstances, what can I do?" We may make such excuses, but they are in vain. Instead, we must prepare ourselves for the service of God so that we can stand obediently in battle formation to resist all temptations.

Indeed, it will be challenging, but with God's help, we will be strong. We should pray for His guidance through the Holy Spirit. This guidance will not only subdue us under His dominion but also grant us victory against all the strategies Satan employs to defeat us. When we call upon God and place our trust in the working of His Holy Spirit, we can continue on our path even though the world is full of wicked obstacles trying to lead us astray.

The key point to remember is that in addition to a good disposition to submit to God and the willingness to accept and obey whatever He commands, we must also be equipped to battle against Satan's assaults. Even though we see the whole world steeped in wickedness, we should not think this diminishes our fault before God. Instead, we must understand that it is God's way of testing and trying us. Nevertheless, if we call upon Him and rely on the Holy Spirit, we will undoubtedly overcome all of Satan's attempts to hinder our service to God.

In conclusion, Paul uses this analogy to remind us that we should not engage in the works of darkness. It is as if he is telling us that we should separate ourselves from unbelievers and not live as if God has not worked in us or His word has had no effect on us. To do otherwise is to trample

upon Jesus Christ, negate the fruit of His death and passion, and defile His precious blood, which is the source of all holiness. Therefore, let us avoid darkness and have nothing to do with it, for associating with unbelievers and the godless world is of no benefit. Those who choose such a path will ultimately reap the reward of eternal death, following one another into damnation.

Let us examine ourselves closely, for when people readily excuse themselves and seek nothing more than to remain firmly bound under Satan's dominion, they are essentially throwing themselves into the depths of despair. Is this not a pitiable form of liberty? St. Paul, therefore, explicitly tells us that we should not involve ourselves with the world's corruptions. Instead, we should strive to reform those who take such liberties to do evil, ultimately leading to their own downfall. Both we and they should be obedient to our God in such a way that His Word and Holy Spirit provide us with an invincible power to resist all assaults. We should be equipped with spiritual armour, such as a helmet, breastplate, and sword, as we will discuss later.

We must be careful as we walk in this world, maintaining true constancy and not turning away from God due to any troubles, impediments, obstacles, or temptations that may come our way.

Now, let us humbly kneel before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying for genuine repentance. May we be truly sorry for our sins and continually strive to overcome them, growing stronger in our fear of God and our commitment to keeping His holy commandments. In the meantime, may God bear with our weaknesses until we are purified and free from them, helping us progress day by day in His teachings. We trust in His forgiveness of our sins until we reach the perfection of His righteousness and glory. And with this, I conclude, Almighty God, Heavenly Father...

The Thirty Sixth Sermon, the Fourth on the Fifth Chapter

> "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.:" - Ephesians 5: 11-14

We have observed this morning that despite the many temptations in the world that may lead us away from serving God, we should not use them as excuses. Stumbling blocks have existed in the world throughout history, but the remedy is clear: God's children must remain devoted to Him and avoid corrupting themselves by associating with unbelievers, as God has called them to be distinct.

It is not sufficient for us to merely abstain from being drunkards, fornicators, thieves, or murderers. We must also avoid all forms of evil wherever they may be found. Indeed, we should always begin by examining ourselves and condemning the vices within us. Hypocrites often point out the faults in others while ignoring the great faults within themselves. To be true and fair judges, each of us should self-reflect and acknowledge our own shortcomings. We should genuinely detest the evil within ourselves. Moreover, we must demonstrate that we love God more than the world and refrain from maintaining friendships with the wicked by turning a blind eye to their faults and flattering them.

To address this, St. Paul reminds us of a third reason: we should reprove the works of darkness not only to demonstrate our zeal for honoring God but also to rescue foolish souls from the path of destruction and guide them

toward salvation. These are the two main reasons for reproving evil. First, it should trouble us to witness God offended and people provoking His wrath by disrupting the order He has established. Seeing God's Word disregarded and His name trampled upon should grieve us deeply. Second, we have a duty to care for those redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we witness souls heading towards damnation without acknowledging the tremendous cost of their redemption, it is a disregard for the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul emphasises that as we separate ourselves from evil to avoid becoming companions of those who despise God, we should actively demonstrate our disapproval of their actions. This may lead them to feel ashamed of their wickedness and prompt them to repent. Even if we manage to rescue a single soul from the path of destruction, it will be a significant accomplishment.

In a similar vein, St. James encourages us to reprove evil, highlighting that by doing so, we may save a soul from being lost. Therefore, it is important for us to show our zeal for honouring God and preserving the integrity of His Word. If we do not speak out against those who blaspheme His majesty and challenge His righteousness, it may be considered negligence on our part. Just as a loyal subject would defend their prince and a faithful child would defend their father's honour, we should uphold God's honour and righteousness. Although we are but humble inhabitants of the earth, God has graciously adopted us as His children. Therefore, if wicked individuals attempt to tarnish His majesty and undermine His authority while we remain silent, it is an affront that should not be tolerated.

Therefore, let us pay close attention to what he has told us here. This vice has prevailed throughout history, where people are more or less inclined to flattery and, consequently, find it easier to tolerate the faults of others. This tolerance is not in the sense of having compassion for the weak and being

patient with them, as we have seen so far. Instead, it is the opposite; it entails being content with perpetuating evil and willingly entering into alliances to avoid scrutiny of our vices. We allow each person to claim a certain liberty for themselves. This prevailing attitude is why there is disorder in the world today.

Moreover, we are often reluctant to incur anyone's displeasure, to the extent that we betray God and our fellow beings, body and soul, to avoid exercising the liberty that God's Spirit grants us. When we witness a wretched person indulging in folly, we say, "Let them follow their own path; it does not concern us." Similarly, when we see others perverting the course of justice and corrupting society, we passively overlook it, thinking, "I do not want to incur the wrath of someone in authority. Let others lead the way, and I will follow suit. If consequences arise, I will plead ignorance." Meanwhile, we beseech God's mercy, while remaining idle. We avoid putting ourselves at risk for any matter.

This is how our vices are tolerated in the present day. However, God will not forfeit His right. His verdict will remain inviolable. Consequently, we may be condemned as accomplices of the wicked if we behave like blind and deaf animals, failing to restrain wickedness by standing up against it to the best of our ability. If we allow God's honour to be desecrated and all sense of decency to be discarded without protest, we will be held accountable.

We should, therefore, pay close attention to this warning about rebuking evil. We must make every effort to demonstrate our commitment and be diligent in our ability to address it. If each individual followed this approach, the world would surely be a better place. The reason why God's name is so frequently blasphemed is that blasphemies are concealed, and people would rather soil themselves with the wickedness of others than risk disapproval or dislike. The same applies to drunkenness, theft, extortion,

and other immoral activities. If we possessed the zeal commanded by St. Paul, we would be much more resolute in reproving those who engage in such behaviours.

Conversely, if we allow good people to be trodden upon and mistreated, we reveal a lack of love and compassion among us. We ought to extend our helping hand to them.

Again, souls are heading towards destruction, and we take no action, even though God has bestowed upon us the grace to stand in His place, to save that which was on the path to being lost and damned. Now, St. Paul, having addressed this issue, aims to reinforce the same doctrine and ignite the sluggishness within us. He explains that the reason why unbelievers indulge in such heinous acts, acts they would be ashamed even to speak of, is because they believe they can remain hidden from human sight. Why? Because they lack the fear of God, and hence, they consider themselves well-concealed.

For instance, when a thief perceives that no one is around, he ransacks cupboards, breaks open doors, steals whatever he can, all because he does not anticipate being caught and judged by anyone. He deludes himself into thinking he has escaped without a trace. Similarly, a robber or a murderer who enters some concealed spot imagines himself to be well-hidden. When he encounters a stray individual, he pounces upon him, robs him, injures him, and even goes so far as to slit his throat if he cannot overpower him by other means. And all this while, he believes he has escaped undetected, for no one has witnessed his actions. This pattern extends to various other deeds. We are more ashamed before our fellow humans than we are afraid of God. Scripture proclaims that all our thoughts will be called to account, not only our wicked deeds but even our hidden thoughts. For on the last day, the books will be opened, signifying that nothing will be forgotten, unless we obtain the promised grace mentioned in the Psalm, which is that

God forgives us our sins. However, this forgiveness is not granted without repentance. Those who have grown unyielding to all evil merely mock this notion. They care not about what God may do, for they have become so brutish that they do not contemplate the enormity of hardening their hearts against the sovereign majesty of God.

Hence, when the unbelievers and those who despise God seek refuge and hide in such covert places, vile licentiousness prevails among them, and it would be disgraceful to contemplate their actions and words. But as Simple explains, when they are rebuked, their mischief is uncovered, and their liberty curtailed, as the rebuke serves as a restraint. It is not just because they are reproached by others, but also because they sense that they are accountable to the heavenly judge, and they recognise the dreadful consequences of falling into His hands. In short, Simple meant to demonstrate the purpose that rebuke can serve when utilised correctly and with genuine charitable zeal. He already emphasised that we must not employ hypocrisy or attempt to vindicate ourselves by condemning others. Instead, each of us should thoroughly examine our own lives, despise the vices to which we are prone, and strive to bring ourselves under God's guidance. We should pray for His strength through the power of His Holy Spirit, enabling us to align ourselves with His will and righteousness. In doing so, we should not flatter those who err but speak candidly to them for their own benefit.

The benefit that will arise from following Paul's counsel is that God will not be as grievously offended as we see He is. Moreover, those who were beyond shame may, through this means, be led towards honesty. It seemed to them that they had permission to commit any form of wickedness, but they will repent and encourage others to do the same. Yet, what should drive us even more is the understanding that we live in this world and enjoy the countless blessings bestowed upon us by God. Nevertheless, we allow His authority to be undermined, even when it seems as though people are

attempting to remove Him from His throne by blaspheming His holy name. When people provoke Him to anger and we do nothing, we must be considered utter scoundrels and traitors. Imagine if someone insulted, plotted to murder, robbed, defiled the spouse, or corrupted the child of a man in his own home, and we were there enjoying his hospitality, eating his food, drinking his wine, and, in short, being fed and supported at his expense, all the while remaining silent. Wouldn't we deserve to be stoned and have people spit in our faces? Certainly, for ingratitude and villainy will always be condemned, even among humans.

Now, if we are so obliged to protect a mortal man's honour and integrity when we are guests in his home, what should we do for our Lord? Aren't we in His house as long as we live in this world? Don't we receive every drop of water due to His kindness and generosity? Consider this: God takes care of us as a father would. Yet, despite all this, we allow His name to be blasphemed, His majesty to be disrespected, His word to be torn apart, all the orders He has established to be disregarded, His Church, which is His spouse, to be corrupted and abused, and His children to be lured into wickedness. In the meantime, we remain silent. Can any of you deny that such silence is evidence that we are unworthy even to eat a morsel of bread, or to be counted among the lowliest creatures, like worms and insects?

So, let us ponder this carefully. We will be held accountable for despising God's majesty, as we can see happening, because we do not rebuke the vices that flourish due to the audacity of the wicked and the heathen, who become bolder and believe they can run the world as they please, exulting in their disdain for God. Part of this comes from our silence, and that's what St. Paul intended to convey here. Furthermore, it means that the wretched souls, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ paid such a high price that He did not spare Himself to save them, are perishing and falling into Satan's grasp because of our indifference. In the meantime, we pay no heed to it at all.

Now, do we not bear witness that we lack even a drop of charity within us? Yes, and that's why I mentioned that in doing so, we become traitors to God and our neighbours. When we lack zeal for God's name and neglect the welfare of our neighbours, doesn't the world see that we are filled with cruelty and unkindness? I mean cruelty in the sense that we let people perish while knowing and witnessing it, and unkindness towards God because we do not give Him the honour He deserves when we lack the courage to demonstrate, at the very least, that we disapprove of men diminishing God's authority and the reverence owed to Him.

Therefore, whoever we are, we should not be afraid to incur men's displeasure or disfavour when it comes to showing, to the best of our ability, that we genuinely abhor such things. I say, as far as we can, because sometimes our mouths will be shut, and all we can do is sigh at such utter disorder when people behave like devils unleashed, venting their insolence against God. Those who bear the sword seem intent on creating chaos, with all goodness forgotten. In such circumstances, as I mentioned earlier, we have no other recourse but to be sorrowful about it, just as it is said of Lot that his heart was grieved by the wickedness of Sodom. Therefore, let us not hold back. Each of us should stir himself to grief and sorrow when we witness such disorder, and we should testify against it to the extent that it may do some good.

Furthermore, if there is any hope of converting those who are so unruly, let us strive unceasingly to bring them to repentance. Indeed, let us exert ourselves to achieve it. Many people too easily quote the proverb that one should not cast pearls before swine, and they assume that people are swine before they have even attempted to understand them. Even if they have behaved poorly, strayed, or become lawless, and even if the devil has ensnared them, we must labour to reclaim them and have hope, as St. Paul says, "Charity hopeth all things."

So then, until men demonstrate themselves to be wholly inclined to evil, and their maladies appear incurable, let us strive to be good physicians to them through the counsel that God shall inspire us with. You can see what St. Paul meant when he said that unbelievers consider themselves hidden when they are neither perceived nor rebuked. When they are left to wander without correction, they continue in darkness, emboldening themselves to commit wicked deeds. However, we are partly responsible for this, and we cannot absolve ourselves of it, for God has entrusted us with His authority in this matter and has given us His Word, which has the authority to condemn evil. Nevertheless, it is often suppressed and disregarded.

Consider this: when the most wicked individuals are rebuked, they finally recognise their shame. Before, they could not distinguish between right and wrong. It's like a person stumbling in the dark, unaware of their surroundings, even if they stumble and fall. Therefore, when God's Word is presented to people, and we boldly show wrongdoers their faults, it is as if we hold up a mirror to them and say, "Look at yourself; you are as filthy as can be. Are you not ashamed? Go and cleanse yourself." Therefore, admonitions will always achieve this much, although not with everyone. Many have become hardened, and Satan has taken hold of them. God has allowed them to possess such a stubborn and willful disposition that they feel no shame. Nevertheless, when any faithful person does their duty, it will always do some good, and some benefit will come from it. Just as those who had strayed like wild beasts or unruly oxen may return and find some sense of righteousness. Therefore, let us strive for this, if possible, or at least make every effort to attain it.

Now, regarding the word "rebuke," it primarily means to expose the hidden thing. Paul alludes to this function in preaching when he addresses the vanity prevalent in the Corinthian church. They spoke in strange tongues seeking praise and admiration. People would say, "This person is a great scholar; they can speak in all languages." However, this did not lead to

edification. Today, we often witness similar distractions in churches, with organs playing on one side, and various performances on the other. There is so much spectacle that simple-minded people are captivated, but there is no edification. Instead, when we gather in the name of God, our aim should be to encourage one another in faith and piety. How can this be achieved? It happens when good and God-fearing individuals are edified by His Word. Moreover, if an unbeliever, who was once a mocker and never felt any remorse, comes in and hears what is proclaimed in God's name – that we cannot escape God's judgment and will stand before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, and how Christ has redeemed us, and how ungrateful it is for us to make His sacrifice of death and passion meaningless – when the unbeliever hears all this and sees how we are encouraged to fear and love God for His boundless grace towards us...

Although he compares a person to a brute beast, as Simple says, yet that person will reflect upon themselves and be reproved. He uses the same term here, and the meaning is evident. Even if someone's conscience was as good as dead, and they were almost brutish, they would be compelled to examine themselves and feel shame, giving glory to God. This does not happen to everyone equally, but we can see that many who had gone astray, forgotten God, and had no regard for their own soul's well-being can be so profoundly affected by a single sermon that they appear to be transformed for the rest of their lives. What is done in a communal gathering should also be practised individually. We are not here solely for self-improvement but also to teach one another through mutual instruction. In this manner, we must reprove wrongdoers so that they do not take more liberties to mock God in such a manner, cast off His yoke, and indulge in wickedness. This is essentially what Paul aims to convey to us.

To further solidify this doctrine, he adds yet another reason. It is apt to say that light reveals all things. Previously, he told us that once we are enlightened by God's Spirit and the Gospel, we should be like lamps,

providing light to the world. We possess the word of life, which not only guides us but also leads those who have gone astray onto the right path. Continuing on this theme, he explains that it is the nature and function of light to expose. Therefore, when we permit wickedness to take root and grow deeper and deeper, we clearly demonstrate that we are neither lights nor children of the light. In other words, we do not belong to God or Jesus Christ in the slightest. In short, Simple means that we cannot provide any evidence of our Christianity or faith unless we actively oppose and resist evil as much as possible, preventing it from gaining full control and dominance.

Now, let us reflect upon ourselves once more. As I mentioned earlier, none of us is free from the fault of fearing men more than God, of turning a blind eye to others' transgressions so they will do the same for us, and of betraying one another through our silence. However, there is another, even worse vice that compounds the problem. In addition to our silence, we actively contribute to the spread of evil. Consequently, immorality gains further ground because almost everyone, by which I mean the majority of people today, turns a blind eye to all sorts of wickedness and disorder, shutting their ears to things they ought to confront.

Every person strives to conceal the wickedness of their peers, men for men and women for women. They could rectify a great many enormities that are committed, but instead, they bury their own faults with the dung and filth of others and hide their vices as if they were treasure. Practically everyone plays this game of mutual concealment, where they keep quiet about their neighbor's vices in the hope that the favor will be returned. The same is true for all other sins. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, God has not spoken in vain. One day, we will experience the execution of the sentence spoken here by His Apostle. When that time comes, it will be too late for regrets about what we should have acknowledged earlier. Those who fear should go and learn and remember what is stated here: God enlightens us so that each

one may examine themselves. We should not be like blind riches groping in the dark, stumbling on one side and running into things on the other. Instead, we should know the path to salvation and, moreover, teach others by revealing the hidden evil. Those who have turned their backs on God, although they appeared to have been in darkness for a long time, will understand that they must come to the light, whatever the consequences.

Therefore, the true way for us to genuinely demonstrate that we belong to God and are enlightened by His Holy Spirit and His Word is to expose things that would otherwise remain hidden, as charity covers a multitude of sins, as Solomon said. We ought to be patient and bear with many shortcomings. It is not appropriate for us to accuse one another, as some do, who, instead of warning those they see transgressing, spread gossip to the point where the streets and marketplaces are filled with it. They exaggerate minor infractions to the level of heinous crimes. Therefore, when some of us expose individuals, it is not to accuse each other in that way, but rather to help the afflicted person, who, with their eyes blinded by Satan, needs to recognize their own wretchedness and wickedness so that they may feel ashamed. Likewise, a woman who has surrendered herself to utter impurity may regain some decency and return to the right path by being confronted with her faults and vices.

The method of exposing wrongdoing is not to slander one another, reprimand each other with pretense, or act hypocritically, straining at a gnat while swallowing an ox or a sheep in a morsel. In other words, some people are overly conscientious about very minor matters but turn a blind eye to numerous major transgressions right under their noses, without being the least bit offended. We must not behave this way. When we observe sin multiplying and growing due to our unfaithfulness, we must address it. Each person should be compelled to reflect upon themselves and their vices for the purpose of improvement. This, essentially, is the diligence that St. Paul urges upon us here. It is the means to remove the plagues that Satan

would otherwise maintain through silence and dissimulation. Therefore, whenever we perceive an infection within, we should not let it fester until the disease becomes incurable. Instead, we should promptly cleanse it, using admonitions as though they were lancets and methods to remove the infected matter that could mar and infect the entire body. So, in essence, we should apply this doctrine to what St. Paul teaches here.

Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, in all the teachings of the gospel, speaks to those who have fallen asleep in their sins, to those who are as good as dead, so that they may awaken and rise up, and thus we shall be enlightened by Him. First, we must remember that Jesus Christ indeed raises us from the dead when He calls us to faith and leads us into the hope of salvation. This is so that we may better understand our condition. We see how people often boast and glorify themselves, even though they are utterly confused and have nothing to be proud of. Scripture tells us that we are dead, and we may have some semblance of life before we are converted to the faith of Jesus Christ. However, that life is but death before God. This is why it is said in St. John, "The hour is coming when all those who hear the voice of the Son of Man shall live, even though they are dead, and shall pass from death to life." Jesus Christ does not speak of physical death or the resurrection we hope for on the last day. Instead, He reveals how we already have a prelude to the second resurrection when God renews us and gives us spiritual life. For we are capable of nothing but evil, as has been explained before. Simple also uses the same expression, stating that we are dead within. Building upon this, he emphasizes that the entire message of the Gospel is that we should rise from the dead. As long as we are estranged from God, the source of life, we are in a dungeon, and it would have been better for us never to have been born. We must awaken because part of our death is our sluggishness, as I mentioned earlier. We are so corrupted from birth that we cannot find salvation through good deeds alone. We are stuck, blinded, wicked, and lost, with the devil driving and pushing us forward, so

that as long as God allows us the reins, we can do nothing but sink deeper into the abyss.

Now, when we have reached that point, there is no more inertia, as St. Paul has already mentioned. There is nothing but obstinacy, as if God meant nothing to us, and we have lost all sense and awareness of our sins. This is why he emphasizes here that we must awaken, because we are in a state of spiritual lethargy until God stirs us and makes us realize our wretchedness so that we may detest our sins and turn back to Him. Therefore, the beginning of life and salvation is when God visits us with His grace while we were like spiritually dead wretches, utterly corrupted. Take note of this first.

Secondly, let us also observe that alongside the wickedness within us, there is such great hardness and stubbornness that God must forcibly awaken us to make us even slightly aware of our vices. This is why God must do this primarily when He calls us and pulls us out of the confusion we were in. However, every Christian must remain in this state throughout their life. We will never be so completely awake that we do not need God to continue rousing us. You may have seen some people who are so deeply asleep that even when they are dressed and on their feet, they stagger and seem half asleep until they rouse themselves and engage in some activity. They are so sluggish and drowsy that they still seem half-asleep even when awake. It is similar with us. Even though our Lord Jesus Christ has granted us the grace to rescue us from spiritual death and quicken us through His Holy Spirit and His Word, we still sense our own slothfulness and sluggishness. Thus, God must continually awaken us. Therefore, we need to be encouraged every day, and our ears must be constantly opened, as if Jesus Christ were calling out loudly to us, "Why are you still in this wretched state?" Even if we heard such warnings incessantly, we would not be fully awake, as we require. Now, we can see what St. Paul intended to convey in this passage: that what we experience by God's grace within ourselves, we should also

apply to our neighbors. Our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed raised us from spiritual death and awakens us daily from our spiritual slumber, for we are often so lethargic. This is so that we, in turn, may awaken others from their spiritual slumber and strive to bring those who are spiritually lifeless back to life.

Furthermore, when he says, "And Jesus Christ will enlighten me," it is not meant that we can rise up and awaken by our own power, with Jesus Christ adding His grace later. His intention is different. He means that we shall be enlightened by Jesus Christ, but not in the sense that we are merely in a dark place in need of a candle, like in the nighttime. Even if a person's vision is somewhat obscured, whether by the moon, stars, or anything else, they can still distinguish things. Thus, a person's eyes are not completely useless when navigating in the dark, no matter how dim it is. However, our Lord Jesus Christ enlightens us in a much more remarkable way. We are not only in darkness but utterly blind. Therefore, the remedy that the Son of God brings us through the teaching of the gospel is that He restores our sight. Our eyes were blinded by the sin of our first ancestor, Adam, who allowed vainglory to lead him astray, desiring to discern between good and evil beyond what was lawful for him. However, instead of gaining greater insight, he became brutish, and we, along with him, were left in a state of spiritual blindness. Therefore, we require our vision to be restored, and God's Spirit to serve as our eyes, replacing our spiritual blindness. Keep this in mind.

Furthermore, in this world, there is nothing but darkness, and it is so thick that we cannot even take a single step without stumbling or losing our way. Therefore, we need guidance, and our Lord Jesus Christ shows us the way. Our Lord Jesus enlightens us, not just by helping us or compensating for our deficiencies, but because we are utterly blind, even dead, and finally, we are in the depths of hell, just like a corpse in a grave. People may bring candles and torches to the grave, but they will not help the corpse see. Thus,

our Lord Jesus imparts His light to us, not to make us see more clearly than before but to fully restore our sight, since we are blind. Therefore, since Jesus Christ speaks in this manner and continually awakens us and helps us see more clearly, should we not follow His example and do our utmost to assist our neighbours when we see them straying toward destruction? This is the essence of the message being conveyed here.

Recognizing that our Lord Jesus sets Himself as an example and a pattern, we must be barbaric and uncaring if we remain unmoved. The Son of God not only undertakes His role of enlightening us, showing us the way of salvation, and awakening us from the spiritual slumber that enveloped us but, after enlightening us, He expects us to serve as beacons for others to follow, guiding the way. In this manner, He expects us to fulfill half of His role. Therefore, since the Son of God has bestowed such honour upon us, it would be treacherous to hide His light under a bushel and use it only for our own benefit and not for the benefit of others. Furthermore, if we think we have fulfilled our duty by merely abstaining from evil personally, while letting others head towards destruction, without caring or being willing to rectify the situation when we see the devil leading them towards eternal damnation, we are undoubtedly doing great injustice to God. Suppressing His light in this manner, we betray our neighbours and deprive them of the benefit that should lead to the eternal salvation of their souls. Therefore, we will be held accountable before both God and humanity, unless we heed what is being conveyed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and always keep this doctrine in our hearts.

As professed Christians, we must consider ourselves as trumpeters, awakening those who are asleep and serving as guides to direct those who have strayed, bringing them back to the right path from which they have wandered. We must all act in this manner and continue to do so until we reach the joyful meeting when our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to join Him, granting us the inheritance He has acquired for us. Now let us humble

ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He may make us increasingly aware of them. May He not allow us to fall into a deep slumber like wretched unbelievers. Instead, as it is His will for our lives to be like a continuous day, not merely providing the sun to illuminate us temporarily, followed by nightfall, but governing us Himself both day and night, so that we may gain lasting benefit and not return to darkness after He has enlightened us. May He keep us steadfast on the holy path to which He has called us and guide us as we call others to follow Him, all the way until we unite together in His presence. May He grant this grace not only to us but to all people and nations of the earth, etc.

The Thirty Seventh Sermon, the Fifth on the Fifth Chapter

> "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." - Ephesians 5:15-18

The concern we have for temporal profit will be sufficient to condemn us before God for the negligence evident in our lives when we consider our eternal well-being. We may try to escape blame by claiming that we did not think of it, but is it a tolerable fault that, when God calls us to Himself and offers us the gift of heavenly life, especially when He has revealed how this life was purchased and requires only that we glorify Him through true obedience, we neglect all of this? It seems that we are too shallow-minded, concerning ourselves with trivial matters that fade away, while

simultaneously despising the kingdom of heaven and God's service, regarding the salvation of our souls as insignificant. St. Paul exhorts us to be more vigilant than we have been in the past. He emphasizes that in such cases, we must rely on God and not assume that God will forgive us simply because of our ignorance when we are ensnared in worldly matters. We must not forget about the kingdom of heaven. He suggests that we should walk circumspectly, acknowledging that even if we are watchful of ourselves, we will still be susceptible to our weaknesses. We commit many faults, not only through ignorance but also knowingly. Often, we are not strong enough to resist temptation as we should. However, if we consider that we are constantly in the presence of God and His angels, we would conduct ourselves differently. This is why he calls for great care and circumspection so that no one falls into evil due to carelessness. To further motivate us, he adds that we must redeem the time because the days are evil. This implies that we cannot afford to misuse God's grace even slightly, as it would mean wasting precious time that cannot be recovered.

Now, let's summarise the key points here. Firstly, it is important to understand that the days are filled with evil influences, which can hinder our spiritual growth. We face numerous corruptions and temptations that can divert us from the path to salvation. Therefore, we need to put in extraordinary effort to overcome these obstacles that Satan places in our way. Satan regards us as his captives because of our sinful nature, and we, in turn, often lead others into wrongdoing. We are easily swayed by various influences, and the devil exploits this to his advantage. Therefore, we must remain vigilant and cautious of his tactics. In today's world, sin and iniquity have reached alarming levels, with people engaging in all sorts of wickedness. There seems to be an increase in craftiness, malice, extravagance, robbery, cruelty, and extortion everywhere. This text and the guidance provided by the Holy Ghost in it are especially relevant in these times when the world is filled with such rampant wickedness.

And therefore, as Paul said, the days are evil, and in times when there was a hundred times more righteousness than today, we ought to be even more vigilant and watchful due to the increasing evil of our times. When there is a fear of war, each of us will take precautions and consider that we should not risk everything at once, but save something for later, both in terms of provisions and other necessities. Similarly, when facing other troubles, we tend to think ahead and prepare ourselves. We say to ourselves, "Let's be careful; necessity will drive us to it." But now, when we can clearly see the evilness of the days – when everything seems to be against us – and even if we were diligent and circumspect in the world, we still often find ourselves hindered from serving God, we simply passively let it all slip away without minding it at all. Therefore, let us be wise and learn to redeem the time. By this, I mean that the more opportunities there are to lead us into sin and away from God, the more each of us should strive to do good. Even when faced with the corruption of the times, we should not use it as an excuse to cover our own sloth and carelessness. We should not assume that it's permissible to engage in deceit or dishonesty in our daily lives just because it's common practice.

If someone tells us to live indifferently and uprightly, we may respond, "How can I do that when even buying a small item involves some form of deceit? How can I live modestly and avoid idleness when it's clear that everyone around me acts contrary to these principles?" Or when advised to be patient and gentle, we might think it's impossible since everyone else behaves in the opposite manner. This common behavior should not serve as our justification; rather, we must remember that it is our duty to resist the prevailing ungodliness and live according to God's standards. We need to be vigilant and prayerful, asking God for the strength to resist the devil's schemes. Our efforts to redeem the time should not be driven by a desire for temporal and worldly gain, as we are already inclined towards that by nature. Instead, when we see the devil attempting to lead us away from serving God, we should redeem the time by forsaking our own sinful

desires. This redemption does not always require the use of gold and silver, but rather, it involves forsaking our own sinful tendencies. When we notice that our worldly desires are pulling us away from following God's calling, we must redeem the time by casting those desires aside.

In essence, we should evaluate how the devil might lead us astray or cause us to waste our time on sinful pursuits and take steps to rectify our conduct. This means that considering the corruption and rampant vice in the world today, as well as the disorder prevailing in society, even those who strive for righteousness are somewhat affected by these vices and disorders. Instead of making weak excuses and claiming our inability to overcome the numerous obstacles that surround us, we must seize the opportunity to redeem the time.

The only means to do this is to understand that Satan's attempts to drag us down are not sufficient excuses before God. If we turn to Him, He will provide us with the armor and weapons to withstand the battle until we achieve victory. So, let us not hesitate to set aside other things we desire and to confine our sinful affections as if they were imprisoned. Then, it will become easier for us to heed what St. Paul is saying here, which is to be watchful and discerning, to walk with wisdom rather than foolishness.

As we have previously discussed, if we learn in God's school as we should, we will have a reliable guide and cannot be deceived or led astray. God knows what we need, and He has not neglected to instruct us in anything. Therefore, St. Paul assumes that even though we may be spiritually blind or overwhelmed by the darkness of this world, or even though the devil employs numerous cunning strategies against us, if we become good students of God's Word and allow ourselves to be governed by Him, we will possess sufficient wisdom. In such a case, we will not be able to claim that we sinned unknowingly because God is wise enough to direct our entire

lives, provided that we listen to all He says and willingly accept His guidance.

Therefore, we can indeed attain the wisdom St. Paul requires. He clarifies this by saying that we should not be foolish but rather be prudent and understand what the will of God is. He explains what kind of wisdom he means, distinct from worldly notions of wisdom. The world often regards a person as wise if they are crafty and shrewd, able to deceive others and protect their own interests through cunning and deceit. Worldly wisdom is often about securing personal gain by any means, irrespective of the fear of God, justice, or honesty. Those who act truthfully may be perceived as foolish, making themselves vulnerable to exploitation.

In contrast, true wisdom, according to Scripture, begins with the fear of God and finds its perfection in it. Therefore, St. Paul's intention in these words is to condemn all the cunning, deceit, and subtleties that people rely on, boasting of their worldly wisdom. He emphasizes that all such practices are detestable and unacceptable before God. So, what kind of wisdom should be in us? It is enough if we know and understand the will of God. However, in our interactions with the world, God will bless our simplicity in such a way that we will not fall into the snares of the wicked. As we learn from our Lord Jesus, He desires His disciples to be as innocent as doves, even though doves are simple creatures easily startled.

Nevertheless, we should also be as wise as serpents. God will not allow us to be exploited and devoured by the wicked, even if we live modestly and honestly without relying on worldly schemes to defend ourselves. We only need to entrust ourselves to His protection, and He will grant us sufficient wisdom. However, the primary matter is not merely acquiring the skill to protect ourselves in this world and thwart the wrongs and injustices of others. We must begin on a higher plane, namely, governing our lives in a way that God approves, understanding the purpose for which He has placed

us in this world, and recognizing the ultimate goal of our creation and redemption – to inherit heaven. This is the path to true wisdom.

Although this doctrine may seem foreign to those deeply immersed in the world and utterly pagan, without knowledge of their divine calling, upon closer examination, we find it is not unjustly said that the fear of God is the only true wisdom. Consider the actions of those who seek to advance themselves through greed, ambition, and other worldly pursuits. It is evident that they are openly provoking God's anger and often reap the consequences they deserve. Their pursuit of wealth and status, which they hoped would bring them prosperity, recognition, and a lasting legacy, often ends in disaster. God may curse their efforts to such an extent that the higher they rise, the more devastating their fall, turning the wealth they accumulated into their downfall. Even if, for the sake of argument, their prosperity remained stable, we must acknowledge that our true happiness does not reside in this fleeting life, which is as transitory as a vanishing shadow.

Now, consider a person who was created in the image of God, redeemed through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and adopted to be a companion of angels. Yet, they willingly act like beasts, forgetting their own nature and the price paid for their salvation. If a person, who was created to inherit eternal life, contentedly indulges in a few days of pleasure here on Earth, forsaking the greater purpose, it would appear as if Satan has bewitched them, robbing them of understanding and reason, and rendering them like brute beasts. If a child abandons their father's home and the sustenance provided there, embarking on a reckless pursuit of a brief pleasure, whether in revelry or other debaucheries, and eventually becomes a beggar with nothing to eat, would not the world judge such a child as utterly blind, senseless, and worse than mad?

Now, let us compare the heavenly inheritance prepared for us and purchased at great cost to the world's wicked and cursed estate. Let's consider the fate of those who turn away from God and what awaits them when they distance themselves from the source of life, well-being, and joy. If we had a sound understanding, we would no longer find it strange that true wisdom for humanity lies in living in the fear of God, for that is where our well-being ultimately resides.

In essence, we must pay close attention to the lesson here, where St. Paul tells us that we will always be strangers to all forms of well-being as long as we do not seek to obey God. Additionally, we should not rely on our own understanding, nor should we become overly conceited, thinking, "This seems good to me, so it must be right." Let us guard against such arrogance and humbly offer ourselves to God's guidance, recognizing that we cannot go wrong by obeying Him, as our wisdom lies in seeking His will. Has the Lord hidden anything from us that would benefit us? No, for He has promised to show us the way of life, provided we are not stubborn but humbly submit ourselves to His Word.

This was previously declared in the law, which, though less clear than the gospel, still provided guidance. In the gospel, we have full and perfect insight. Therefore, let us not use the excuse of ignorance or claim we are not scholars, for God has condescended to teach all of us, from the greatest to the least, through His Word. We have no valid argument or resistance to offer, but rather, we should allow ourselves to be guided and governed by His will, which is clearly revealed to us, as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah: "I have not spoken in secret; from the beginning, from the time it came to be, I have been there. And now the Lord God has sent me and His Spirit."

Paul assumed here, as he did in his letter to the Colossians, that when the gospel is preached to us, we will find a perfect wisdom by which we can

walk a sure path. Therefore, let us be cautious not to deviate from this path in any way.

It is true that not all individuals will be as well-informed as required. But upon whose fault and negligence can this be attributed, except our own? Additionally, even if many simple souls do not attain the knowledge that could guide them perfectly towards serving God according to their desires, those who humbly submit themselves to God's Word, receive it, and show the reverence it deserves will have a reliable guiding star leading them to the heavenly inheritance, even if they progress slowly and are not as wise as we might wish them to be. Thus, Paul rebukes all those who are ungrateful and obstinate when the gospel is preached to them, even if they are uncertain about God's will. For this rebuke applies as much to their benefit.

It is true that God will not satisfy our curiosity by indulging in speculation or entertaining our desire for constantly changing discourse to tickle our ears. He will teach us what is essential for our salvation and for drawing us closer to Him. Therefore, this is the point to remember from St. Paul's statement. No one should be surprised that the world is in such disarray, with everyone going their own way and confusion reigning everywhere. This can be seen among the misguided Papists who martyr themselves excessively yet fail to come closer to God due to their misguided and fanatical zeal. They do not wait for God's will; instead, each follows their own desires, all while excusing themselves under the pretense of good intentions. This has led to the perversion of the world, disorder in all things, and the removal of all certainty. All this has happened because men have chosen to follow their own inclinations instead of God's clear and evident will. Therefore, given the great extent to which God's will has been despised and men have been audaciously self-assured, behaving as they please, it has caused profound confusion. The disorder is so extensive that contemplating it should make us shudder. Consequently, it is all the more necessary for us to exercise great self-restraint and submission to God and

His pure Word. We should not be amazed that our entire wisdom comes down to this: acknowledging God's sole will as the complete rule for everything. But we cannot conform to it unless we relinquish our unstable desires and abandon what seems good in our own eyes. We must allow God to reign over us, with such dominion that we do not need to add or subtract anything from His pure Word. St. Paul could simply have said that we should walk wisely, but he added the opposite as well to emphasize that it is not a mere joke when people say, "I am uneducated; I lack the means to pursue knowledge to do good with it," or "I am a simple person, a farmer, a labourer, or a craftsman." To eliminate these excuses, it must be understood that even if such individuals consider themselves wise, they should, nevertheless, rely on God's remedy by submitting to His Word. However, let us note, as mentioned before, that people should not elevate themselves with pride, assuming that they can self-govern as required. The beginning of our wisdom is to consider ourselves foolish in our own eyes, as previously discussed in 1 Corinthians.

On one hand, there is presumption, and very few can humble themselves enough not to be constantly held back and hindered by their own opinions. On the other hand, some are so reckless that despite hearing God's word daily, they remain obstinate. Therefore, it is all the more important for us to pay close attention to the warning given here, which is that to be well-taught in God's school, we must not rely on our own reasoning or think our own ideas are good. Instead, we must empty ourselves of our own reasoning and make way for God's word, accepting without dispute whatever He proclaims.

St. Paul then returns to specific and special exhortations, as he had done before. First, he advises the faithful to avoid becoming drunk with wine, which leads to disorder. In other words, we must exercise self-control in our eating and drinking and use the good things God has provided for our sustenance moderately, not indulging in excess like beasts. To understand

and benefit from this teaching, we must first consider the purpose for which the Lord has given us food and other provisions. The lawful use of wine, water, bread, and all other foods is to nourish us according to our physical needs, sustaining our lives so that we may not live idly. Instead, we should honour God, the source of our life and sustenance, and express gratitude for His fatherly generosity. Secondly, we should engage in productive work according to our station and abilities. Thus, the lawful use of food and drink should lead us to God, remind us of His blessings, and motivate us to glorify Him in all things.

Therefore, while eating and drinking may seem to hinder our ability to do good at first glance, we must also consider the compensations. The time spent eating and drinking may temporarily limit our ability to serve our neighbours, but it can also serve as a reminder to turn to God. We should reflect on His goodness, which He continually bestows upon us, even as we partake of His provisions. It would be unbecoming to accept His blessings without acknowledging Him. So, while eating and drinking may seem to interfere with our worldly activities, they can also encourage us to seek God with greater joy and fervour.

Now, let us consider the consequences of excess. When a person overindulges to the point of becoming unwieldy, they undergo a transformation that defies God, nature, and all order. As I've mentioned before, food and drink are meant to strengthen us so that we can fulfil God's commandments and the requirements of our vocations. When a person indulges to the extent that they can no longer find sustenance from what God has provided, they debase themselves into a state resembling a beast and move further away from the image of God. Furthermore, they forget God, displaying ingratitude as though they were mixing heaven and earth together. Isn't this monstrous and unkind, akin to mingling the sacred and the profane?

St. Paul makes it clear that the culmination of all excess is found in drunkenness and riotous behaviour. In such a state, individuals cast aside all shame, forget all propriety, and behave like wild animals. We witness one of the consequences of drunkenness as it leads people into debauchery and a profound slumber where they remain oblivious to mockery and insults. Whatever comes out of their mouths, whether right or wrong, goes unchecked. They may even blaspheme God and speak unjustly of others, displaying a complete lack of discretion. When individuals are carried away by such behaviour, they transform from beings created in God's image, designed to be rational creatures with a superior status, into creatures resembling swine and dogs. It's evident that drunkenness is a reprehensible vice.

St. Paul intended to convey that even without the fear of God to restrain us or the discretion to recognise the proper and lawful use of God's blessings, we should still abstain from such behaviour due to societal shame. A drunken individual is a spectacle of confusion who disrupts all order. In this state, God's image is defaced, reason is extinguished, and all things fall into disorder. Therefore, since we can observe the extremities associated with drunkenness, we must abhor it. While St. Paul briefly mentions the enormities associated with drunkenness, we should recognise that he encompasses all excesses in general. The lesson here is that we must be temperate and exercise self-control in our eating and drinking. Even when there is an abundance before us, we must be prudent in our consumption, remembering that bread, wine, and food are meant to sustain us, not to make us gluttonous. The heathen understood this, and it is common knowledge that we should eat and drink to live, not live to eat and drink. These provisions are meant to give us strength and vitality to fulfil our duties, not to make us sluggish. It is certain that bread, wine, and meats are not meant to debilitate us but rather to strengthen us. As the Psalm says, "wine gladdens the heart of man and bread strengthens it." Therefore, let us remember to eat and drink in moderation, using these blessings as intended

by God's ordinance and the guidance provided by His Word and imprinted on our hearts.

Even without hearing a single word of the law or the gospel, we can be sufficiently convicted by observing the order of nature, a fact acknowledged even by the heathen. It is essential to remember that people gradually descend from one evil to another, which does not diminish their fault. Many resort to this as a final excuse when caught in their wrongdoing, saying, "Oh, you can see I was overtaken with wine, and my wits were intoxicated after I had a drink." They hope that their drunkenness will serve as an excuse before God. However, this will not absolve them; in fact, they become even more guilty. If the laws were properly structured, drunken individuals would face double punishment when committing an offense due to their inebriation. Firstly, they are deserving of punishment for misusing the benefits that God provided for our use. These benefits were meant to draw us closer to God as a testimony to His fatherly goodness, but the drunkard perverts them. Secondly, because they are drawn into wrongdoing as though they had conspired with Satan from afar, they should be punished again for their attempts to excuse and cover up their actions.

While not everyone may consider this, those who abandon themselves to such behaviour and indulge in all manner of licentiousness through their drunkenness will have to answer to God for defiling the things sanctified for His service. These things were marked by God's goodness to draw us closer to Him. When everything is perverted in our eating and drinking, we must answer to God for abusing the benefits He bestowed upon us, contrary to His intentions, as if we intentionally provoked His anger. Drunkenness makes people so bestial that they forget themselves, God's image is obscured in them, and they resemble dogs, swine, and asses. Considering this, we should each, at the very least, exercise caution and control our desires when God provides us with food and drink. We should not succumb to excess. So, in essence, we must remember to be moderate in our eating

and drinking, to honour God not only by thanking Him for our lives but also by allowing our meals to continually remind us to turn to Him.

We must understand that God gives us a taste of His love now so that we may learn to forsake the world and willingly serve Him. He is not only our master with all authority over us but also our father, desiring to win us over with His goodness. Let us humbly acknowledge our faults before the majesty of our good God, sincerely repent of them, and always turn to Him seeking forgiveness in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He bear with us until He cleanses us from the corruptions of the world and our flesh, reforming us so that we seek only to attain perfect righteousness, as He has exhorted us. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father."

The Thirty Eighth Sermon, the Sixth on the Fifth Chapter

> "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." - Ephesians 5:18-21

This morning, we observed how God is displeased when people misuse the blessings He intended to be used for the purposes He has revealed in His Word. Therefore, excess and drunkenness should be avoided by the faithful because they recognize God's paternal care in sustaining them in this world, even though they have only tasted a portion of His goodness. They are

continually strengthened in the hope given to them through our Lord Jesus Christ. However, when people, instead of being drawn closer to God, become so bestial that they lose all reason and humanity, it disrupts the natural order and defies God's intentions for His blessings.

When drunkenness leads to a cascade of licentiousness, where people abandon all shame and their shamefulness becomes evident, the mischief is amplified. To maintain sobriety and orderly conduct, St. Paul advises us to refrain from being overcome and dominated by wine. Conversely, we should be filled with the Spirit. Those who indulge excessively in eating and drinking, without moderation, show that they lack an understanding of the kingdom of God and have not tasted the blessings of their heavenly life.

This remedy is apt for correcting the excesses and extravagance seen among those who are distant from God's grace and spiritual benefits. It is similar to a person who, when empty, gorges without restraint, overwhelming their stomach rather than taking nourishment and sustenance in a measured way. Inordinate desires are a sign of emptiness, indicating a lack of faith, the fear of God, and the joy found in the Holy Spirit. Such individuals may be ignorant of God's goodness and His favour towards them, as well as the grace revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ. If our faith, the fear of God, and the joy of the Holy Spirit filled us as they should, we would not engage in gluttony and excess, but would instead exercise moderation. Therefore, St. Paul's admonition to be filled with the Holy Spirit implies that those who disregard God and pursue a life of ease, delight, and pleasure are excessively indulgent beyond reason and measure.

This behaviour is a contemptuous attitude towards God's blessings and a disregard for the natural order, as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, if you are eager to understand who God is and what it means to grow in His Word, come and partake of it as someone who has not eaten for days. Do not fear consuming too much of this spiritual nourishment, for it will never harm

your soul. Therefore, let us eagerly partake of the gift of God's Spirit and His spiritual blessings, which nourish us in the hope of heavenly life. In doing so, we cannot go wrong. However, when it comes to satisfying our bodily appetites with food, indulging our desires often leads to sin and offence.

The lesson we must take from this is that those who cannot restrain themselves and are never satisfied with material pleasures demonstrate a lack of faith, the fear of God, and true religion. They are enslaved by their desires and cravings, making these their primary focus. Therefore, let us hunger for the spiritual food of our souls, for God offers it to us generously every day, desiring that we have all we need for our salvation. Let us sharpen our appetites for this nourishment so that we will not be enticed by material pleasures to the point of becoming insatiable gluttons. We should be content with what is suitable and sufficient for our needs.

Furthermore, we should not find it strange when Paul suggests that we should drink our fill of God's Spirit. We know that the prophet Isaiah likened God's Spirit to water, milk, and wine, inviting us to come to God and partake of what is beneficial for us. Isaiah encourages us to take delight in milk, wine, and water without cost. This metaphor signifies that we will have an abundance of spiritual blessings and be fully satisfied if we are willing to receive them freely. We must not be so overwhelmed by our own sinful desires that we cannot bring ourselves to seek the primary source, which is the deeper meaning of Paul's metaphor.

Since this doctrine is emphasized so strongly, we should consider it a valuable lesson. If one contemplates the spiritual emptiness present in many who profess Christianity, they might struggle to openly confess their faith. However, if they truly believed in their hearts, their mouths would readily express it. According to Scripture, "We believe with the heart unto righteousness, and confess with the mouth unto salvation." Nevertheless,

when we are eager to be spiritually nourished, we do not require counselling to seek the sustenance we need; we simply need to receive the nourishment that has been prepared for us. It is ironic that people often forget to draw near to God, even though He invites us to partake of what He offers, while we never forget to eat and drink for the sustenance of our bodies.

However, that is not enough for us. Even the more restrained among us still desire our regular meals, while others seek to consume food and drink four or five times a day. Yet, the wretched souls of these individuals remain hungry. Therefore, we should remember the admonition that Paul gives us here: to be temperate and use in moderation the blessings bestowed upon us. We must not neglect the soul but nourish it with spiritual gifts that lead us towards heavenly life and sustain our hope in it until the full possession and enjoyment of this life when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

Moreover, Paul instructs us to speak to one another in songs and hymns, and to do so with heartfelt sincerity, as mere verbal expression without corresponding inner commitment would profane God's Word. When he mentions talking together in hymns and praises, it is to counteract frivolous conversation to which we are often inclined. We all have "itching ears," eagerly listening to trivial and senseless chatter, readily transmitting it from one to another. Thus, our days pass by in trivial pursuits, or our conversations become licentious and corrupt, offending God. This inclination is prevalent, and St. Paul provides a remedy by advising us to speak to one another in songs and hymns.

This means that our mouths should be filled with praises to God, as we maintain the similitude previously mentioned. Just as drunkards not only degrade themselves but also influence others, riotous behaviour tends to spread as individuals encourage each other in excessive eating and drinking. St. Paul, on the other hand, emphasizes that when we partake of the

nourishment of God's Spirit, it should not be for our sole benefit but to provide refreshment and sustenance to those in need. Therefore, the true feast we should offer to one another is when someone who has gained knowledge of God's Word seeks to share a portion of it with their neighbours according to their own capacity.

Now, Paul introduces the idea of songs, psalms, and hymns, all of which are closely related. I need not delve into intricate distinctions among these expressions, for they all serve one purpose—to ensure that our joy is continually directed towards glorifying God. Indeed, if not for our own wickedness, we would derive ample pleasure from contemplating God's grace. It's astonishing how each person desires God to show His generosity and love, yearning to enjoy His blessings. Yet, paradoxically, we often neglect to remember and acknowledge them. We exert ourselves to the utmost, almost burying the memory of His benevolence underfoot. In our estimation, the time spent recognizing our numerous obligations to God seems wasted. However, this is the very task to which we should devote ourselves. It is the primary occupation of our lives.

If people were wise, they would find no mirth comparable to this, unmatched in its significance—acknowledging the multitude of ways in which God has displayed His goodness and love towards us. As I mentioned earlier, it strengthens our hope of attaining heavenly life. Undoubtedly, none of the blessings bestowed upon us by God carry true meaning unless we place our trust in Him, call upon His name, seek refuge in Him, and offer Him the praise that He justly deserves. Therefore, let us carefully heed what is stated here: when we engage in conversation with one another, we should always exalt God's name. While it is true that in this earthly life, we cannot achieve perfect holiness, and there is much interaction concerning various needs, relationships, and diverse matters, we must never neglect the paramount principle. That is, we should never delay in acknowledging the benefits for which we are indebted to God and thereby be stirred to extol

Him. In this manner, each of us will not only fulfill our duty privately but also set an example for others, encouraging them to do likewise.

So, the crux of the matter is that we should remember the benefits bestowed upon us by God, and the remembrance of these blessings should kindle our love and devotion to serve Him wholeheartedly. We must seek Him and realise that cleaving to Him is our ultimate happiness. This is the core message that Paul imparts to us in this context.

On another note, St. Paul emphasises that when we sing to God, it should be done with a genuine spirit, so that we do not mimic hypocrites who merely use their tongues to magnify God while harbouring cold hearts within. Therefore, he associates singing to God and conversing with our neighbours, both directed towards the same goal: the commendation of God's blessings and the stirring of our hearts to love and serve Him, dedicating ourselves entirely to Him, seeking Him diligently, and acknowledging that cleaving to Him is our ultimate fulfilment. This serves as the foundation of the message conveyed by Paul in this passage.

First and foremost, it must be understood that singing unto God cannot be done without engaging the heart. We are aware that God accepts nothing that contradicts His own nature. Therefore, if we desire to sing in a manner acceptable to Him and that He may receive our songs, we must do so with heartfelt devotion. Counterfeiting in our actions, where we put on a grand show before others but lack sincerity in our hearts, is a profanation of God's name. For such actions, done merely for the sake of appearances, defile His name. This is why the prophet Isaiah declared that those who approached God with only their lips while their hearts were far from Him were in error. Hence, we must take note that to sing praises to God, the heart must lead and resonate deeply, creating a fervent inner melody. In this way, we align ourselves with the angels in heaven. Mere lip service, without the heart's sincere engagement, amounts to mere mockery. Although others may

applaud such actions, God does not accept this shallow representation of Him, seeing it as a mere facade of folly and triviality.

Therefore, when we sing God's praises with genuine zeal, laying open our hearts before Him as our witness and judge, we must also fulfil our duty towards our neighbours. Our example should encourage and inspire every individual. Unfortunately, we witness little regard for God in our time. The way many people perform His praises is often nothing more than raucous noise and clamour. This represents one of the gravest abuses in religious practice, where people mistakenly believe that God should be pleased when they loudly recite prayers or engage in vocal demonstrations. In truth, this practice profanes and distorts the Holy Scriptures. Regrettably, there is no shortage of individuals who engage in such practices without truly understanding their significance. For them, it suffices that their voices have been raised. Even among us, those who claim to exalt God's praises often seek to glorify themselves instead, neglecting the essence of genuine worship while merely going through the motions of religious observance.

Let's reflect on how limited and lukewarm our practice of conversing with one another in songs, hymns, and praises of God has become among us. It seems that hardly a word is drawn from us that could edify. Lewd talk seems impossible to banish, and our songs often contain impurity and frivolity. Such matters cannot be easily erased from people's minds. However, regardless of the situation, people will have to answer to God for it, according to the judgment pronounced by St. Paul under the authority of God and the power of His Holy Spirit.

By the way, it's worth noting that the combination of three words here, all conveying a similar meaning, is not arbitrary. It serves to emphasize that we have more than enough material to engage one another if we acknowledge the numerous blessings bestowed upon us by God. If variety is what pleases people, let us contemplate the many ways God has lavished His goodness

upon us. For each of these blessings, there is a song. Even if we had a hundred melodies to delight us in all our endeavours, it would pale in comparison to the immeasurable diversity of blessings we receive from God's hand. Thus, St. Paul corrects our ingratitude by including these diverse words to underscore that we would have to be exceedingly dull not to be moved by the multitude of ways in which the Lord blesses us. Since we cannot turn our minds to anything without His blessings coming into view, it is only fitting that we respond accordingly.

This is why he adds "always giving thanks," signifying that if we were truly wise, the continuous expression of praise for God's blessings should never tire us or become burdensome. Considering that God ceaselessly bestows His goodness upon us, it is only right that our response corresponds to His generosity. Not a single day passes without us receiving at least a hundred good things from the hand of God. Therefore, we must understand that when we have thanked Him two or three times for the multitude of blessings we receive throughout our lives, we should not consider ourselves done. As the Lord continues to refresh our memory of His goodness, it is fitting that we are stirred by it. Thus, it is our duty to constantly remind ourselves that we are utterly dependent on God for all good things, and that it is impossible for us to fulfill even a hundredth part of our duty. We echo David's words when he says, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:12-13). In Psalm 40, he explicitly states that the wonders of God's providence in governing us are so numerous that they exceed the number of hairs on our heads, leaving us in awe.

Therefore, since we cannot fully comprehend the infinite goodness of God, even though we strive to dedicate all our faculties to it, let us at least aim towards it. Just as God tirelessly lavishes His blessings upon us, flowing continually like a fountain, providing us with abundant streams to satisfy

our needs, let us also continually, without ceasing, acknowledge how much we are bound and indebted to such a good and kind-hearted Father.

Furthermore, St. Paul teaches us that we must thank God for all things, reminding us that people are often too sluggish to consider how God blesses them in countless ways. He implies that, my friends, given how much we owe God for both our bodies and souls, can we ever truly comprehend it? No, it is not possible, for our understanding is limited. Even when we have done our best to grasp the extent of God's blessings, we still lack the capacity to express adequately how much we are indebted to Him. So, why is it that we are so lukewarm, content with speaking just a single word of thanks, thinking it sufficient, and then postponing further gratitude for as long as possible, even as God continues to provide us with every reason to bless His holy name?

Now, when we are resolved to fulfil our duty in offering God the primary sacrifice He desires, which is the praise of His name, as I mentioned earlier, let us reflect on our true nature and condition. We are subject to numerous needs, and God must provide for us in countless ways. When we contemplate our wretchedness, both in body and soul, and consider how God cares for us, ensuring that we never lack essential provisions, even in times of hardship, we should find ample reason to continue praising His holy name incessantly. St. Paul urges us not only to thank God for the blessings we clearly perceive but also, even when He afflicts us or deals with us in ways we would not choose, to continue praising Him. He draws from the example of Job, who not only praised God when he had his children at his table, enjoying merriment and feasting, but also when he was deprived of his offspring, left desolate in his home, and when his possessions were taken away, partly by robbers and partly by a lightning strike from heaven. Even in the midst of misery, to the point where it seemed that he would be consumed by affliction, Job did not cease to proclaim, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the

name of the Lord." Therefore, St. Paul reminds us that, even in times of sorrow and when we receive chastisements that are painful and severe, we should not complain against God but rather persist in praising His name, as he encouraged us in another place, stating that in our prayers, we should always offer praise to Him.

Even though our prayers often include our desires, and in our petitions, we express our wants, pains, and anxieties, we must always blend thanksgiving with our prayers. Many people pray to God but fail to provoke His wrath because they intermingle their grievances, harbouring resentment and gnashing their teeth at Him. They may indeed say, "My God, help me," but if they could pluck God from heaven, they would do it wholeheartedly, just so He would have no more power over them. It is evident that some, while thinking they are praying to God, do not prevent God's anger because their requests are filled with pride, spitefulness, and defiance. Therefore, St. Paul instructs the Philippians that all our petitions and requests must be accompanied by thanksgiving, signifying our patient acceptance of God's providence.

In this passage, he emphasises that we should thank God for all things, not only during times of prosperity when everything aligns with our desires and we live in delight and pleasure. While God may discipline us, we should acknowledge that He does so for our salvation and welfare. Do we not have reason to bless God even in the midst of adversity? Certainly, we do. First, whatever befalls us, God is patient with us. If He were to strike us even once with His finger, we would be overwhelmed. Our endurance signifies His forbearance, and for this, we should thank Him.

Moreover, when He afflicts us, He does so for our benefit, to draw us nearer to Him continually and to lead us toward the kingdom of heaven. He seeks to elevate us, knowing that we are too attached to the world. Seeing all this, do we not have cause to praise our God, even in moments filled with grief,

care, fear, and doubt? Indeed, we do. However, our ingratitude can hinder us. We must recognise the point St. Paul makes here, that we should praise God endlessly. Even if our mouths are sometimes silenced by grief and it seems we cannot freely express our thanks, it is a sign that God has never been so harsh or severe toward us that He does not alleviate the bitterness of our afflictions, all with the aim of drawing us closer to Him, so that we may thank and glorify Him.

Since we receive all grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, who turns our corrections into benefits, even when they are deserved punishments for our sins, it is stated that we should offer thanks to our God and Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Firstly, he sets before us God the Father, and subsequently demonstrates how God is our Father in all respects, mediated through the means by which we are reconciled to Him. He has removed all our sins in such a way that whatever difficulties we endure in this world are all conducive to our salvation, as is mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans. Here, we must first note that without faith, we cannot truly praise God. Regardless of the praises we utter with our mouths, they amount to nothing but pretence and hypocrisy unless we are fully convinced that God is our Father.

It is essential to understand what is meant by faith. It is not as the papacy suggests, namely, to believe that there is a God in heaven while remaining ignorant of His will. Instead, St. Paul tells us that we must firmly believe that God accepts us as His children; otherwise, we will never be able to praise Him with a genuine and sincere heart. But how can this be achieved? It is only through being firmly grounded in the concept of free adoption, wherein God graciously receives us for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not due to our merits or any virtue of ours that God is our Father and we are His children. Quite the contrary, we are referred to as the "children of

wrath," and God must rightfully disown us because we are filled with sin and wickedness.

Therefore, until we come to our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be certain of neither God's favour nor His acceptance of our service. Thus, St. Paul, after stating that we must give thanks to God in and for all things because He is our Father, rightly adds that this is accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that all those who fear God's majesty but cannot trust Him or rely on the promises of His favour, and cannot address Him as their Father, can never genuinely praise Him. While they may perform some ceremonies, it will all be superficial. Therefore, for anyone who prays to God and offers Him praise and thanks, faith must take precedence.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it is impossible for us to have a firm faith and consider God as our Father until we understand that we are made one with our Lord Jesus Christ. We become participants in the benefits He has acquired for us because we are members of His body. His death and passion constitute our righteousness, His holiness purifies us from our own defilements, and the sacrifice He offered redeems us from the damnation we were trapped in. Ultimately, it liberates us from the bondage of sin and secures our righteousness.

Since we possess all these things in our Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to express our gratitude to God through Him. This is why the papists cannot formulate a single request that God approves. In truth, their efforts are futile. While they may recite hymns and songs, they do not genuinely praise God with their actions. Even though they conclude everything with the phrase "by our Lord Jesus Christ," they lack the belief that God is merciful to them or that they are deserving of His mercy. They undermine our Lord Jesus Christ by creating patrons and advocates of their own making, making it nearly impossible to distinguish Him from others. They confine Him to a

corner or push Him behind the scenes. Meanwhile, they pursue the merits and intercessions of saints, which is the root of their presumptuousness. They believe they can atone for their sins and redeem themselves.

As for us, when we are instructed to thank God in all things, it is so that we should continually humble ourselves. Thus, I previously mentioned that faith opens the way for us to pray to God and give thanks for the benefits we have received from Him. In this passage, St. Paul tells us that we must be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, or alternatively, in the fear of God, as both interpretations are appropriate for the text. By saying that we must be subject to one another, he reveals that just as God desires His children to engage in His praises, He also expects them to be useful to one another. Since we cannot benefit or harm God in any way, the least we can do is praise His name. It is an immeasurable kindness on His part that He credits us with all we owe Him. We find ourselves deeply indebted to Him, and by humbly acknowledging this, we fulfil His requirement. While He seeks no more from us, He still wants us to serve one another and not pursue our own gain to the extent that we forget our interconnectedness in a mutual bond of charity. This is the concept that he intends to convey in this text.

At first glance, one might find it strange that he states, "We ought to be subject to one another," for it may seem inappropriate for a father to be subjected to his children, a husband to his wife, or a magistrate to the people he governs. Even equals in status should not be subject to one another.

If we carefully consider all aspects, we will find that St. Paul has not without reason placed all Christians under this subjection. Even magistrates, who hold authority and glory above other men, are bound to those they govern. They are not ordained rulers for their own sake, but for the sake of the commonwealth. When God ordained principalities, kingdoms, and

states, it was not to establish some with preeminence over others, but to provide a system where there is a bridle to hold us in obedience under laws, and some power and authority over us. We have magistrates to ensure such order, and we cannot deny this remedy. Therefore, since God has established magistrates in such a manner, it is clear that they are subject to those they should serve by governing over them.

The same applies to fathers. While fathers should be honoured by their children, it comes at a significant cost if they do not govern their households wisely. This governance also involves a degree of subjection. Similarly, in the relationship between husband and wife, the husband's bearing with the frailty of his wife and showing discretion in treating her as a companion, sharing her burdens in sickness and health, is a form of subjection. Indeed, subjection is present in all these cases. Therefore, it is rightly said here that all those who wish to prove themselves faithful must be subject to one another, each according to their state and degree.

Those who hold higher positions should recognise that God has elevated them to willingly accept the pains and responsibilities that come with their office. Inferiors should understand that they must humble themselves and bear the yoke placed upon their necks. Even equals and peers must bear with one another, for living together requires mutual forbearance. Surely, all forbearing implies a form of submission. We cannot coexist without it. This is why it is said elsewhere that we owe nothing to one another except the obligation of love.

In this context, we see the foolishness of anyone saying, "I owe you nothing." While people may indeed rebuke each other, stating that they owe no duty, they should go further. This is why St. Paul mentions the fear of our Lord Jesus Christ or of God. It is as if to say that if we were left unguarded and everyone sought their own interests, we might hold others in contempt, thinking we have no need for them. Yet, it is sheer folly to push

away our neighbours in such a manner, under the pretext that they can neither assist nor harm us.

It is evident that we are too blind in our attitudes. Suppose we were to say, "I owe you nothing, and I do not care for you." Even so, we must come to God, who is our head. When He placed us in this world, He bound us together and intended us to serve one another in charity. We know that charity is the perfect bond of unity and it brings abundance with it. So, even if I owe nothing to a person in their own right, I owe something to them in respect of God. This thought should bring us back to humility.

Consider that you were not created and placed in this world without the condition that you should serve your neighbour. If you shun this responsibility and distance yourself from others, it is as if you are cutting the sinews of the body, causing it to fall apart. It's as if you want our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our head, to have no more to do with us. Those who choose to act like wild beasts and cannot find it in their hearts to show kindness to their neighbours should live in the wild woods, for they are not fit to live among humanity. God has joined us together, setting us apart from brute beasts, and bound us to one another. If we reject this yoke, it plainly indicates that we do not consider ourselves indebted to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reluctant to be governed by His hand or to submit to the order He has established, which should be kept without disruption.

Therefore, since each of us is so attached to ourselves that we cannot submit to one another, let us remember what St. Paul has outlined for us here. This principle will help us appreciate the doctrine that if we fear God and are willing to submit ourselves quietly to His will, we should not find it grievous or strange to serve those whom we are bound to serve. By doing so, we maintain our respective roles and remain united under our head, Jesus Christ, as we strive for the heavenly glory He has purchased for us.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults. Let us pray that this awareness of our faults will lead us to genuine repentance and daily progress. Let us examine our miseries in a way that moves us to call upon God for His remedy, seeking His cleansing and protection until we attain the perfection of righteousness we ought to pursue, though we are far from it. In the meantime, may God bear with us and allow us the privilege of calling upon Him as His children, and may He grant us the grace to give thanks to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through His Holy Spirit, He has sealed our adoption in our hearts, firmly uniting us to Him. May we continue in faith and hope, persistently acknowledging the manifold benefits He continually bestows upon us. Let us learn to receive these benefits from Him in faith and gratitude.

May it please Him to grant this peace not only to us but also to all the people and nations of the earth, etc.

The Thirty Ninth Sermon, the Seventh on the Fifth Chapter

> "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." - Ephesians 5:22-26

We have observed how each of us is subject to our neighbours, and how we cannot live together without performing some duty of subjection. We tend to disapprove of others because each of us desires to be above our fellows, and we hold our pride in such high regard that it is difficult for us to humble ourselves. We have also seen that if we fear God, we should not find it strange to submit to our neighbours because God created us with this condition. In general, charity binds us so closely that we should neither disdain nor favour one person over another, nor consider a third person unworthy of service. For, in relation to God, we must either bow our necks or our stubbornness will lead to our downfall.

Now, let us delve deeper and understand that there are certain degrees among men. While the general rule stands that each of us must strive to fulfil our duty, there is also a greater subjection, particularly of the son to the father, the wife to her husband, and subordinates to their superiors, more so than is the case among all men in general. I have mentioned before that there is a brotherhood even among strangers on Earth because they share a common nature, and each must acknowledge their indebtedness to others. However, when God has joined people together in a closer and holier bond, they must pay more attention to themselves. When a wife is united to her husband, she is given to him as a help and becomes a part of his body. In this special subjection, even though the husband holds superior authority, he is also bound to his wife as she is his companion, both in life and death. The same principle applies to children and fathers, as well as subjects and their princes or superiors, and servants and their masters, each according to their role and station.

The main point we need to discuss now is that we must live in charity with one another, generally endeavouring to fulfil the duties that God has assigned to us to the best of our abilities. We should not despise the order established by God but rather be all the more motivated to do our duty, knowing that by rejecting this condition, we would be in conflict with God.

Now, let's turn to the topic of marriage, which is not a human invention but ordained by God. It is solemnized in His name, and the Scriptures describe it as a holy and divine covenant. Therefore, if a wife is obstinate and unwilling to bear the yoke, she wrongs not only her husband but also God Himself. Why? Because it is God's will that this bond should be inviolable, and yet a mortal creature wishes to break it and tear it asunder.

We see, then, that when a wife rebels against her husband, she rebels against God Himself. On the other hand, when a man insists on ruling as he pleases, despises his wife, or treats her cruelly and harshly, he openly defies and disobeys God. He should remember why he was created, the purpose of marriage, and the laws God has established. Therefore, St. Paul calls on us to consider God in all circumstances, especially when interacting with others. If we focus on the faults and excuses of those we associate with, we will always find reasons to exempt ourselves from following God's laws.

Husbands may argue that they have a stubborn or proud wife with a will of her own, or a talkative one. Some wives might have husbands who are temperamental, rowdy, or who frequent taverns and alehouses or engage in gambling and frivolous behaviour. Others might have husbands who are unfaithful, gluttonous, or drunkards. Every person could find excuses to avoid fulfilling their marital duties. However, when we come before God, we cannot justify ourselves by making excuses. Even if husbands and wives misbehave, God does not permit their marriage to be dissolved except in cases of divorce as explained by our Lord Jesus. The vices of one spouse should not hinder the submission and obedience of the other, and if a wife does not fulfill her duties as she should, the husband cannot cast her off. God's ordinances must always remain steadfast, and the bond created by His word must be inviolable.

It is evident that this lesson is often disregarded in the world. The root of the problem lies in the fact that few in marriage have their eyes on God.

While they may seek blessings and prosperity from God, they do not entrust themselves to His guidance or sincerely call upon Him. Some seek wealth and gain, others seek pleasure and indulgence, but few place God at the centre of their marriage. It is no wonder that when the beginning is so flawed, the end becomes disordered. When God is lightly esteemed and despised in marriage, He must take revenge. Therefore, let us heed St. Paul's lesson, recognizing that marriage was ordained by God, and those entering into it must wholly dedicate themselves to Him, making Him their refuge. This binding commitment between husband and wife is established by God, and both parties must fulfil their respective duties.

Regarding wives owing subjection to their husbands, we must note that this subjection is twofold. Even before Eve's creation and the fall of Adam and Eve, man was the head of woman. St. Paul uses the same reasoning to argue against the idea of wives having equal status with their husbands. He explains that man was not created from a woman, but woman from man. She is a part of his body. God could have created Eve from the earth just as He created Adam, but He chose to unite man and woman with such a condition that men would love their wives, knowing that they are of the same substance and flesh. Likewise, women, knowing that they have no other origin than man, should bear their subjection patiently and willingly. If a hand, which is a part of the body, were to refuse its place and insist on being on top of the head, what chaos would result?

If we reflect on the creation of man and woman, husbands should be encouraged to love and cherish their wives as they do themselves. Wives, being formed from the substance of man, should submit themselves willingly to their husbands as their head. However, there is another aspect to the wife's subjection. We know that she was deceived. Therefore, women must remember that in their submission to their husbands, they bear the mark of Eve's sin. They should consider that if marriage had remained pure and uncorrupted, it would have brought joy to both husbands and wives. All

things would have been blessed by God, and every aspect of life would have been filled with happiness and prosperity. Yet, because of the fall of Adam, there are now signs of God's curse in everything, including marriage.

Women should feel the consequences of their sins, and men experience them as well. If Adam and Eve had remained in the righteousness God had given them, life on Earth would have been like paradise, and marriage would have been so beautiful that husbands and wives would have lived in harmony, much like the angels in heaven who live in peace and brotherly love. Therefore, when a man has a troublesome and cursed wife whom he cannot control, he should reflect on the fruit of original sin and the corruption within himself. On her part, the wife should accept the consequences of her disobedience to God, recognizing that she did not submit to His will.

Regarding the word "subjection" mentioned here, St. Paul is not suggesting that men should be equated with God or our Lord Jesus Christ, for that would be a grave oversight. Instead, he emphasizes that the fear and reverence a woman should have for God and her subjection to her husband are inseparable. Just as he earlier encouraged mutual submission with the phrase "in the fear of God," he now illustrates that husbands and wives must submit to each other in obedience to God's divine order. Pretending to honour and obey God while rejecting and despising one's neighbour is sheer hypocrisy. Similarly, a wife who feigns great devotion but engages in strife and quarrels with her husband at home displays a lack of the fear of God.

It's essential to note that St. Paul uses this analogy not to equate mortal husbands with Jesus Christ but to emphasise that since our Lord Jesus has authority over marriage, everyone must look to Him. Every individual should submit willingly, knowing that refusing one's role would be to disregard Him, as He desires marriage to be maintained through mutual

duty. This means that husbands should love their wives, and wives should submit to their husbands – the core of the matter to remember in this context.

Now, let wives carefully consider their duties and understand that when they contend with their husbands, it is as if they were rejecting God. God created them with the condition that they should be subject to their husbands. Some may become so proud and haughty as to ask, "Should my husband have authority over me?" Yet, by doing so, they demonstrate that they are unwilling to recognise God's authority over them and are ready to trample God's law underfoot. Therefore, women must inevitably humble themselves and understand that the ruin and confusion of all humanity came about through them. Through their disobedience, we all fell into disgrace and were banished from the kingdom of heaven.

When women say, "I understand that all this came about because of the sin of womankind," as St. Paul explains in another place, they must humble themselves and patiently bear the subjection that God has placed upon them. This subjection is a reminder to remain humble and gentle. However, if they rise against their husbands and cannot submit to their authority, they are essentially confirming the sin of Adam and Eve and rejecting God's healing of that wound. When they make war against the grace of God in this manner, the result can only be utter confusion. Even if headstrong wives do not consider this, God takes note, and they will eventually have to answer for their actions to their own shame. Therefore, let us heed this warning so that every person may glorify God in their own household.

Husbands, on the other hand, must also consider their duties. While they are not subject to their wives in the strictest sense, because their wives have no authority over them, they are elevated to the honour of superiority with certain conditions. They should not be cruel to their wives or act as if everything is granted and permissible because they are in charge. Instead,

their authority should be a partnership rather than a dictatorship. Husbands are not the heads of their wives to oppress them or keep an account of their actions. Instead, they should recognise that their authority binds them all the more to their wives. As the head, they must use discretion and wisdom to guide their wives and households. The way to achieve this is through gentleness, kindness, and patience, considering the weaknesses in their wives.

Husbands must require obedience from their wives while fulfilling their own duties. They should realise that God will not tolerate them if they give their wives reasons to rebel. If husbands act wisely and uprightly, wives will submit willingly, and God will work in their hearts to bring peace to the household. However, the key is to call upon God, for human efforts alone will often prove futile. Husbands should pray for the grace and power to win their wives' agreement and humility. It is unfortunate that many husbands deal harshly with their wives, thinking that by force they can win them over, often causing physical harm. Such actions are inhumane and torturous and go against the purpose of the authority given by God.

On the other hand, many women do not reflect on God's teachings before marriage. It is rare to find a woman who prays fervently to God when considering marriage. Most hear that the husband must be the head, and they accept it as the way of the world. However, they often display stubbornness and pride, wishing to remove God from His seat. They believe that the teachings we read are merely derived from Scripture, and they resist being subject to them.

Furthermore, they often form alliances among themselves, declaring, "I assure you, I will hold my ground. If my husband tries to confront me, he will soon realize that I am not bothered, and I will keep him at bay until he sees that he is wasting his efforts and gives up." This is often how women approach their role in managing the household. So, it is challenging to find

even one among a hundred who has a different mindset or does not fully intend to act in this manner.

On the husband's side, they may think, "Leave her to me; I will handle her just fine." It is as if they believe they know better than God, who has provided guidance on how to handle this situation. Winning a wife is not about approaching her with stubbornness, playing the role of a tyrant, or using intimidation. None of these methods will work. Yet men often think so highly of themselves that they believe a stern look will suffice. They engage in debates and arguments, neglecting God as if He had nothing to teach them. They fail to recognize that they should turn to Him, praying for His guidance to soften their wives' hearts and lead them to obedience and gentleness.

Therefore, we should remember the valuable lessons provided to us here. For this reason, Paul applies the analogy of our Lord Jesus Christ to both sides of the marriage. He instructs women that it is for their own benefit to be submissive to their husbands. Why? Let us consider the spiritual state of the Church. How miserable would our condition be if we were separated from our Lord Jesus Christ? We would lose all hope of life and all of God's blessings. Even if we enjoyed many worldly gifts, they would all become a source of displeasure if we were not members of our Lord Jesus Christ. In short, without the Son of God, everything would be scattered and chaotic in this world.

Therefore, there must be a similar connection in marriage. Women must understand that since matrimony is an image of the spiritual union between us and the Son of God, it is to their advantage to be under their husbands and obedient to them. This arrangement will benefit them much more than if they were free to govern themselves without restraint. Although they may not fully grasp this concept, they should consider who is right in the end – God or women. If they insist that it is better for them to have no subjection

to their husbands, they are arguing against God's ordained plan, which is designed for their welfare. They need to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is set as the savior of the body so that wives may realize that God has provided for their needs more effectively than they could ever imagine, even after thorough contemplation and reasoning.

It is evident that women do not fully understand what is for their own benefit, as God Himself has placed them in subjection to their husbands, solely for their own welfare. On the other hand, Paul also addresses the husbands, so they do not misuse the authority given to them or disrupt the harmony that should prevail in marriage. He reminds them of the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, asking how He loved His church. First and foremost, Christ gave Himself for it and did not spare Himself when He took on human flesh. Although He had all power and dominion, requiring all to bow before Him, even the Apostle Paul said that all, both great and small, must acknowledge Him. However, Christ did not reign in a way that exercised tyranny over us. On the contrary, He humbled Himself. Despite His sovereign dominion over the angels of heaven, He willingly subjected Himself to the law and became a servant, even emptying Himself for our sake.

When we contemplate the immense love that God has shown us in our Lord Jesus Christ, who has assumed the role of a husband and allowed us to be as a wife under Him, it should inspire both husbands and wives. Unless they are filled with brutish or devilish pride, both husbands and wives should be moved. Considering that our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself out of love for us, even though we are unworthy, and that He has indicated that it is best for wives to be subjected to their husbands and for husbands to bear with their wives, this should suffice to motivate them. The root of the problem lies in the fact that many are too beastly and proud, or devoid of reason. If even a single drop of this truth were present in their hearts, it should prompt them to mend their ways and fulfill their duties on both

sides. If this were genuinely considered, there would be much more tranquility in households, and husbands and wives would not behave like cats and dogs, constantly sniping at each other.

The real issue is the absence of the fear of God among them. Shouldn't men remember the grace bestowed upon us by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ both morning and evening? When they truly contemplate this grace, married men should also reflect on how they should conduct themselves towards their wives, just as Jesus Christ has behaved towards them. Is this not sufficient to soften even the hardest of hearts, which may be as unyielding as stone or steel? Similarly, if women recalled the redemption and salvation offered to them, their hearts would surely be softened, and they would not persist in stubbornness. They would willingly accept the yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, thus sharing in the benefits He obtained through His death and passion.

Therefore, we see that when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is preached, it often falls on deaf ears, and most people gain nothing from it, as they continue in their obstinate ways. It is important to note that even if husbands are difficult and wives seem incorrigible, it does not absolve either party from fulfilling their duties.

For example, consider a husband who has a gentle and tractable wife, as I mentioned earlier. He, on his part, can bear with her, and there can be a wonderful harmony and joy between them. But perhaps another man may say that he has a wife who is a drunkard or a glutton, while someone else claims that his wife is extravagant and overly proud, spending excessively on her appearance. Others might complain that their wives are lazy housewives who do nothing. These things may seem justifiable to some, and as I mentioned earlier, if it were only about the parties themselves, they might have a defence ready to cast off all responsibility. However, in such

cases, husbands should reflect upon their own behaviour, not only in worldly matters but also towards God.

When a husband examines himself thoroughly and acknowledges his own faults, he will remain patient and bear with his wife's shortcomings until God grants her the grace to mend her ways. Meanwhile, regardless of how the world goes, he should continue to be a good husband by trying to win her over with kindness. He is not in a position of superiority for his own benefit, but for the welfare of his partner. Since it is an inviolable law, the same reasoning should persuade women as well. If a woman has a husband who is a drunkard, frequents taverns and drinking establishments, is addicted to gambling, is wasteful, indulges in riotous behaviour, or is indifferent towards her, so that despite her best efforts to obey and please him, she receives no peace or goodwill in return, she should consider it as God's scourge upon her. She should reflect upon how she has failed to serve and honour God and how she has not met the challenges He has presented to her. Then she should conclude that regardless of her own faults, she cannot break the bond that God has ordained for mortal creatures. To do so would be to strive against God, and she must submit herself to her husband, who is her head. Even if he is intimidating, she must remember that she is submitting to God, who has her husband's heart in His hand and can change it as He pleases. She must not provoke her husband to win her over with force, as it would displease both God and her husband.

Therefore, the wife's faults cannot release the husband from the unbroken law ordained by God, which is to live together in harmony. Similarly, the vices of the husband shall not excuse the wife from yielding subjection and obedience in all things for the sake of God, as is stated here. St. Paul, to strengthen this exhortation, further explains how our Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the body. He did this by giving Himself for the church to sanctify it and make it holy. Although the full doctrine here cannot be elaborated upon now, we must understand that it amplifies what was briefly

mentioned earlier. Both the husband and wife can control their wicked desires, and when tempted to separate or quarrel, the means to subdue all evil passions is to focus on the pledge of the spiritual union between our Lord Jesus Christ and us, which will be discussed further later. First and foremost, it is stated that we must consider that our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, marking that word "for" as significant. In the beginning of our redemption, it shows that our Lord Jesus Christ, to a certain extent, disregarded Himself and did not consider His own person when He worked towards our salvation. He was given to us by God, who, as stated in the third chapter of St. John, loved the world so much that He did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for our sake.

Nevertheless, our Lord Jesus Christ willingly gave Himself up. "No man taketh my life from me," Sophie, "but I lay it down, for it was requisite that the sacrifice which He offered for the remission of our sins should be willing." You see then, Jesus Christ gave Himself unto death. If we inquire about the cause, surely it was primarily to fulfill the will and eternal decree of God, His Father. However, in doing so, He showed how dear we were to Him and how precious our souls are in His sight, as He willingly offered Himself for us in that manner.

Therefore, on one hand, husbands must consider what they owe to their wives, namely, that they should be as dear to them as their own lives, at the very least. Even if they do so, they still cannot reach the perfection of our Lord Jesus Christ but follow Him at a great distance. On the other hand, wives must also bear in mind that it is God's will that in marriage, there should be a representation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They would greatly err if they do not submit themselves when God calls them to do so. Along the way, let us understand that by saying Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, we are magnifying God's goodness towards us and the love that Jesus Christ had for us. We should acknowledge that it is all due to the free mercy of God His Father and that our Lord Jesus Christ, out of His

great compassion, came to our aid. Reflecting on these things, we will be moved to fulfill our duties without reluctance. We will also be inspired to glorify our God and acknowledge, both with our words and our entire lives, how much we owe Him.

Seeing that God has poured out the treasures of His mercy upon us, not only delivering us from the condemnation we were under and rescuing us from death but also giving us His beloved Son as a pledge of His love, we should be grateful. Jesus Christ assumed the role of our mediator and ransom, presenting us blameless before God, so that the devil can no longer accuse us. Although he remains our adversary, we are subject to him until we are set free from this bondage through the Redeemer. Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults, and pray for the wisdom to recognize them, ask for His forgiveness, and continually reform ourselves. May our lives be increasingly shaped by His law in accordance with the measure of grace we have received from Him. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Fortieth Sermon, the Seventh on the Fifth Chapter

> "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" - Ephesians 5:25-26

This morning, we have considered the vast scope for glorifying the infinite goodness of our God when we contemplate the means by which He has rescued us from death and adopted us as His children, despite our curse in

Adam. Now, St. Paul elucidates how we partake in the grace secured for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, primarily through cleansing us from our blemishes, in order to dedicate us to His service in all holiness. He mentions the washing of water because baptism serves as a visible symbol and reminder for us, given our simplicity and weakness, helping us better grasp the surpassing grace of God, which exceeds human comprehension.

First and foremost, we encounter the word "sanctify," signifying our separation from the world and our union with the Son of God. This doctrine is one we can never fully grasp. As I mentioned earlier, we must continually compare our wretched state when God found us with the state to which He has called us. From our very birth, we were steeped in wretchedness, cursed and detestable in the eyes of God. Thus, He draws us out from the depths of death, takes us unto Himself, and sanctifies us. This should astonish and overwhelm us each time we contemplate what we were and what we should still be if not for God's boundless mercy.

Now, let's turn our attention to the means I mentioned. St. Paul states that our Lord Jesus Christ has washed us. Without a doubt, this refers to His death and passion. How could we possibly stand before God, unblemished, except that our sins are obliterated through the sacrifice that reconciles us with God? Until we are washed and purified by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we stand before God more tainted than any leper, filled with filth and corruption. In short, everything we bring before Him would only provoke His wrath. Therefore, we must embrace the sacrifice through which our Lord Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God the Father, and His blood must cleanse our souls, removing our impurities and stains.

Nonetheless, St. Paul mentions baptism here for a reason. Not that we are cleansed by baptism itself, nor was he attempting to divert our attention from the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, considering our limitations and lack of spiritual understanding, St. Paul accommodated

our simplicity and weakness by presenting our washing through a visible sign. This aids us in grasping the meaning more effectively.

Let's consider why baptism was instituted and its purpose. When our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to be baptized in His name, did He intend to shift our faith away from His crucifixion and resurrection? Did He mean for baptism to replace His death and passion in achieving our salvation? Absolutely not. Baptism is merely a complement to the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is intended to direct us to Him. Without this connection, baptism would be an empty ceremony. Similar to the Lord's Supper, when we partake of the bread and wine, symbols of His body and blood, it directs us to the profound reality of His sacrifice.

Although in the Lord's Supper, we are truly nourished with the food and drink mentioned in the Gospel of St. John, where our Lord Jesus Christ makes us partakers of the reality of His own substance so that His life becomes shared with us, nevertheless, if the Supper were separated from the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, it would be meaningless. Indeed, we also see what the promise contained within it signifies. He says, "This is my body, which is given for you." While it illustrates the nature of our ordinary food, it also directs us to His death and passion. For had He not atoned for our sins and shed His blood to cleanse us of our stains, what purpose would there be in having baptism and the Lord's Supper administered and given to us? Thus, we must understand that in baptism, we should not fix our thoughts on the corruptible and transient element of water. For water, though pure at first, will eventually decay. How then can it cleanse our souls eternally, securing purity that endures beyond death when we ourselves succumb to decay? If such power cannot reside in the water, we must necessarily turn to the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The water itself serves as a symbol of His blood and His Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us recognize that our Lord Jesus cleansed us when He shed His blood, washing away our sins and enabling us to approach God with

full confidence that we will be regarded as righteous and blameless because He does not impute our sins to us. Bear this point in mind. As Peter states in his first epistle, we are cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have the substance and reality of our salvation in the person of the Son of God, and furthermore, He shares Himself with us, granting us access to all His blessings through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, why did St. Paul omit any mention of the cleansing blood and the work of the Holy Spirit in this passage? It may seem that he has overlooked the most essential aspects and focused on something of lesser importance. However, his intention was not to diminish any of the Son of God's contributions or exclude the Holy Spirit from His role. Rather, he considered our weaknesses, and that's why he presents a visible sign that helps us understand something that, in itself, is too lofty and concealed for our limited understanding. This is the essence of what we should take away from this passage. In general, we can derive a valuable lesson from this explanation, which is that the true and proper use of sacraments is to lead us directly to our Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we reduce them to mere idols. In the realm of popery, baptism is regarded as a mere charm because they believe that salvation can only be found in the water. I won't delve into the additional superstitions they've added, for they have corrupted and distorted the true institution of Jesus Christ by blending baptism with known superstitions. However, let's assume they use only pure water. Even so, it's a devilish belief to think that baptism can save us on its own. In this manner, our Lord Jesus Christ is effectively pushed aside, and His significance diminished. They disregard Him, focusing solely on the visible sign as if they were utterly infatuated with it. The same applies to all their other rituals. Therefore, we must remember the crucial lesson that, to employ sacraments correctly and in a way pleasing to God, they must guide us toward our Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, in baptism, we may only see water, but it should elevate our thoughts to the blood of the Son of God, assuring us that it is not the water that cleanses us but serves as a pledge of the cleansing accomplished for us when our Lord Jesus Christ was

crucified. In the Lord's Supper, we are presented with bread and wine. To fixate solely on these visible elements would be to turn away from Jesus Christ. Our faith must be raised and directed towards Him, in whom all the components of our salvation are contained.

Considering that we possess the entire perfection and fullness of all good things in the only Son of God, it is imperative that we direct our attention and efforts towards Him when the sacraments are presented to us. This is their true purpose; otherwise, we distort their meaning and, in essence, misuse what God has consecrated for our benefit. Separating our Lord Jesus Christ from the visible signs is a grave mistake.

Furthermore, we must recognize that our communion with Jesus Christ is made possible only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we should not disdain the means that our Lord has established for us, as He deemed them necessary for our feeble condition. If we were taught simply that we can find our cleansing and purification in our Lord Jesus Christ alone, that should suffice. It may seem that the water of baptism serves as a barrier preventing us from approaching Jesus Christ directly. However, let us consider our own limitations. If we possessed the minds of angels, we would not require this external baptism any more than the angels do. But given our earthly nature and the difficulty we face in approaching God and comprehending the secrets of His heavenly kingdom, we require this form of assistance. It is a remarkable act of God's gracious kindness to provide suitable remedies where there is infirmity and deficiency.

Baptism, therefore, does not hinder us from approaching the Son of God. Instead, it enables us to apply it to our benefit and prevents our faith from wavering aimlessly, as if floating in water. When we witness water being poured upon a child's head, we should be reminded of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, understanding that just as water cleanses the body, His blood cleanses our souls. The inner workings of the Holy Spirit are often likened

to water, as He makes us partakers of the benefits acquired for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. Through His grace and work, we are renewed and separated from the world, shedding our inherent corruption, so that we may enter into the newness of life brought about by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is symbolized in baptism.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper should serve as a means for us to draw nearer to our Lord Jesus Christ, to be firmly assured that He dwells within us, and that we are made one with Him. In this way, He quickens us, much like branches draw their strength from the root of a tree or the body receives its vitality from the head.

And so, the things that we have to consider in this matter are that the sacraments do not turn us away from the trust which we ought to place wholly in our Lord Jesus Christ, nor do they lead us astray in any way. Instead, they confirm our faith in Jesus Christ, assuring us that He is sufficient. We find our condemnation and rest in Him. Furthermore, all honor that belongs to Him should be yielded unto Him, for it is not for us to deprive Him of that which His heavenly Father has given us.

But that's one point. This is also the reason why St. Paul said that after cleansing, he yielded the dignity of cleansing us to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is indeed true that if He had not been appointed as the mediator, this could not have been accomplished, for it is a work that solely belongs to God. However, since He was sent for this purpose and entrusted with it, we are cleansed through Him.

It's important to note that we are washed not only in His human nature through His blood but also in the spiritual sense. The Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that He suffered in spirit. By this, it means that His death should not be perceived as that of an ordinary man. Instead, we should understand that He is the Son of God manifested in the flesh, revealing His everlasting power. Even when He was humbled, and though it

may have seemed like His death was merely a human experience, His power was at work in a way that surpasses our understanding and comprehension.

Therefore, it becomes evident that our faith remains uncertain and fragile until it is firmly grounded in our Lord Jesus Christ, resting entirely in Him without wavering. If we attempt to add anything to Him, He will reject us as unworthy of sharing in His benefits. Therefore, we must acknowledge what is rightfully His, that He alone cleanses us, and we possess righteousness before God solely by His grace.

Regarding baptism, as mentioned earlier, the Apostle Paul speaks of it to remind us of our own weakness and to strengthen our faith through these means provided for us. Anyone who considers baptism as unnecessary does not truly know themselves. When we carefully examine ourselves, even the most advanced believers will find moments of doubt, weakness, and susceptibility to countless temptations. Thus, it is essential for us to realize that pride blinds us when we think that baptism has no significance.

Considering our need for spiritual growth, let us regard baptism and the Holy Supper as means to guide us toward Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it is not without reason that symbolism and the act of washing with water are linked together. As mentioned earlier, our tendency to be captivated by visible things and be held down instead of soaring upward is a common human weakness that is deeply ingrained in us.

God, in His mercy and understanding of human weakness, reaches out to us as if He were among us. He does not change His divine nature or location, as His being is infinite, and His Majesty encompasses both heaven and earth. However, He makes Himself accessible to us, using terms like "temple," "house," "dwelling place," and "rest" to describe His relationship with us. This was not meant to endorse superstitions but rather to gradually

draw people closer to Him, especially those who were initially unable to approach Him directly.

Where are the wings that would enable us to soar above the clouds? Instead, our faith must rise above the heavens.

So, God intended to alleviate human weaknesses through ceremonies, sacraments, and similar practices. However, on the contrary, human folly has been all too evident. To be precise, people have used these rituals as an excuse to bind themselves to ceremonies, when they should have used them as a means to uplift themselves. This misuse has caused prophets to continually rebuke the Jews. They believed that God dwelled within the physical temple. But let me ask you this: Did Isaiah not proclaim, "Has not the Lord made all these things? Have you not created both the stones and the wood? Will you confine Him within them, even though the heavens and the earth cannot contain Him?" Yet, you attempt to confine Him within some structure of your own construction. This demonstrates the gross folly of people, who entangle themselves with visible symbols, ceremonies, and sacraments, instead of being led to God.

Throughout the ages, this problem has persisted, prompting St. Paul to address it. He emphasized that our cleansing in baptism is symbolized by water. However, we must also pay attention to the word. For without teaching to guide us towards finding the substance of what is represented in baptism in our Lord Jesus Christ, and without recognizing that it is in His person that we find the complete realization and assurance of these things, baptism would lead us away from God. In that case, it would be better to have no baptism at all. It would be a grave error to turn away from the Son of God and devote ourselves to the corruptible world. Therefore, we must always ensure that we do not separate the sacraments from the word.

This brings to light the true essence of Christianity in many individuals. For them, everything is fine as long as they have been baptized. They fail to

realize that having the sign without the accompanying promise is merely a superficial and unprofitable act. It is like having a seal that is detached from any document; it serves no purpose. A seal should confirm and validate some form of evidence, whether it is related to a gift or something else. Similarly, the sacraments, when not accompanied by the word, become meaningless; they do not bring any benefit.

Those who cling to their ignorance because they were baptized at birth display ingratitude and falsehood towards God's truth. Counterfeiting a seal is considered a crime, even if the seal itself is of little value. However, those who stubbornly remain in their ignorance and resist being enlightened are guilty of falsification and forgery concerning something more valuable than the entire world. This pertains to the confirmation of the blessings that have been obtained for us through the death and suffering of the Son of God, as has been explained earlier.

Furthermore, let us also consider that St. Paul speaks of the word that is full of instruction and edifies our faith. Mere pronunciation of certain words is not enough, as if someone were to say, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost," and believe that the power and virtue of baptism were contained solely in those words. That would be an abuse, and it would reduce baptism to nothing more than a charm or enchantment. The word, in fact, is the promise through which our Lord Jesus Christ has assured us that He has given Himself to be our righteousness. It is through this promise that all our sins are covered and buried in His obedience, and all our impurities are washed away by His purity. Therefore, when we possess this promise and understand what blessings are bestowed upon us by the only Son of God, then the water is joined with the word.

We should take note of this, especially since we see how Paul mentions in another place to Timothy that not even our food and drink can be sanctified

by the word alone. This means that bread, wine, water, and all other things are inherently pure by God's creation, but we cannot use them without defiling them and committing an offense against God. It is through His words that God sanctifies all these things for our use, teaching us that He cares for us as a father, providing for us and nourishing us. He also tells us that all these things are given to us so that, by experiencing His generosity, we should be moved to serve and honor Him and to be filled with love for Him. Additionally, it confirms our hope in the promised inheritance because by making us taste His goodness in this world, God assures us that when we enter the glory He calls us to, we will experience the fullness of the good things that have been partially revealed to us.

Hence, we see that all the benefits for the body are made whole by the word. What should we say then about matters concerning the eternal salvation of our souls? Is it not even more reasonable that they should be sanctified by the same word? In summary, we observe that the papists lack the power of the sacraments due to their own unbelief. They have stripped our Lord Jesus Christ of His power and virtue, transferring His prerogative to lifeless and corrupt objects. God has, as a rightful punishment, so blinded them that they believe they still possess the sacrament, albeit without the word. For instance, in their practice of baptism, they mutter and engage in incantations, often in an unfamiliar language. However, their words are directed more towards the devil than to the godfathers and godmothers, who are there to provide instruction for the child and the collective guidance of the entire church.

In brief, in the Roman Catholic baptism, there is no presence of the word. Therefore, as much as it lies within them, they have abolished baptism. Nonetheless, God has not allowed the memory of His goodness to be completely eradicated. Just as in the time of the Old Testament, when the priests were idolaters and propagated false doctrines, misleading the people with numerous errors and misconceptions, circumcision was not abolished

during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah when religious reforms were instituted to restore proper worship of God. This was because circumcision had been ordained by God, and it was not permissible to entirely remove a sign of His covenant. Instead, they were required to forsake all the additions that had been introduced through Satan's schemes. In a similar manner, I now assert that in the Roman Catholic Church, there is no presence of the word of God in the administration of the sacraments. Nevertheless, let us not hesitate to receive the substance that is signified to us in baptism, even though it may be contaminated with impurities.

But we must reject the rubbish that was imposed upon us, including the other wicked practices, and preserve the pure ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we should comprehend that our baptism, as we initially received it, would have been inadequate, and indeed, a detestable betrayal, if we had stopped there. Why? Because we would have been led astray, distorting the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a similar manner, it is true regarding the supper, there is no genuine communion left in the practices of Popery. What they call "God's table" is a mere spectacle, a disgrace to the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ because it is tightly entwined with the Mass. We are well aware that the Mass is a complete rejection of the sacrifice made by the Son of God.

However, no matter how they may appear to conform to the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ, they do not possess the word. They mutter and mumble as they consecrate what they term the spiritual sacrament, which they have distorted. How do they use it? They speak over the bread, claiming to change it into the body of Jesus Christ, or at least in their perception. Similarly, they murmur over the chalice and deceive themselves into believing they have transformed its contents. They pretend to have made such a profound alteration as if they were capable of creating a new world. To make a piece of bread into the Son of God is a far greater feat than creating an entire world. However, Satan has so deceived the Papists

that they believe they possess this power, and it is not by the power of God's Word.

Yet, as I mentioned earlier, the word St. Paul speaks of here is not merely a spoken sound but a teaching that edifies our faith. We receive the promise made to us in baptism and apply it, so that the water serves as a confirmation of our spiritual cleansing. Likewise, when we partake of the bread and wine in the supper, it is an infallible assurance to us that we are nourished with the very substance of the Son of God, where His flesh becomes our sustenance and His blood our drink. Therefore, the word is essential.

Regarding the vast and bewildering array of elements within their ceremonies, especially their five sacraments, which they have devised and concocted themselves, there is no trace of God's Word in any of them. For what promise do they have for their genuflection, as they call it? Certainly, they can invent enough about it, but where can one find any reference to it in Scripture? The same is true for all the rest. Marriage will be discussed separately at another time, as St. Paul may address it shortly thereafter. However, it is clear that the Papists have corrupted the sacraments, and now they can derive no true benefit from them because they have separated what God had joined together. Therefore, it is even more crucial for us to heed what St. Paul tells us here, that is, to be thoroughly cleansed in baptism, just as Ananias said to St. Paul, "Wash away thy sins."

By baptism, we are shown that the washing with water, which we witness, is not a meaningless or deceitful act. Rather, it demonstrates that Jesus Christ has indeed accomplished what is visibly portrayed before us. Hence, we must keep this in mind; however, the word is also essential in this context. Without it, all that can be presented regarding ceremonies is nothing but misuse and deception, even if the name of God is invoked countless times.

Additionally, we should understand that the cleansing performed by our Lord Jesus Christ is intended to set us as excellent and exceptionally beautiful before His presence. To grasp this better, let us acknowledge that we are cleansed not only through the forgiveness of our sins, absolving us of guilt before God, but also through the renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit. This renewal equips us to combat the temptations of the world and to conquer the vices of our flesh, as well as to overcome excessive worldly affections. It is a twofold grace that we receive from our Lord Jesus Christ: first, because He has satisfied for us and acquitted us of our debts, enabling us to stand before God as righteous individuals. Our sins are not imputed to us, and we are reconciled freely, at least in our perspective, thanks to the ransom offered by Jesus Christ. However, it is not God's intention that we continue in our impurity, but rather, He desires to draw us closer to Him through His Holy Spirit. Therefore, it was necessary for the aforementioned cleansing to be linked with regeneration. This is why St. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ has cleansed us so that we may excel in beauty and be blameless in His sight.

When St. Paul speaks of being honorable or glorious, he refers back to his earlier teachings about husbands and wives. He continues to discuss spiritual marriage, the union between the Son of God and us, a topic he will elaborate on further later. Therefore, just as a man loves his wife when she pleases him, St. Paul conveys in this passage that the Son of God will be pleased with us if we respond to the blessings He has granted us. First and foremost, this means that upon recognizing our own wretchedness, we should humble ourselves to seek the forgiveness that He has obtained for us. This enables us to be acquitted before God, allowing us to approach Him with complete trust. Secondly, we should be renewed by His power, such that we no longer follow our worldly desires or give in to our sinful affections. Instead, we should strive against our own inclinations and continually cast away the sinful tendencies inherent to our human nature. This allows God to rule and dwell within us, and we should be led by His

Holy Spirit, making our lives a continuous act of obedience to His divine will.

So, what will make us acceptable to the Son of God is not the kind of beauty adorned with perishable ornaments, but the beauty that comes from being cleansed of all our blemishes through faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This sanctification enables us to live as new creations continually. This is the essence of what we should remember. When it is said that Jesus Christ has been given to us as our redemption, St. Paul clarifies how it is accomplished—by making Him our wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. He becomes our wisdom so that all our understanding rests upon Him without wandering astray. He also becomes our righteousness, ensuring that there is no stain or wrinkle in us when we stand before God's presence, for the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse and purify us from all corruption.

He has given us for our sanctification or holiness, with the intention that we should be renewed by His Holy Spirit. Anyone who separates these aspects from one another seeks to tear Jesus Christ apart rather than live in Him. So, if we desire to partake in the spiritual cleansing that St. Paul discusses here, let us ensure that we live in holiness and walk in pure conduct before God. This cannot be achieved by our own strength or cleverness, but it is all ascribed to Jesus Christ. St. Paul demonstrates that it is His role to make us excellent. It is certain that when individuals attempt to achieve this with presumption, they may exert themselves greatly but will never draw closer. In contrast, we must allow our Lord Jesus Christ to work in us through His Holy Spirit. Through this means, we will become exceedingly beautiful, and He will take pleasure in us.

For the same reason, St. Paul says that Jesus Christ may present to Himself a beautiful and glorious Church. In saying this, he signifies that all the external show and ostentation that we may display to the world is mere

smoke. Instead, we must possess purity of heart. He could have said, "Our Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed His Church so that it may be pure and righteous." However, he intended to convey that our purity or cleanness is not intended to please the world's sight, so that we may be praised and commended as hypocrites. Such people are admired from a distance, and others consider them holier than angels. Instead, it is far better for a person not to be perceived in this manner. They should walk straightforwardly and, if there are imperfections in them, let them be known, while continuing on their course with the fear of God ever-present. Following the counsel of St. Paul, let us learn to place ourselves in the presence of the Son of God.

When it comes to the conduct of our lives, let us look to Him, recognizing that either we are approved by Him, or we gain nothing by being praised and esteemed here below, even if people hold an exceptionally high opinion of us. All that is said about us will amount to mere vanity and falsehood until we have ordered and shaped our lives in such a way that we walk in the presence of the Son of God, knowing that nothing can truly be concealed from Him. This is another point we must bear in mind.

Now, as St. Paul states, in order for the Church to be without blemish, wrinkle, or any impurity, it does not imply that this is already achieved within us. Such perfection cannot be attained as long as we are bound by this mortal body, which is like a prison, and we continuously bear the shackles of our earthly existence. Even if we have made progress in the fear of God, we must still admit with St. Paul that we are held in a wretched bondage and can only serve God with our hearts. It is important for us to understand where we are called and why we are to bear the Word throughout our lives.

So, what is the purpose of our redemption? Why are we reconciled to God, cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, sanctified, and regenerated? It is so that ultimately, we may be blameless before God. While in this

world, we will always have much to be criticized and faulted for. However, let us be content in the knowledge that our sins will not be held against us. This is worth noting because in the past, there were some wicked and misguided individuals who surmised angelic perfection, believing that one could attain full and perfect righteousness in this world. This view effectively nullified the covenant that God made with us, which includes two inseparable aspects: the forgiveness of sins and the new birth. These two cannot be separated. God receives and adopts us, yet we still need to have our sins forgiven until we are completely free from all earthly corruption. We must also continue to grow daily in newness of life.

However, there are still individuals who seek to abolish the remission of sins to the extent that they dare to slander us by suggesting that we keep people stuck at their ABCs when we make them understand that they must continue to be sinners. Nevertheless, it is a certainty that anyone who wants to be a Christian must also be a sinner. This may appear strange at first, but it is presented by the Holy Spirit. St. John speaks of it, but the doctrine is of God. If we claim that we have no sin, we make God a liar, and His truth is not in us. So, if we consider ourselves so holy that we no longer have any sin within us, are we making God a liar by our presumption? Furthermore, if we aspire to be Christians, should we not be disciples of Christ? And if we desire to learn in His school, isn't the manner of praying to God the Father, the foremost lesson He imparts to us? And what does He teach us? "Forgive us our sins," we beseech God daily to pardon the multitude of times we offend one another. Now, if anyone seeks to remove this petition for forgiveness from our prayers, they are departing from the school of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must understand that in this world, we cannot be without blemish or wrinkle. We must be gradually cleansed, and the vices within us must be corrected piece by piece until we reach the perfection spoken of in the first chapter. In summary, as long as we are in this world, bearing so many sins and vices within us, let us be mindful in

our prayers to God, continually seeking His mercy and forgiveness for our transgressions.

Nonetheless, let us also be courageous in our fight against our vices, and willingly submit ourselves to our guardian, using all our strength to conquer our passions and desires. We must strive to gain mastery over evil, even though we may not entirely eliminate it. Although sin resides within us, we must not allow it to rule over us. In this way, we see that we must continually engage in the practice of presenting ourselves before God with humility, beseeching Him to forgive our transgressions. Yet, we must also make progress in the process of renewal, as described here, until we are fully transformed to resemble the righteousness and glory of our God.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and asking Him to make us increasingly aware of our sins. We should strive to follow His service in such a way that our actions throughout our lives demonstrate that He has not redeemed us from the tyranny of Satan in vain. He has set us free so that we may willingly serve Him and glorify His holy name. Let us also implore Him to grant us the grace to fully appreciate the blessings He bestows upon us, motivating us to glorify Him continually. May it be our constant practice and purpose to sing His praises and acknowledge the great debt we owe to Him. Through this, may our Lord Jesus Christ reign over us, binding us to Him in an inseparable bond until we reach the kingdom He has purchased for us at a great cost. We pray for this grace not only for ourselves but for all people, and so on.

The Forty First Sermon, the Eighth on the Fifth Chapter

> "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." - Ephesians 5:28-30

Seeing that the Holy Scripture exhorts us to be kind-hearted, meek, and patient with one another, and presents us with the example of God, who is reconciled to us in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and shows us the love He has for us and His concern for our salvation through Christ's sacrificial death, it is clear that our hearts must be harder than steel if they are not moved by these truths. However, despite these exhortations, our stubbornness and corruption often render them insufficient. Therefore, to further convict us and shame us, we are directed to observe the natural order of things. Even without the Word of God or the teachings of Holy Scripture, if each of us were to reflect on our own condition, it would be enough to condemn us without the need for any other witnesses.

The heathens, who lacked faith in God and had no religion, could still recognise this fact. They knew that wild animals did not wage war against each other; for example, one wolf did not eat another. Bears and lions living in the wild had a certain instinct that prevented them from harming each other. While they lacked human discretion, they possessed a natural inclination that inclined them towards mutual cooperation, allowing them to coexist peacefully. Therefore, it is troubling that humans, who are supposedly created in God's image, often live more like dogs and cats, displaying cruelty, craftiness, and malice towards one another. Each person can be likened to a wolf or a fox when it comes to their treatment of their

neighbours, as if there is nothing but cunning, malice, or outright cruelty among them. This is the reason why God tells us that we share one flesh and one kind, as Isaiah similarly argues to persuade us to help our neighbours and show them pity and compassion in their times of need. "Thou shalt not despise thine own flesh," he says, for even the stranger in the world is not entirely separate from us. Both they and we originate from the same source, and we should recognise them as our fellow human beings. Therefore, anyone who despises or scorns another person forgets their own identity and is unworthy of the honourable status assigned to them by God because they disrupt all order.

If this reasoning applies generally, it should have an even stronger influence on people when they are reminded of their own nature. They are linked by a much closer bond. For example, if someone were to say to a father, "How can you be so distant from your own son that you refuse to see him or speak with him, and you find it impossible to reconcile with him? How cruel is that? After all, he shares your blood. How can you be so blinded by anger that you fail to recognise that God has given him to you as if he were a part of yourself, and that through him, you have been blessed?" The holiest bond established by God among us is the relationship between husband and wife. This is why St. Paul asserts that a man cannot love his wife without loving himself. Conversely, if he despises or hates his wife, it is as if he is in conflict with himself. Is such a situation even possible? Earlier, he urged husbands to fulfill their responsibilities, pointing to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has argued that the Son of God gave Himself up to death to cleanse His Church, which, though poor, miserable, and full of filth and uncleanness, received His pity. After suffering what was necessary for our salvation, He left us a visible sign of the grace He purchased for us. In baptism, we have a tangible reminder that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is our cleansing. Can we contemplate all these things and not be moved to gentleness?

Indeed, if we first consider that we are wretched creatures, full of nothing but misery, so much so that we could be compared to vermin, full of corruption and loathsome impurities, can we have any pride left to commend ourselves or trample others underfoot?

Now, if this applies to all people, as I mentioned, what should be the relationship between husband and wife? The bond God has established between them is such that the husband is, so to speak, incomplete without his wife, just as the wife is incomplete without her husband. They should each consider their own situation, as I mentioned earlier and will elaborate further. The husband is indeed the head, but the woman is the body. While the head may have preeminence and sovereignty over the body, this does not mean that it should despise or shame it, for the honour of the head extends to the whole body. However, since husbands are often not moved enough by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, which should remind them of their origin, and since even heathens and unbelievers understood marriage and respected it, there is no need for Holy Scripture to teach us in this regard.

These ignorant souls, who have natural understanding and walk as their mother has directed them, know that the wife is a part of the husband and that they are bound together inseparably. One should not forsake the other unless they want to tear themselves apart. If the blind can perceive this, what a shame it is for those enlightened by God's word, who have been taught this truth as part of their upbringing, as if by a father who watches over his children. If we remain ignorant of this truth, even though God has spoken to us intimately and shared His will with us, we are worse than infidels and deserving of greater condemnation.

Let us not harden our hearts or stop our ears to the advice given to us. Consider that since St. Paul has presented our Lord Jesus Christ as an example and reminded us of how we are linked to Him, it is only right,

given this connection, that we should be willing to follow Him and emulate Him. This means showing compassion to those in distress, patiently bearing with our neighbors' vices and weaknesses, and helping those in need whenever we can.

Furthermore, considering that man and wife are mentioned here, those who are married should reflect on the severe judgment awaiting them if they are not moved by the teachings presented here. On one side, heathens will testify against them on the last day, and on the other side, the natural order instructs them on what they should do. If they do not live in harmony and friendship, as prescribed here, they willfully oppose God and forget themselves, becoming worse than brute beasts.

Furthermore, they should know that since marriage is a symbol of the sacred union between the Son of God and all the faithful, they should hold it in even greater reverence. Despite the many disputes that have arisen, they should strive to quell them and consider that since our Lord Jesus Christ reigns over them, it signifies that marriage was blessed by God the Father in such a way that the Son Himself confirmed this blessing through His death and passion. He reconciled us to God, illustrating that a husband and wife are as one in a living image, though still in obedience to God. They are both to serve Him in harmony, until they are so united in perfection that they cleave to Him completely.

However, even though such admonitions carry great weight, very few take them to heart. The world bears witness to this, for one can examine households one by one, and where can one find such companionship that resembles the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church? Nowhere. Instead, husbands and wives are often at odds, and even if they have some fondness for each other, the slightest provocation can set them against each other. They forget or, to be truthful, they never even consider the principles

outlined here. The love between them is spurred by their lusts and not founded upon their understanding of their duties.

Husbands don't contemplate how they should bear with their wives, guide them in the fear of God, and love them as helpers, making their lives easier, so that they may walk as they should. Similarly, wives do not humble themselves before their husbands, striving to please them, realizing that they are given to be a support rather than an impediment. There is no talk, no inkling of any of this. When all is considered, I must say that the common and most typical state of affairs in every household is that one will encounter profanity, cursing, blasphemy, swearing, malice, and harm. Although some women may behave devilishly towards their neighbors just as they do towards their husbands, if the husband has any wealth or possessions through her, he must unconditionally take her side and support her cause, be it right or wrong. One can see this perversion nearly everywhere.

Furthermore, every man complains about his wife, saying, "I cannot live with her. She is a wild beast. There is nothing in her but pride and stubbornness, and I cannot speak to her without her replying with fury."

Surely, in many cases, men shape their wives as they know, more about what I speak of. Men, as if in defiance of God, support their wives in unjust quarrels or do not hesitate to yield to their undeserved demands, causing harm to themselves. Whatever I say, if a man observes everyday life carefully, he will find that there may be a form of fondness and an excessive attachment. But as for well-ordered friendship, which relies on God and is rooted in His Word, it is rare. Hardly among a hundred households will one find a husband and wife so well-matched.

Nevertheless, we are without excuse if we do not learn from this teaching. Each of us must struggle against our unruly affections. If a man does not have the wife he desires, he should understand that God intends to test his

patience through her. He should also remember that he has behaved worse towards our Lord Jesus Christ, the husband to whom all of us are married. Therefore, let him not be harsh towards his wife, considering that he himself deserves to be humbled. In short, every man should keep this doctrine in mind so that when a husband does not find everything he desires in his wife, he can think to himself, "Yet I am bound to her, and not only to my wife, but also to God, the master of marriage, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is a mirror and living image of it for us. Therefore, I am bound to do my duty towards her, to love her, and to bear with her, even if there are faults in her."

However, this does not mean that a husband should foster and nurture his wife's faults. Just as we must warn and counsel one another, there should be no such estrangement or disconnection that a husband cannot point out anything lacking in his wife, rebuke her, and make every effort to guide her onto the right path. Nevertheless, as long as we are married, the established order set by our Lord remains inviolable. Therefore, we should not focus on the individual qualities of the persons involved. Even if a woman has a rough and severe husband who treats her harshly, she should always remember that he is her husband, and that God joined them together because she was deserving. She should also examine her own sins and pray to God to remove that rod and treat her more gently.

On the other hand, when a husband does not have a wife to his liking, he should think in the same manner, "My wife does not fulfill her duty, I cannot live with her. But marriage, who ordained it? God did. Therefore, if I neglect my duty and retaliate against my wife or show stubbornness without considering my responsibilities, I am not contending with a mortal creature. I am fighting against God and attempting to dismantle what is naturally inviolable."

So, let each of us apply this doctrine to his own life. Let not only married couples but all people, in general, understand that we cannot alienate ourselves from one another, becoming unkind, merciless, and impatient toward each other. We must not act like mindless creatures without reason or regard for our origin and purpose in this world. This is the essence of what we need to keep in mind.

If we contemplate the prophet's reasoning carefully, we would be more moved by this exhortation presented here. No one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it. If each person considered the care they have for their own body, how tenderly they care for all parts of it, and how they ensure nothing is lacking, they would realise the importance of doing the same for their neighbours. This applies to all people and even more so to fathers and children, husbands and wives, and all who are bound together by our Lord in close bonds. If anyone responds with excuses, saying, "I am not like that," I reply that they are not truly human. For, as I said before, God has created and preserved us in such a way that we are all part of one body. Although there are many fingers and many sinews in a human body, it does not hinder them from being one entity. Nor is it a reason why one member should not benefit another as well as itself. It is unnatural for the body to become divided and factionalised, and it is impossible for it to happen. Therefore, if every one of us is so focused on their own benefit that they, in the meantime, harm others through pride or cruelty, failing to show compassion or bear with anything or forgive, is this not a sign that we have forgotten our own nature?

To better grasp this doctrine and be more fearful, let us consider Saint Paul's words: "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." Do we need a teacher to instruct us in this? Does God need to send angels from heaven? Must we make great efforts to learn this skill of self-care? No, we are naturally inclined to it. Every one of us already takes great care of themselves, as evidenced by their preservation of their own well-being.

In summary, the more one demonstrates self-love, the more severely they will be condemned by God for failing to do the same towards others, even towards their own flesh and blood. And when these disorders exist among us, where parents treat their children harshly and mothers are cruel to their children, or husbands are so rough with their wives that it discourages them and drives them to sorrow, causing them to give in to disorderly behavior, and when women are stubborn and resistant to good order, we need no other evidence to condemn us.

Our self-centeredness and unkindness are enough to demonstrate that we are not worthy of enjoying the benefits that God bestows upon us in this transient life. Since we are overly attached to it and care for it more than we should, we are all guilty, and there is no one who can open their mouth to defend or excuse themselves.

St. Paul, after instructing us about what we should know and how to judge our own nature, returns to the topic at hand. Those who claim to be members of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, or who are persuaded by His example to live in harmony and agreement with their spouses, must understand that if a man truly loves himself, he will also love his wife. God has ordained marriage in such a way that a wife must be like the body of her husband. Therefore, if a man loves himself, he must love his wife as well, for she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. This is the way it should be, as opposed to a monstrous kind of love. It is crucial to remember this point.

When Paul previously used the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, he mentioned how Christ spared not Himself but shed His blood to cleanse us from our filth and uncleanness. We were defiled and stained before God, but our Lord Jesus Christ found a way to restore us to His favor, doing so by shedding His own blood. In addition to that, Paul now presents another reason to strengthen the argument, which is that we are bone of His bones

and flesh of His flesh. In saying this, he teaches us that when men fulfill their duty, it is for their own benefit. They come to experience the immeasurable and infinite grace of God, which is reflected in every man, according to his station, through marriage. In marriage, we see the union between ourselves and our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, what St. Paul intended was to soften the hardness of our hearts by showing that we cannot fully enjoy the grace purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ unless we live in harmony with one another, according to the image of love that He demonstrated in His death and passion. However, before delving further into this, let us examine why Paul is saying that we are the bones and flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is making it clear that Jesus Christ, who descended from the lineage of Adam and is called the seed of David, is part of our human lineage. Although He was conceived in a miraculous manner in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He took on human flesh and became truly human. By referring to Himself as the Son of Man, He signified that He had taken on a common human nature to become familiar with us. As the apostle says in the Epistle to the Hebrews, He is not ashamed to call us brothers. However, we must understand that Jesus Christ, despite being born of the seed of Abraham, needed to share our nature in order to fulfill what was promised. He could not mediate between God and us without being of our nature. He had to clothe Himself in our body and have a soul to represent Himself in the person of all men. Thus, Jesus Christ became our flesh and took on our body, making Him bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh. While His conception was miraculous through the Holy Spirit, He still became truly human to serve as our mediator.

So, when St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the second Adam, he is making a comparison between the grace of reconciliation through Christ and the deadly fall caused by the first Adam. The first Adam's transgression made us enemies of God, resulting in our inability to approach Him without being

justly thrust back. Sin created an insurmountable division, as God, the source of all righteousness, could not tolerate our iniquities and corruptions. However, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, came to remedy this situation. He is referred to as the second Adam because, just as the first Adam's sin created enmity between us and God, the second Adam's sacrifice and grace reconciled us to God. In Christ, we are restored and made new. It is through His divine power and the work of His Holy Spirit that we become bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh, not through our own human nature. Thus, we are linked to Him in a new and second creation.

St. Paul, as we shall see here, makes reference to the original creation of Eve, who was taken from Adam's side. Now, when we consider our first birth, which brings us into this world as mortal beings, we cannot boast about our flesh unless we are born of the seed of those who came before us. However, if we are born of that seed, we are cursed. It is true that Adam was initially created in the image of God, but that image was tarnished by sin. So, we are not worthy to be counted among God's creations, and God Himself has pronounced a harsh judgment upon us, expressing regret for creating mankind, as if He disowned us all. We are considered less worthy than worms, lice, fleas, and other vermin. This is the consequence of our connection to Adam's lineage – a state of condemnation and corruption.

Now, when we turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, we find restoration. Scripture describes us as new creatures in Him. It is evident that we are united with Him not by the order of nature, nor by common means, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. This union makes us members of His Body. The reason we are part of His Body is that God the Father has appointed Him as our Head. This is achieved through a mysterious power that we may not fully comprehend but accept by faith.

In this way, both aspects align perfectly: Jesus Christ is considered our bone and flesh because He took on our human nature, without which we would

have no connection to Him. His willingness to be united with us as brothers is made possible by the work of His Holy Spirit, making Him our head and us the members of His Body. This elevates us to a heavenly state that transcends our former earthly existence, marred by corruption.

Now, you may wonder how it is possible for us to be of the bone and flesh of Jesus Christ when He is in heaven, and we are on Earth. Additionally, when each of us is born, it is a natural process involving human parents of the same race. How then can we be considered of the bone and flesh of Jesus Christ? This connection does not involve our physical substance – our skin, bones, or hair – coming from the body of Jesus Christ. Instead, it is based on the removal of the curse inherited from Adam and the outpouring of the grace of the Holy Spirit by our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this grace, we are enlightened and transformed.

Therefore, this connection with Jesus Christ is not of a physical nature but a spiritual quality. The usual course of human descent, as established by God from the beginning, continues, where people are born into the world through succeeding generations. However, Jesus Christ renews those chosen by God, who are members of His own body. He cleanses them of the corruption inherited from Adam. Then, He imparts to them a power by which, through faith, they acknowledge Him as their Head. They understand that they are all gathered together in Him, and His life is given to them, so they no longer live for themselves or the world, but Christ lives in them, as Scripture affirms. Therefore, there is no need for Jesus Christ to descend from heaven physically to make us His body's members, or for Him to diminish His own flesh to generate us from Himself. This transformation is accomplished through the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit. We do not draw anything from Christ's flesh or His body in heaven. Rather, our strength continuously flows from Him. Like trees draw their nourishment from their roots, and as the human body receives its strength from the head, we feel the virtue and force of the union between us and our

Lord Jesus Christ. He remains in His full glory without hindrance, allowing us to benefit greatly from this connection.

Let us always remember that this internal awakening enables us to fulfill our respective duties. Through this, we taste God's grace, which pertains to the salvation of our souls. The matter at hand here is that husbands and wives should live in harmony with each other. When a husband contemplates the teachings presented here, he should be motivated not only to fulfill his obligations to God and his wife but also to reflect upon this state. He should consider it as a living image wherein he perceives that Jesus Christ is his head, that he belongs to Christ, and that Christ belongs to him. Therefore, Christ's life is his, and he is as though a member of Christ's body. This understanding should encourage husbands and wives to fulfill their respective roles. We must not be ungrateful if we fail to recognize how earnestly our Lord Jesus Christ works to win us and motivate us to serve Him willingly. He not only allures us through gentle and loving means but also draws us towards Him. Even in this world and in transient, earthly matters, He demonstrates the eternal salvation prepared for us in heaven. He purchased this salvation at a great cost, through the blood of His only Son, so that in the end, we may fully partake in its benefits and virtues.

Now, let us humbly kneel before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and seeking His grace to reform our hearts and lives. May we devote ourselves entirely to His service and obedience, recognizing the everlasting salvation that awaits us. We pray that God may extend His mercy to us in our weakness, granting us the strength to stand before His presence. Let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Forty Second Sermon, the Ninth on the Fifth Chapter

> "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." - Ephesians 5:31-33

God orchestrates His works in such a way that we can perceive a profound wisdom in all His actions and glean valuable lessons from them. Take, for instance, what St. Paul references here: that woman was created from the substance of man. God could have created Eve in the same way He made Adam, but instead, He took a rib from man's side and formed woman from it. He intended for there to be a deep union between man and wife, so that a husband might think, "This is my flesh, this is my bone," and the wife, "From where did God give me life? He shaped me from a rib taken from man." Thus, we see that God's deliberate choice in creating man and woman differently had a purpose, serving as a continual reminder in marriage. It is a reminder that if a husband does not maintain a good and harmonious relationship with his wife, he disrupts the natural order of things. Similarly, a wife who does not quietly submit to her husband, recognizing him as her head, goes against this order.

St. Paul takes this concept further by applying it to the union between our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. As mentioned before, marriage serves as a symbol of the connection between us and the Son of God. Therefore, he exclaims that it is a profound mystery—a secret we must pay close attention to. In the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church, two aspects must be noted here. Firstly, we observe how God has united man and wife in an inseparable bond from the very beginning. Secondly, God intended to

elevate us further. Since there is nothing within ourselves but various forms of wretchedness, we are to be joined to the Son of God, who is the source of all goodness. We are to draw our spiritual life from Him and derive all our strength and power from Him.

When St. Paul, after quoting this text from Moses, adds that this mystery is great because the Son of God has made us bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, some have imagined it to be a prophecy of what has been said. However, there is no valid reason to support such an interpretation. The text should be taken simply as it is: God's way of instructing husbands and wives about their duties and responsibilities. Let that suffice. In this matter, certain individuals have greatly overreached themselves and displayed such ignorance that even little children could rightfully scoff at them. This is because the word "sacrament" was once commonly used to signify secrets, mysteries, and all things of high importance worthy of our admiration.

Therefore, the word "sacrament" was used here in translating this text. St. Paul refers to it as a great sacrament, meaning a great mystery or secret. This should pose no more doubt than when he says it is a great sacrament that God was manifested in the flesh. It is also a great sacrament that the gospel was preached throughout the entire world, and that the wretched Gentiles and unbelievers were included among the descendants of Abraham. In this text, the infinite goodness of our God is a sacrament, signifying something high and well worthy of our attention. Yet, some individuals have acted quite foolishly by asserting that matrimony, like baptism or the Lord's Supper, is a sacrament. They misunderstood the term "sacrament," assuming it implied a tangible element, like water in baptism or bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. They hoped to find something similar in marriage.

When we see such ignorance has pervaded the world and that even these renowned scholars needed to be corrected because they lacked the

understanding they should have possessed through natural reason, we witness the severe judgment of God upon those who have corrupted true religion and distorted the Word of God according to their own whims. Therefore, we ought to thank God even more for delivering us from such confusion. Since there was such terrible disorder among those who claimed to be lights and pillars of the church and were esteemed as such, we should not fear separating ourselves from their company and assembly, for God has granted us the grace to disentangle ourselves from them. Let us remain steadfast in our course and proceed with sobriety. This serves as a warning for us to be vigilant, as true disciples of God, to distrust ourselves and not twist the Holy Scriptures to our own liking. Instead, we should handle the Holy Scriptures with reverence, seeking the true understanding guided by God's Holy Spirit.

Now, let us turn to St. Paul's intention. He undoubtedly cites Moses' account to demonstrate that a man should cherish his wife as if she were a part of his own body, an integral component of himself. This was intended to encourage wives to honor their husbands and to submit to them as commanded by God. The reason Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs was for God to establish such harmony between man and wife that no other bond in the world could compare. While a child ought to honor his father because he is of his seed and blood, the bond of matrimony is held in higher regard. The origin of this bond is not determined by human preference but by the pronouncement of Adam and the divine sentence. It is an unbreakable decree that a man should be joined to his wife, and in such a manner that if he must forsake either, his father would not be as near to him as his wife.

Yet, is it not the same as saying that God intended to break the yoke and permit children to rebel against their fathers and mothers once they are married? God does not alter any of the ordinances He has established. Therefore, one who has a living father or mother should continue to be

subject to them, never ceasing to fulfil their duties as shown in the Scriptures and as taught by nature itself. These responsibilities are ingrained in us and cannot be erased. Hence, married individuals do not cease to be perpetually subject to their fathers and mothers.

The situation becomes apparent when we compare one scenario to the other. It is as if to say, if a young man were to abandon his father, show contempt for him, be stubborn or disrespectful, or fail to show him reverence, would not the world consider him a monster? God has commanded in His law that disobedient and stubborn children should be stoned, prescribing such measures to root out such wickedness from the world. How much more atrocious it is, then, when a man forsakes his wife, or a wife her husband? Surely, it is an outrageous crime. If it is intolerable for a child to rise against his father, there is no doubt that the bond of matrimony is even holier and more highly commended by God, as every person should strive to fulfil their duties. When a woman is quarrelsome and headstrong, refusing to be submissive to her husband, or when a husband is surly and cruel, treating his wife with disdain, it is not just an act of cruelty towards a human being but an affront to God, who is the author of marriage and has ordained it with the conditions we hear of here.

This extends further to the idea that every person should love those allied to them by God's providence. For example, a man with no one else but his wife should still acknowledge that God has united us all together. When God created Eve, the mother of all humanity, from Adam's side, He did so with the intention that this unity should extend universally. We should understand that He wants us to live in such harmony that none of us should separate ourselves from others. No one, then, should be so cruel as to say, "She is not my wife."

We must consider that our Lord's will is for a general harmony among all people, and that everyone should consider themselves bound to their

neighbours. Humanity is composed of two genders, male and female, and as such, we are all bound to one another. Matrimony, as I mentioned, is a distinct institution, but nevertheless, men are obligated to support women, as our Lord has demonstrated from the very beginning of creation. Women, too, must conduct themselves modestly among men, even if they are not their husbands. Furthermore, they are joined as one flesh, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown, indicating that a married man should be content with his wife alone, and a woman should rely wholly on her husband. They should not let their desires roam freely or change the order established by our Lord, which is meant to endure until the end of the world.

Throughout history, men have exceeded their limits and forgotten both nature and kindness. They have not only disregarded God and His Word but also forgotten the conditions under which they were created in the world. They failed to recognize what even natural reason could have shown them, and they arrived at this point because they were consumed by their lusts, behaving like wild animals, especially when their desires were unchecked by the fear of God. This led to practices like polygamy in many countries, as it is still permitted among the Turks today. Even the Jews, despite having the Law of Moses, divorced their wives for trivial reasons. If a woman was not attractive enough or not wealthy enough, she was divorced. Although our Lord had provided for this situation, saying, "Because of the hardness of your hearts, he permitted you to divorce your wives," they chose to divorce their wives rather than honour the faith of marriage. By divorcing their wives after pledging their faith to live and die together, they proved themselves unfaithful and perjured. Divorce, therefore, was a disgraceful practice. While God did not punish them severely, it does not mean that they should take this as an opportunity to do worse.

The Jews had taken liberties with divorce based on a passage that said, "He who finds himself displeased with his wife should give her a certificate of divorce." However, our Lord Jesus told them that while God had allowed

this in the past, it was because He had to deal with them like wild beasts. God had granted them more than was lawful due to their stubbornness. But now, it is not meant for them to use this as an excuse to act even worse.

We should always go back to the beginning when God created Adam and shaped Eve from his side. At that time, God declared that two should become one flesh. Therefore, anyone who takes two wives deserves to be cut asunder, and those who take three should be cut into three pieces. This is tantamount to defying God and nature since God has placed a mark in the person of man and wife, signifying that marriage should be maintained as it should. So, if someone disrupts the order of God's ordinance, they deserve to be condemned.

What we must remember is that a person must control all their senses and not let their eyes wander, lest their mind is carried away when they see someone of the opposite sex who appears more attractive than their spouse. Likewise, the wife should not gaze upon any man other than her husband, except with simplicity. Both should always remember that they are two, yet one flesh. A person cannot be whole unless they are with their spouse. The husband must love his wife, and the wife must honour or revere her husband. The word used here signifies fear but is taken to mean reverence and submission on the wife's part.

There is a difference in the duties of the husband and the wife. God does not command the husband to fear his wife but commands him to love her. The woman, on the other hand, must be subject to her husband. If someone asks how the husband should honour his wife, it is not possible to truly love without reverence. A person will never love someone they despise. Love must involve mutual respect and good manners. If a husband thinks of his wife as a part of himself, one-half of his person, how can he despise her? Therefore, the husband must honour his wife, though not through submission. Should he not always remain in his position as the head and the

one who governs his wife? This is why St. Paul only requires love from the husband. In another text to the Colossians, he adds that husbands should not be bitter towards their wives. If there is love, a person will bear with the many faults and weaknesses of their spouse. If we do this for one another, how much more should a husband do it for the one given to him by God, loving her as his own body? Therefore, St. Paul says explicitly that men should use discretion and wisdom to help their wives in their weaknesses by bearing with their frailty. If a man gets it into his head that his wife is fickle and frivolous, or in short, despises her because she is not a man, it is a poor view of her. For those who are frail, one must consider their own weaknesses and bear with them as they would bear with themselves. This is what St. Paul is referring to here. He does not mean that a man should be weak in love, as has often happened.

In the previous Sunday's sermon, I cited examples of those who appeared very passionate in defending their wives in public quarrels but were devils to them at home. The love I speak of is a genuine and righteous affection that a man should have for his wife because he recognises that God has joined them together as if He has placed them together with His own hand, saying, "Stay together in peace and harmony."

As for the wives who are reluctant to bear the yoke that God has placed upon their shoulders, in another text, Paul reminds them that God is the author of marriage. He established the condition that wives should be subject to their husbands and allow themselves to be governed by them as their head, showing reverence. Women often find reasons to despise their husbands. If a man has goodness, she may attempt to diminish it to have a reason to say, "Why should this man have authority over me? He is no more capable of ruling than I am." Both men and women tend to be conceited, thinking themselves more capable than others. Therefore, wives may desire to have the upper hand. This is why Paul tells them to remain in the position God has placed them, which is one of subjection. They should not scrutinise

their husbands, examining whether they are worthy of authority and superiority. Instead, they should consider what God has ordained and obey it without question or objection. They should not inquire why this or that is the way it is in an attempt to find excuses to exempt themselves from obeying God and His commandments. We must pay attention to God, and each of us must receive His commands without dispute.

This doctrine is clear and straightforward by itself. However, in practice, people in the world often seek to use ignorance as an excuse to evade their duty, saying, "This is too high and too hard to understand." When it is stated that men ought to love their wives, does it require an interpretation of what the Holy Spirit meant? No, the meaning is evident, and everyone knows within themselves that they understand it well enough. But when it comes to the love that men should have for their wives, scarcely one in a hundred can resist the temptation to forsake it and has no wandering thoughts.

Women, too, often have such fickle minds that they could wish to be unmarried twenty times a year. Even without the guidance of scripture, people in the world generally respect marriage because God willed this understanding to be engraved in the hearts of even the most ignorant and unrefined individuals. His purpose in this is to demonstrate that since even the most uneducated and simplest people understand that husbands and wives should live together in love and harmony according to their respective roles, we must all strive towards that. Now, with the teachings and exhortations we have, we are further encouraged to avoid complacency in our vices. However, despite these instructions, what progress have we made? It is a common sight to see husbands scolding their wives and wives backbiting their husbands. Such conduct is found in every household, even among those who constantly quarrel and bicker. In short, there is nothing but contention and disdain.

In homes where such attitudes prevail, it becomes impossible for husbands and wives to approach God. Since prayer is the means by which we draw near to God for His mercy and protection, it is essential. St. Peter expressly states that when a husband is too harsh and rigid with his wife and the wife, in turn, is stubborn to the point where she cannot be controlled, and she refuses to submit as she ought, their prayers are hindered. In other words, he is saying, "Wretched people, do you not realize your misery when the doors are shut against you, and you cannot call upon God?" What, then, will become of us when we cannot turn to our God for help? It would be better for us to be dead a hundred thousand times. God desires tranquillity from both men and women, as He commands us to live in peace and harmony. Furthermore, He beckons us to come to Him, saying, "If you call upon Me, I will hear you." This invitation from our Lord should remind us of our own benefit and welfare. We must be utterly possessed by the devil and devoid of reason if we do not accept such a favourable condition.

Therefore, let us understand that if husbands and wives intend to fulfil their duties, both must acknowledge God as the author of marriage and recognise that they did not come together by mere chance. The Lord joined them together so that the husband would be a companion to his wife, treating her as a part of himself, while the wife would honour her husband as God commands, submitting to him as her head. The best way to heed God and obey Him in this matter is to regard Him as the originator of marriage and follow His guidance in all aspects. Husbands should not trouble themselves excessively by scrutinising their wives' faults, saying, "What shall I do with this woman?" We know that reproaches are distasteful and abhorrent. Similarly, wives should not focus on their husbands' shortcomings and label them as devils who cannot be reformed. They should adhere to the role to which they are bound and avoid questioning why it is so, for God has placed them in this subjection to their husbands. They should not exalt themselves by opposing God's ordained subordination to their husbands.

Now, let us turn to the second point and delve even deeper into the profound mystery that St. Paul emphasised here. It is, indeed, a great mystery, the union between Christ and His Church. By these words, it becomes evident that St. Paul did not intend to label marriage or wedlock as a sacrament, as he clarifies later. As I mentioned before, the main focus here is on expressing God's incomprehensible goodness in deigning to unite us with His only Son. I have previously explained how we are considered to be of Christ's bone and flesh. This does not mean we are physically taken from His body, for we are all descended from Adam. However, we live from His very essence, as indicated when He said His flesh is our food and His blood is our drink. This signifies that we live in Him, albeit spiritually.

Even though we share a common life with all humans, one that is not the result of God's special grace, we also possess an inherent imprint of God within us, even from birth. Yet, we remain cursed in our own nature and are so wretched that we are referred to as dead. This is why Jesus Christ said that the hour is coming when the dead, those who are like decomposed corpses in the grave, will hear the voice of the Son of God. St. Paul also states in the second chapter that when we are renewed by Jesus Christ, we move from death to life, having previously been dead in our sins and transgressions due to our inheritance from our forefather, Adam.

The manner in which we are of Jesus Christ's flesh and bone of His bone is akin to being grafted into His body. Just as a branch, when severed from the root, can still receive sustenance and nourishment if grafted into another tree, so too are we. If we persist in our natural state, we remain separated from our Lord Jesus Christ. However, if we are incorporated into Him and He deems it fitting to impart Himself to us, then we truly experience that the bread and wine do not merely nourish us but that we genuinely receive life and strength through the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it is evident that this is a profound mystery. No matter how much we deliberate and ponder this matter, can any of us fully comprehend how we are joined to our Lord Jesus Christ and become one with Him? Can we truly assure ourselves that through this union, we will partake in God's glory and that, even now, we live in our Lord Jesus Christ, as He declared, "Because I live, you also will live"? Can our finite minds grasp this reality? Certainly not. That is why many struggle to accept the notion that we are the flesh of Jesus Christ and bone of His bones. They are content with their own imaginations, which diminish the grace of God—a grace that St. Paul could not fully express, but rather indicated that it should amaze us.

Therefore, some may develop mistaken, even heathen-like, notions that we are connected to our Lord Jesus Christ, saved by His grace. However, the Scriptures go even further. Even if all we had was this statement that it is a great mystery, we should avoid constraining it according to our own notions. To do so would be akin to making St. Paul a liar. Those who disregard this spiritual union we have with our Lord Jesus Christ reveal their failure to recognise the hidden, marvellous power of God and the profound truths expounded here.

The Holy Spirit employs such language to humble us and then to elevate us once more. Hence, we must, on one hand, acknowledge that all the wisdom and understanding we possess are insufficient for this matter. On the other hand, we should rise again, for we hear our Lord Jesus Christ calling us to Himself. He tells us that we are so closely united to Him that there is nothing of His own that He does not share with us, and from which He does not want us to benefit. Therefore, if we encounter conflicting thoughts within ourselves, if we begin to think, "How is it possible for our Lord Jesus Christ, who is in heaven, to nourish us with His own substance, such that His body becomes our food and His blood our drink?" If such ideas cross our minds, we must dismiss them with what is stated here, namely, that it is a great mystery. We should reprove our own foolishness and

recklessness in attempting to comprehend something that is infinite. Our Lord makes it clear that when He has united us to His only Son, He has accomplished a work so profound and elevated that it surpasses our every capacity. Therefore, let us always conclude that even though we find it to be a remarkable matter, we must rely on that which is spoken by God Himself. Especially when He states that He will work in such an exalted manner that we will be utterly amazed.

Consequently, let us generally learn from this text that all the benefits we obtain to attain heavenly life through our Lord Jesus Christ proceed from the boundless wisdom of God. It is not for us to be so foolish and presumptuous as to declare, "I will understand it," or again, "I will only accept what pleases me." We must restrain ourselves from such presumption, for it renders us unworthy of the mystery of faith. This statement underscores its significance: it is a great secret. To reach the betterment through Jesus Christ and partake in His grace, we must comprehend that God's work in our salvation is a profound and mysterious matter. As illustrated in the text from the epistle to Timothy, which I previously cited, it is indeed a great mystery that God was manifested in the flesh. Consider the vast gulf that exists between God and humanity; we are mere worms, frail and decaying, while God's majesty is so exalted that no one can truly describe it or conceive even a fraction of it in thought. Thus, we must be content to be overwhelmed by awe and wonder.

Seeing that God has so closely united Himself to us as the true Emmanuel, as named in Isaiah, and that things which seem distant are bound together in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us understand that there are nothing but mysteries and secrets in all the grace we receive from our God. This is especially true when we are incorporated or grafted into our Lord Jesus Christ. He, having taken on our nature and wrapped Himself in our flesh, desires us to be grafted into Him as into our root, quickened by His Spirit,

and partakers of His life. He holds nothing exclusive to Himself but desires all to be given unto us through Him.

By receiving our Lord Jesus Christ along with the benefits He brings, we can overcome all the temptations that may confront us. We should earnestly contemplate the teachings of the Holy Scripture, taking them seriously and giving them due reverence. We should acknowledge that God works within us through our Lord Jesus Christ, which may require us to abandon our natural understanding.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our sins and beseeching Him to pardon us in such a way that we may be freed from them. May He govern us by His Holy Spirit, enabling us to live in accordance with His Holy Will and to reform our entire lives in obedience to His commandments. May He bear with all our weaknesses until He has fully transformed us, leading us to the perfection we now strive to attain. And so, let us all say, Almighty God, etc.

The Forty Third Sermon, the First on the Sixth Chapter

> "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:1-4

Those who come to listen to sermons must not only hear new things but also be stirred to do their duty. They must be awakened when they are sluggish and heed the good and holy warnings. If there is stubbornness and malice in them, they should be rebuked. This is what St. Paul tells us, and it is something that should be etched in our hearts. It is common knowledge that children should be obedient and subject to their fathers and mothers. Parents should be gentle in their guidance, treating their children kindly without excessive harshness.

However, sometimes parents become overly domineering, leading their children to their own destruction. At other times, they become too hot-tempered and lack restraint, failing to deal with their children fairly. Children, on the other hand, often disregard their parents and show disrespect, acting as if they hold them in contempt. There are few who maintain self-discipline and offer the proper reverence to their fathers and mothers, even though they are bound to do so by God.

Therefore, when we see St. Paul exhorting the faithful to such common things, we can recognize the stubbornness of our own nature. These are things we should not need to be reminded of; each of us should be inclined to do their duty without being prompted. However, our human nature is so frail that, despite knowing what is right, we struggle to commit ourselves to

it. So, let us strive to overcome our own vices, for it is not enough to have learned what we ought to do; we must also engage in the battle within ourselves. After we understand God's will and what is right and proper, we must introspect and ensure that we do not regress. We must restrain and discipline ourselves, recognizing that instruction alone is insufficient. We must exert ourselves forcefully, suppressing our wicked desires, no matter how difficult it may be.

Now, let us turn to what is said here: "Children, obey your parents." By using the word "honor" in His law, God intends to convey that children should show both submission and reverence to their fathers and mothers. A child might obey and submit but still harbour a spiteful, proud, and disdainful heart towards their parents. However, when the Lord commands us to honor our fathers and mothers, it encompasses reverence. Furthermore, it implies performing all the duties required of children, which includes aiding them and providing them with comfort and support to the best of their abilities. Children should understand that they are obligated to serve their parents and be subject to them in all things to the best of their abilities. They should not consider themselves free, for their entire service is owed to those through whom they came into the world.

St. Paul explicitly states, "in the Lord," indicating that there are two aspects binding us to this submission. First, there is the order of nature. God has ordained that fathers and mothers should have authority over their children in this earthly life. Even among the heathen, those without the guidance of the law or the teachings we receive through St. Paul's words, children who were disobedient to their fathers and mothers were scorned. This was universally understood, and anyone, young or old, could recognize it. They could not escape God's judgment, for they were already condemned in this world.

As I mentioned earlier, this concept is deeply ingrained in the hearts of all of us and as clear as day. Furthermore, God, out of His own will, has ordained and confirmed it for our benefit. Therefore, we must follow this path. Since we know that God is on our side in this matter of honouring our fathers and mothers, we are even more without excuse if we do not submit ourselves with meekness and humility. Even those among the heathen who followed the natural order of things, despite being blind to the truth, will stand as our judges. If they, without the guidance and advantages we possess, have managed to fulfill their duties, how much more should we, who have received greater knowledge and grace, obey the command?

This is what St. Paul intended when he said that children ought to obey their fathers and mothers "in the Lord." He meant that it is right and just. In other words, no one gains anything by resisting in this matter. We must acknowledge that human pride is so deeply ingrained in our nature that everyone desires to be a lord over others. Submission is difficult for us until the Lord, through His Holy Spirit, transforms us into humble beings. That's why the Spirit of God is often referred to as the spirit of meekness and gentleness. Pride turns people into wild beasts and puffs them up like toads, making it impossible for them to humble themselves. St. Paul, recognizing this deep-rooted vice in our nature and desiring to correct it, teaches us that it is right and fitting for each person to strive for humility and submission. Even if there is resistance within us that refuses to be subjected to our superiors, the rightness of God's rule must prevail.

When St. Paul states that it is "right" or "rightful," he directs us back to God's authority. In essence, he is saying that when God has spoken, there is no need for further scrutiny; people must close their mouths and obey. We should be certain that His will is a reliable and infallible standard, one that we are not allowed to deviate from to the right or the left. This is an important reminder, as we often see people, even when they intend to do good and have a sincere zeal for it, assuming wisdom in their own

judgment. When it comes to our self-guidance and self-governance, we have a tendency to place our own understanding above the Word of God.

Given our inclination to be fond of our own opinions and presumptuous in attributing authority to our own intellect, it is crucial for us to pay close attention to what is said here. We must have the discernment and wisdom to recognize and accept what God has commanded and approved. When we have God's approval, we must be content with it. Even if we don't understand the reason behind it or find it pleasing to our own preferences, we should not ask why or argue against God when He forbids something that may not seem entirely evil in our eyes. We should avoid such inappropriate and devilish recklessness, and instead, follow what St. Paul tells us here, which is that everything God has spoken through His Word is right, and we must accept it without objection. The true test of our faith and obedience lies in our willingness to accept something as good and valid, even when we think it should not have been commanded or forbidden because God has spoken it.

In this context, we have the commandment of the law: "Honor thy father and thy mother." Additionally, it is accompanied by the declaration that this is the first commandment with a promise. This implies that God intended, through all means, to lead us to the subjection we should offer to our fathers and mothers. It should be sufficient for us that this is pleasing to God. Moreover, since He encourages us to serve our fathers and mothers through His gentle promises, it should incline us to embrace subjection even more readily. Therefore, St. Paul, after making it clear that we must be subject to our fathers and mothers, unless we want to rebel against God and oppose His ordained order, reminds us that we would be excessively hard-hearted and obstinate if God's command and His gracious promise did not move us to do what He desires.

And if indeed we are moved and even softened by this commandment, then it can be said that the devil no longer holds dominion over us and no longer possesses our hearts. What he is saying is that this commandment comes with a special promise, which none of the other commandments of the law have. The promise is that we shall live long upon the earth, and not just live long but live in prosperity because God will bless us if we honour those who were the means by which we came into the world. On the other hand, he also reveals the duty of fathers and mothers towards their children. This is to treat them gently, not to let them off completely or give them free rein to do as they please, but to be gentle in their dealings with them and not dishearten them. By "nourish," St. Paul means that they should deal gently with them and show them love. However, this word also implies correction and discipline. This is so that children may be kept in check and not allowed to become unruly. They should be brought up in the fear of God, knowing that God has given them overseers to guide their lives. This is the essence of what St. Paul is conveying here.

To fully understand this text, we must first recognise that, strictly speaking, we have no father but God alone. It is true that occasionally He is referred to as the father of our souls and spirits, as mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews. However, even in terms of our physical bodies, the honour and title of being called "Father" do not belong to any mortal creature. We are fashioned in such a way that our bodies are the result of God's marvellous power, and no mortal truly deserves the title of father. Nonetheless, God has chosen to allow those who beget us, those through whom we enter this world, to be referred to as our fathers. God has granted them a share in the honour that belongs to Him alone. It is important to remember that when we contend with our fathers and mothers, we are, in essence, warring against God. He has placed His mark upon them, designating them as His representatives. Therefore, it is undeniable that by honouring our fathers and mothers, we are offering the service that God demands of us, and that we owe Him. Conversely, if we disrespect or shirk our duties towards our

fathers and mothers, we explicitly offend God. This is not only because we violate His commandment but also because we hold His Majesty in contempt. Our fathers and mothers bear a certain mark, as mentioned earlier, and this is why the law imposes severe punishments on those who are disobedient to their parents. In the law, it is decreed that anyone who despises their father or mother, utters curses against them, or inflicts harm upon them shall be stoned to death.

When children are so disobedient as to rebel against their fathers and mothers, God deems them to be monstrous and infectious to defile the whole earth. Furthermore, He will not tolerate prolonged deliberation for those who rise against their parents. Once the father and mother have testified, "Look, our son cannot be reformed," immediately thereafter, let him be stoned, and let the world be rid of such an infection. God declares this to emphasise that when children refuse to submit to their fathers and mothers, it is a heinous and dreadful crime. It is tantamount to attempting to overthrow the entire order of nature. Therefore, our starting point for deriving true benefit from this teaching must be this.

This is also why St. Paul states that we should be subject to our fathers and mothers in God. He means that what pagans and unbelievers understood dimly should be much clearer to us. Pagans did not fully grasp the reason why children should submit and obey their fathers and mothers, except that it seemed to be a matter of equity and right. They couldn't comprehend that God is our Father and requires this subjection from us. In contrast, we, who know that our Creator is God and that He is our Father, and that this status belongs to Him, must conclude that we ought to obey our fathers and mothers, even in God. We should view it as if we are honouring God Himself through our obedience to those who represent His person and majesty here on Earth.

I must reiterate a point I made earlier – when we know God's will, we should restrain ourselves and not dare to argue against God or question why He likes or dislikes something. We should accept His will as the ultimate righteousness and equity. And where do we find this will? We find it in His Word. When St. Paul sought to prove God's will, he didn't look to the heavens above the clouds but rather to the thunderous things contained in the law. Therefore, let us dedicate our minds entirely to seeking out what is pleasing and acceptable to God as revealed in His law, the prophets, and the gospel. This is true wisdom. Let us beware of the devilish arrogance of being wise in our own eyes and questioning, "How should this be? Why should that be?" Instead, let us simply obey our God.

Additionally, there is a promise here. One might question why St. Paul says it is the first commandment of promise when a promise is also added to the second commandment of the law. In the second commandment, it is stated, "I am the Lord who shows mercy to thousands of generations to those who love Me and keep My commandments." This promise is much more extensive than the one mentioned in this text.

How then does St. Paul say that it is the first commandment with promise? The answer is straightforward. God's promise of showing mercy to a thousand generations in the first table is not restricted to that one commandment but extends to the entire law. It's as if God is saying, "There is nothing better for you than to submit yourselves to My will, for otherwise, you will be in a cursed state. And as proof of this, do not all the blessings you hope for come to you through My free goodness alone? I will not fail those who serve Me and seek to honour Me; they will continually find that I am a merciful God."

As I mentioned before, our Lord's intention is to encourage us to obey His commandments and ordinances willingly. Thus, it is not a specific promise exclusive to any one commandment but rather a promise that St. Paul

speaks of here when it says, "Honor your father and mother, that you may live long upon the earth." It is a unique promise that pertains only to that commandment. Therefore, St. Paul rightly states that it is the first commandment with such a special promise, one that respects no other commandment.

Now, let us consider the promise itself. God says that those who obey shall live long. From this, we can infer that this present life should not be disregarded because it is a testament to God's fatherly goodness and love towards us. It is no small matter that God created us and placed us in this world, not just to live here as animals but to reign as His children and have dominion over all other creatures.

God's goodness and mercy extend even to animals such as oxen and horses. When He causes the earth to yield hay for cattle, it reveals His wonderful goodness towards these creatures. However, in the case of humans, there is a deeper reason. We enjoy the abundance and richness of the earth's fruits because God has poured out His boundless goodness upon it.

When we look to the heavens, we see the sun providing light, the moon and stars serving their purposes. Although the heathen worshipped them, these celestial bodies exist to fulfill a service. When we look down to the earth, we find many good things appointed for our use. While God provides for animals, all ultimately benefits us. God's care for the beasts serves mankind.

Therefore, this present life should not be scorned. God has placed us here as if on a journey towards our eternal rest and the heavenly inheritance. If this present life serves as our guide to the glory prepared for us and purchased by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is of immeasurable value.

In this way, we see that it is a great benefit and a gift to be valued by us. It is true that there are so many hardships in our life that it might be better

never to have been born than to endure the constant trials we face on Earth. If a person considers how wretched life can be in itself and how it is subject to numerous griefs, sorrows, pains, and vexations, they might conclude that it is preferable never to have left their mother's womb than to enter into such a sea of confusion as we find on Earth.

Nevertheless, when we weigh everything, we will discover that God's goodness surpasses all the chastisements He sends us for our sins. This life, in its essence, should be nothing but happiness and rest if it were not for God allowing us to reap the consequences of our sins and transgressions. However, even when God occasionally afflicts us with barrenness, frost that kills our vines, excessive rain that drowns our crops, or drought that parches the land, or famine, plagues, diseases, and other afflictions, these are all reminders from God of our sins. They are intended to humble us, to make us aware of our weaknesses, and ultimately, to prepare us to renounce the world more willingly.

Even when we gather all the afflictions, troubles, and griefs of this world into one heap, we can still see that God allows us to taste the goodness of His providence by providing sustenance. This present life serves as a testament to His love. While we might easily falter in the face of temptations and trials, God provides us with comforts to alleviate His strictness towards us. Even when He chastises us, He always leaves room for His mercy, as He states in Habakkuk.

Moreover, God promised prosperity in this life to those who obey their fathers and mothers. It is true that Moses was referring to the land of Canaan when addressing the people of Israel. However, even today, wherever we set foot, we are under God's care. Therefore, we should all hope for the blessings promised of old to the Jews, to be brought into the land that God has prepared as our inheritance.

One might raise questions about why some disobedient individuals live while some good-natured, obedient ones die. Does this not seem to contradict God's promise in His law? The answer is that God does not wrong those whom He calls out of this world to take them to Himself. Also, temporal promises do not always play out uniformly. For instance, God promises to prosper those who serve and love Him with a sincere heart. However, we see many poor believers who are miserable in the world, despised, and rejected by all. In such cases, we must remember that God always attaches the condition of giving us what He deems expedient for us.

There are two types of God's promises, and it's essential to distinguish between them. Some of God's promises pertain to the salvation of our souls, such as His mercy, forgiveness of our sins, His guidance against Satan's temptations, and His strengthening us to resist temptations. In these matters, we must firmly believe that God will fulfill His promises, even exceeding our understanding or imagination, concerning our eternal salvation.

On the other hand, there are promises related to our temporal existence, intended to ease our earthly suffering. In these, God may grant us some relief but not necessarily remove all our hardships. He knows what is best for us, so we should not interpret these promises too literally, expecting Him to fulfill every word to the letter. Instead, we should remember that He acts in our best interest and benefit.

Now, if God takes someone out of this world at an early age, it is because He deems it to be for their welfare and salvation. This does not mean He has failed to fulfill His promise, as some may have obeyed their parents dutifully and yet were taken away from this world. God has His own reasons, which are hidden in His secret wisdom, and we should not question His decisions. We cannot fully understand His ways, but we know that this world is a temporary pilgrimage, and life on Earth is a journey leading us to heavenly rest. Therefore, we should not lament excessively when God

delivers us from the multitude of earthly miseries and brings us to a state of perfect happiness awaiting us in heaven.

No matter the circumstances, we should keep in mind what is mentioned here: when God prolongs our stay in this world, it serves as a token of His fatherly love towards us. Consequently, we ought to be mindful of the days we live in this life. Moses, in his song, also speaks of the wisdom in counting our days and reflecting on the brevity of life, urging us to hasten our journey towards heaven. Therefore, counting our days serves a dual purpose, which is not contradictory but complementary.

And when we reach the age of understanding, recognising that God has created us for His glory in this world, we must also acknowledge how we have dishonoured Him. We should reflect continually on the past, contemplating how we have spent our time. This reflection should be a daily and monthly practice. As each year ends, let us consider that God has bound us to Him in numerous ways. Have we truly appreciated His countless blessings throughout our lives? Sadly, our minds cannot fathom them all, not even a fraction. Therefore, we should review all our years and days, serving as a reminder to love and honour God when we realise how deeply indebted we are to Him for sustaining us and bearing patiently with our multitude of sins. Despite our countless faults, His goodness persists.

So, we should embrace this doctrine that this present life deserves our gratitude. God allows us to taste His fatherly goodness by maintaining us, extending His boundless love towards us, and transforming His corrections into our benefit. He also provides us with His word and sacraments, affirming His intention to draw us closer to Himself. Recognising our calling and purpose — to pass through this world and inherit heaven — we realise the worth of this present life when we acknowledge the blessings God bestows upon us here.

It is essential to note that prosperity and well-being in this world are contingent on God's favour. When we are told, "that thou mayest live long and fair," it emphasises that longevity alone is not the ultimate goal. We must also experience God's blessing. Wretched are the unbelievers who fail to comprehend this truth. They may live long, but what does their life amount to? Everything they possess may contribute to their condemnation. Their riches, joy, and pleasures could further provoke God's wrath, and their wealth may only magnify their wickedness, leading to greater damnation. Thus, life is truly wretched if we cannot discern God's goodness within it.

Moreover, we must move on to the second point, which is that those who are disobedient to God and their superiors find no rest; instead, they have a gnawing worm in their consciences, perpetually uneasy and on the brink of destruction. This demonstrates that there is no true well-being in this present life unless we are blessed by God. Although this diversity may not always be apparent outwardly, the faithful know within themselves that God provides everything they lack. Thus, God promises not only long life but also His blessing. It is as if He is saying, "You shall not live solely to endure suffering, damnation, theft, torment, afflictions, miseries, and troubles, or to grind your teeth in agony. You shall also taste My goodness. While I do not exempt you from the trials, conflicts, and griefs of this world, you will always find some comfort. You will feel that I have not forgotten you, that you are My children, and that all your sorrows and grief will ultimately turn to your benefit and welfare. While the devil seeks to keep you from Me and turn you away from your ultimate happiness, I will draw you to it through the afflictions you endure in this world."

Therefore, what we must bear in mind is that being filled with the benefits that God continually bestows upon us in this world and living in comfort are not the sole objectives. We must also recognise that it is God who enables us to prosper, provides us with life, sustains us in it, and supplies all

that is necessary and expedient. Let us imprint this truth deeply in our hearts.

If we desire to experience the fulfilment of God's promise, each of us must diligently fulfil our own duties. While I cannot address all the responsibilities outlined here for children, fathers, and mothers in detail at this moment, I will reserve them for another occasion. In brief, we must understand that God directs us towards our duty with the sole purpose of seeking our well-being and benefit. He intends for us to willingly accept the yoke He places upon our shoulders. Although it may be burdensome to be subject to those whom God has appointed as our superiors, let us first acknowledge our shortcomings. Then, let us submit to what He commands and imparts, assured that He seeks our welfare and will lead us through gentleness rather than severity. Let this make us more obedient.

Moreover, since all forms of authority are ultimately ordained by God, let us recognise that we cannot oppose them without rebelling against His Majesty and turning against Him.

On the contrary, if we willingly accept subjection, we can be assured that it is an acceptable offering to Him, and we should not doubt that our efforts will be in vain in His service. God will not reward us based on our merits or as though we have earned it, for we are obligated to obey Him in all that He commands. We should not think that He owes us anything or that we can bind Him to us in any way. However, out of His abundant goodness, He deigns to bless us and make us feel His favor when we diligently and reverently follow the things He has ordained in His Word. This is the reward we should hope for from God's hand. But this is not as the papacy claims, where they believe God has promised with them and therefore they deserve it. They falsely presume that God is beholden to them because He has willingly bound Himself. However, this is all due to God's free and undeserved goodness. We must not fall into such delusions but understand

that although God is in no way obligated to us, He graciously draws us to Himself through kindness, so that we may serve Him with willing and cheerful hearts.

He calls us to Him through various means, and the more stubborn we are, the worse it is if we do not willingly submit ourselves entirely to Him, seeking nothing but to conform ourselves to His good pleasure and will, which is our primary guide. We must renounce our own desires. Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults, and pray that He may be pleased to forgive them and cleanse us for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He guide us through His Holy Spirit so that we may be reformed to obey His Holy Will and follow the commandments He has given us as our rule. In doing so, we will demonstrate ourselves to be His true children, just as He has graciously revealed Himself as our gentle and loving Father. With this in mind, let us all say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Forty Fourth Sermon, the Second on the Sixth Chapter

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them,

forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." Ephesians 6:5-9

We have already seen that in addition to the general rule given by God to all people, there are also specific guidelines for how each person should behave in their respective roles and positions. We've discussed how husbands should treat their wives and how wives should behave towards their husbands, as well as the gentleness parents should show towards their children and the obedience children should exhibit towards their parents.

Now, St. Paul addresses the relationships between masters and servants. However, it's important to note that the servants mentioned here are not the same as the hired servants we have today. During that time, servants were often held in lifelong bondage, similar to what we now refer to as "bonded slaves." We don't need to dwell on these historical details, but we should thank God that such extreme forms of servitude have been abolished. In those days, masters had excessive authority over their servants, treating them like animals, with the power to even kill them for minor offences. They would imprison them, torture them, and subject them to inhumane treatment. Even some individuals who were considered righteous and God-fearing kept bondmen or slaves in their households, but they treated them more compassionately than the pagans did.

There were reasons that sometimes led masters to be more severe with their slaves. It was commonly believed that the more slaves one had, the more enemies one had, largely because they were kept in line through extreme force and violence, similar to the conditions endured by galley slaves at sea. This resulted in countless abuses, and some wealthy individuals had thousands of slaves in their households, leading to countless threats to their lives if precautions were not taken. All of this was the result of sin and disobedience, turning everything into chaos.

When we consider the authority masters had over their servants, we must conclude that it was entirely contrary to the natural order. We are all created in the image of God, and subjecting a rational creature, upon whom God has placed His mark, to such degradation was completely out of alignment with the way things should be. Yet, the consequences of our father Adam's disobedience and sin led to this extreme disorder.

On the other hand, given the extreme subjection of servants, it might seem that they were justified in trying to escape this oppressive system by any means possible. They could argue that although the Scriptures urged them to obey their masters and be subject to them, it was still a fair excuse to resist this heavy yoke. However, St. Paul counsels masters to temper their excessive authority and not abuse the power they held. It was essential to recognize that their authority, as granted by human law, was just, but it should not be misused. St. Paul encourages masters to moderate their superiority. Nevertheless, he also advises servants to submit to this authority and bear the heavy yoke they were under.

It might seem that St. Paul did a disservice to servants by not speaking out against the widespread abuse they suffered. Some might argue that he should have condemned these atrocities and called for a change. However, there are two important principles that prevented him from advocating for such a change.

Firstly, it was essential to remember that God allowed mankind to be thrown into confusion because of Adam's disobedience, and this was a reminder to all, both great and small, that Adam had disrupted the natural order. Therefore, St. Paul advised servants to bear their subjection patiently, recognizing that it came from God.

Secondly, the gospel did not come to change the common policies of the world or establish laws for the temporal state. While kings, princes, and magistrates should seek guidance from God's Word and align their actions

accordingly, they were also granted the freedom to create laws that they deemed suitable for governing their realm. They should pray for wisdom and discretion and seek counsel from God's Word, but the doctrines of salvation, related to the kingdom of heaven, and the rules for human conduct in this world are distinct matters.

This is why St. Paul didn't attempt to change the institution of slavery but instead exhorted servants to fulfill their duties with humility and reverence. He emphasized the importance of singleness of heart, which stands in contrast to the devious and deceitful ways some servants employed during that time.

It's important to note that simplicity here does not merely refer to serving one's master and seeking their benefit and obeying their commands but also to showing reverence. Servants needed to understand that even if their masters were not harsh or did not resort to physical punishment, they should still patiently accept their position, knowing that God ordained the superiority of masters over them.

Therefore, St. Paul used the term "singleness of heart" to emphasize that while people often pursue their own self-interest at the expense of others, servants should set aside such self-centeredness and affections that might hinder them from fulfilling their duties with sincerity and reverence.

St. Paul intentionally used the phrase "as serving the Lord," which is a crucial foundation upon which we should base our actions when fulfilling our duties towards others. Often, people tend to focus on their fellow creatures and question why they should submit to someone else's authority. They may ask why they should be considered inferior or why they should be subject to someone else's control. People frequently use these arguments to assert their own superiority and exempt themselves from the authority of others.

This mindset leads to a dangerous inclination where everyone desires to be the master, and no one is willing to acknowledge any form of subordination. This would result in a world where people behave like wild animals, or as the saying goes, "every man for himself," until we understand that God approves of our service to others.

It is crucial for us to be fully convinced that our service is acceptable to the Lord. We might manage to please people on the surface, but our hearts will never be genuinely and correctly inclined until we recognize that our service is ultimately directed towards the Lord.

Another obstacle that may hinder or discourage us in carrying out our duties towards others is the ingratitude and thanklessness of those we serve. Often, the people we help fail to appreciate our efforts and may even consider us mere instruments for their convenience. When we see that our service is met with ungratefulness and spite, it can be disheartening, to the point of making us want to give up entirely.

In such moments, we must recall St. Paul's teaching that God holds supreme authority over all degrees of superiority. He expects every person to conduct themselves with humility and adhere to the established order and structures in the world. This perspective can help us persevere in fulfilling our duties, knowing that our ultimate aim is to please God, even when others do not reciprocate our efforts positively.

First and foremost, we need to consider the general principle I am about to discuss. It is essential to understand that when we have superiors or authorities over us, we should not obey them out of compulsion but because God has ordained their positions. There is no authority except from God, as St. Paul states in Romans. While St. Paul specifically mentions rulers and magistrates in that context, it applies to all forms of authority, such as parents over their children, husbands over wives, and masters over servants. We must be fully convinced that God's intention is not to create chaos by

removing all order, but rather that some should have the authority to command and others should obey. This is an irrevocable decree from God, and we must accept and be content with it. If we claim to obey God while simultaneously seeking to eliminate the order He has established among us, it is mere hypocrisy.

This concept of submission encompasses all forms of subordination, including people obeying princes and magistrates, children obeying their parents, and wives obeying their husbands, as well as servants obeying their masters. Once we understand and accept this, we can better withstand the challenges and obstacles that hinder us from fulfilling our duties. When we question why we should submit to God's will, these objections become baseless and futile. Therefore, we must demonstrate our humility and willingness to bear the yoke placed upon us by God through our easy and willing obedience to human authority.

As I mentioned earlier, this principle applies to all forms of subjection, whether it be people submitting to princes and magistrates, children to their parents, wives to their husbands, or servants to their masters. When we are convinced of this, we can avoid confusion and rebellion. Instead, we should demonstrate by our actions that we are willing to please God and fulfil His will. God has ordained this authority, and we should willingly obey those appointed by Him without complaint. For example, in a household, a master may appoint someone to oversee certain tasks, and this person should be obeyed. Similarly, in a society, a prince may have officers, and their commands must be followed without question.

Therefore, it is crucial to internalize this counsel of St. Paul deeply in our hearts. When we willingly and wholeheartedly perform our duties towards those whom God has placed in authority over us, we are ultimately serving God Himself. Without this mindset, all outward displays of virtue before the world are like smoke. Some may appear to perform well in the eyes of those

they serve, but if they lack the right attitude towards God's ordained authority, their actions hold no value before Him. God desires to be honoured through our obedience to Him. While men may grant certain allowances and overlook disobedience, God expects us to acknowledge His authority and obey those He has appointed over us. Our obedience should not cause us to forget God or those in authority over us. Therefore, if we obey people while disregarding what God desires as an acceptable sacrifice to Himself, our actions are in vain. We should always turn our hearts towards God, dedicate ourselves to Him, and willingly serve Him with a free and uncoerced spirit.

For the same reason, as Paul expressly states, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." Those who put on a facade of obedience are seeking either reward, good treatment, a share of the abundance, or some special gift or recompense when they render service. This is what people pursue when they do not have God in mind. However, servants are told that even if those they serve are so difficult to please that they cannot expect any reward or favour from them, they must still fulfil their duties towards God. Thus, we learn that in all things God commands, we should not merely engage our outward actions, such as our eyes, feet, hands, and arms, but we must start with our inner affections. When St. Paul says, "Not with eyeservice," he is teaching us that if we desire our service to be accepted as good and lawful by the Lord, our hearts must lead the way and guide all our actions. There should be no deception; instead, our conduct should be straightforward, honest, and sincere. This exposes the emptiness of many outward displays of virtue; God regards them as nothing more than hypocrisy. To truly serve God well, we must abandon duplicity and build on a foundation of sincerity.

Moreover, while it is true that God prefers to be loved rather than feared, this does not negate the need for reverence and trembling before His

Majesty. When God reveals what He values most, it is clear that He requires willing affection and wholehearted devotion. If we approach Him grudgingly and half-heartedly while showing greater earnestness towards men, we are essentially seeking exemption from obeying God. Therefore, we must find joy and delight in His service, making it sweeter and dearer to us than all worldly liberty, even surpassing the allure of all the realms and kingdoms of the world.

St. Paul explicitly says, "Masters, according to the flesh," because Satan, in his efforts to hinder the spread of the gospel and foster hatred towards it, planted the heresy in many minds that once we become spiritual, we should no longer be subject to worldly or transient authority. However, this is not the true state of God's children.

In our time, we have witnessed a group of rebellious and fanatical people who have tried to abolish all forms of authority, eliminate taxes and imposts, and advocate for complete self-rule. They based their arguments on the belief that since God has adopted us as His children and the world has been renewed to graft us into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is unreasonable and unjust, even dishonourable to God, for unbelievers to rule over us or for those who call themselves believers to exercise sovereignty over their fellow brethren and neighbours. The devil has worked tirelessly to implant the idea in people's minds that the gospel undermines all order in the world, intending to make people despise it and renounce it. Saying that no one is better than another is a persuasive and enticing message. Thus, St. Paul explicitly states that even though masters have temporal authority, and their superiority pertains only to the flesh, which is this present world and transient life, they should not be deprived of their rights. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to establish a chaotic equality where no distinction exists between the great and the humble. His purpose was for everyone to remain peacefully within their respective callings without pride or

arrogance, as stated in the Psalms. The path to humility and meekness is for each person to focus on their own calling.

Therefore, those in positions of authority should not become proud and presumptuous but humble themselves before God, recognising that they are doubly bound to Him for elevating them. Meanwhile, those in less exalted positions should accept their roles without seeking what does not belong to them. It is essential for fathers to elicit the required obedience from their children through gentleness, husbands to treat their wives with harmony and kindness, princes not to mistreat their subjects like wretched beasts, and masters not to exploit their servants excessively. Those in humbler circumstances should understand that God has placed them in their positions as if He appointed their place with His own hand. Therefore, the common people should not seek to advance themselves but be content with their status. This is why St. Paul explicitly includes the phrase "as touching the flesh." It is not to denigrate masters for their authority over slaves but to preclude any objections that people might raise when seeking exemptions from obeying God and the order He has established. It also reminds us that this subjection does not harm the faithful; they can still maintain full liberty regarding their souls. The devil exploits this notion as well, with people asking why they should be made slaves when our Lord Jesus Christ has shed His blood to secure our freedom. However, as Paul elaborates in the fifth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, the bondage we offer to our superiors is limited to the flesh, and our souls and consciences remain ever free before God. Therefore, it is a simplistic objection to argue that, given our Lord Jesus Christ's grant of freedom, people should not impose bondage on us. He has granted us freedom concerning our souls, but it remains His will that principalities and lordships continue in the world. This inevitably results in some being subject and others having preeminence and authority.

Since our Lord has distinguished between the two realms, that of the body and the soul, and one is spiritual, governed by His Word, concerning our path to attain the kingdom of heaven. However, when it comes to our conduct towards our fellow human beings, who share our earthly existence, we must adapt to good governance and civil order. Let us be assured that, despite our position, we are no worse in the eyes of God than kings and princes, even if all men do not tremble before us. In fact, the acts of service we perform for His creatures serve to exalt and glorify God all the more. One must possess a noble spirit to willingly humble themselves and obey, regardless of the greatness, skill, or wealth of those to whom they submit. Even if those who are subject possess qualities suitable for governance, they should not covet a change in their status. Paul has eliminated any pretext for such behaviour. Thus, we must learn from the lesson presented here that, first and foremost, we must keep God continually in view, understanding that He has placed us in this world to serve one another with humility, never disdaining our duty, even towards those who may not be as capable as we desire.

Once we have reached this understanding, it is certain that each of us will willingly submit to the state to which God has called us and remain in the position He has assigned. If St. Paul required such obedience from the slaves of his time, there is even less excuse for today's hired servants. Let us compare the two situations. As I mentioned earlier, those unfortunate souls were subjected to such harsh treatment that their masters had the power to imprison, confine them in stocks, torture, dismember, and even kill them. It was a dire situation, and their bondage was for life and death, with no set term except among the Jews, where God had established limits.

The common and general law among all nations stipulated that bondsmen and their offspring should remain in bondage indefinitely. So, in this state, a father had no more claim to his child than to a horse or any other beast that produced offspring. Such a situation was as dreadful as a hundred deaths.

Indeed, man has always sought liberty, ease, and the ability to enjoy his bread in peace. These unfortunate slaves did not have the privilege of bread at their own discretion. Concerning their persons, they were in a worse condition than captives, as I mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, God strictly commanded them to bear this state patiently and fulfil their duties faithfully and cheerfully.

Now, what can be said of hired servants today, who can seek employment elsewhere and receive their wages after a year's service, being treated much more kindly and generously than those unfortunate slaves of the past? These servants earned their bread by labouring in their trades and crafts, often having barely enough to eat and drinking water, many times less than they desired. They were confined to cabins and forced to perform their tasks. Therefore, if modern servants cannot bear the state that God has placed upon their shoulders, they are entirely inexcusable. The same can be said of subjects in relation to their magistrates. Thus, since we see that our Lord is lenient with us, we are all the more obligated to adhere to the subjection that St. Paul speaks of here.

Furthermore, we must consider the words regarding a free and cheerful hearted willingness. It is impossible for us to find any satisfaction or joy in our state or calling unless we know that it is for our benefit and well-being. We cannot derive great profit from serving creatures. Therefore, we must always turn to our God, aiming for the mark that, since He has been so good and gracious to us by placing us in this world and sustaining us here, and has shown Himself to be such a good Father to us, providing all that we have, we must show reverence to His Majesty. We should strive to please Him in such a way that we do not hesitate to be subject to men or take it as a source of grief or scorn. In this way, our state will be greatly sweetened when we know that God accepts it as a good offering from us.

That is also why St. Paul presents these ideas in harmony rather than in opposition. He mentions that we must serve God on behalf of our masters with all willingness, and subsequently he states God's Will on the other side. This is a harmonious melody, indicating that it is God's will for servants to obey their masters. By understanding this, we can dispel any objections that may hinder us or lead us astray. When the devil tempts us to think anything strange about God's commands, he lures us towards our own destruction. Therefore, let us embrace God's Will as our supreme welfare and ultimate happiness, being assured that, no matter how we are treated by Him, He still loves us and intends what is good for us. Let this serve as one point.

If we have such conviction deeply rooted in our hearts, it is certain that the willingness Simple speaks of will naturally follow. In this way, we will not find ourselves resenting it, as some do when they are compelled to do things against their will. They may grumble about it, and although they may not openly express it, bitterness resides in their hearts. Therefore, St. Paul encourages willingness, meaning that we should do everything with goodwill and freely. This will make our state less disagreeable.

For those who only act out of force and compulsion cannot ensure the necessity of obedience. Nevertheless, they become tormentors to themselves, causing more harm to their own souls than they could ever suffer from external sorrows. Even when we are treated harshly by our masters, superiors, or magistrates, if we are certain that God accepts our service, it mitigates the grief we might feel. Once we have fulfilled our duty, we find solace in communion with God and rest in the relief He provides for our infirmities. Additionally, we should always keep our eyes on heavenly life and draw courage from it to continue walking forward, even in the face of many obstacles.

We can see that God's children will always fare much better when they serve God willingly in their duties than those who approach it as if nine men held them back. When one discharges their responsibilities with reluctance and complaints, they gain no real benefit from their service. Furthermore, let us observe that St. Paul repeatedly directs our focus back to God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is to dispel the misconception that if others mistreat us, our bond with them is broken, and thus we can exempt ourselves from subjection. For instance, a servant might have an overly severe master and wonder why they should comply. Similarly, if masters do not fulfill their duties towards their servants, they might think they are no longer bound to obey. However, St. Paul explicitly states that even if masters are cruel and do not spare their subordinates, their authority is not diminished. They may be unworthy of authority in their own right, but the inferiors must still obey because God has ordained it so.

This emphasizes that masters should not withhold what belongs to their servants and that they should consider that, although civil laws may grant them freedom of action, God does not grant them unrestricted freedom. Both masters and servants must heed this principle. For masters, St. Paul provides a rule: they must be careful in their exercise of authority because they have a common Master in heaven. This heavenly Master is impartial when it comes to servants. Therefore, St. Paul encourages servants by saying, "My friends, though you may not receive the recompense in this world that you desire, rest assured that God does not consider you as slaves. While you may be despised in the world's eyes, you have an inheritance in heaven, and the Lord accepts your service. You will receive your reward as if you were kings and princes."

In summary, it is evident that Simple did not seek to curry favour with the great and rich by upholding their rights over their slaves. He also aimed to instill humility and meekness in all, preventing any from exalting themselves excessively. Similarly, ministers of the church and God's word

must follow the same pattern, sparing neither the great nor the small, but reminding each person of their duties. Since God shows no partiality, His word must be handled honestly, and ministers must not be intimidated by the authority and prominence of individuals in the eyes of the world. Simple, in line with St. Paul, emphasises that those who preach God's word must tear down all pride and arrogance and bring every person's loftiness low when they attempt to elevate themselves against our Lord Jesus Christ and oppose His doctrine. Ministers of God's word must exhort those in humble positions to fulfill their duties and encourage the poor and oppressed to bear their circumstances patiently without complaint, knowing that by doing so, they are not rebelling against men but against God.

On the other side, he instructs the masters that they should not behave like beasts that consume and exploit others, but rather they should conduct themselves with kindness. Even the pagans themselves, when they chose to speak in accordance with natural justice, stated that it was not fitting for masters to abuse their authority over their servants. They said that bondmen and slaves should be treated like hired workers paid by the day. If even the pagans could speak this way without having the understanding granted by God, what excuse is there now for those who have been educated in God's school, where there is a brotherhood among both the great and the small, and where masters should become as fathers to their servants, since they all share the same hope of eternal life? If those in authority then set their feet upon the throats of others by abusing their power, what a terrible thing it is!

Therefore, both masters and servants should carefully consider how to conduct themselves in their respective roles. The inferior should not grumble when the Lord allows them to endure many wrongs in this world and be subjected to mockery and scorn. Even if they were to endure a hundred times more, they should not rebel against God, for that would be like kicking against the spur. The great ones should also remember that the closer God has drawn them to Himself and granted them preeminence, the

more He expects them to conform to His image and likeness. We find in God nothing but goodness, as throughout all of Scripture, He is portrayed as the source of humility, gentleness, and mercy. Therefore, those in positions of honor should reflect upon this, for if they neglect their duty, they shall pay dearly for their worldly honor while abusing God's remarkable blessing.

Since both masters and servants are often resistant to conform, such as the oppressed who cannot help but grumble and are tempted to break free from all bonds, they must be restrained by God's word and earnest exhortations. The great ones should be humbled and remember their mortality, as they sometimes imagine themselves beyond the realm of mortal men. It is certain that if they regard their state through the lens of the humblest individuals, it will lead them to humility. Thus, God's word must prevail in this matter, restraining both the high and the low, so that each person may live according to their calling and quietly obey God. We should desire nothing more than to fulfill our duty towards Him and all His creations until we reach the everlasting kingdom, where we will share in His glory, majesty, and all the good things that come from Him.

Now, let us kneel before the majesty of our benevolent God, acknowledging our sins and beseeching Him to grant us true and heartfelt repentance. May our sorrow for offending Him be so profound that it compels us to despise our vices and seek His forgiveness, so that He may guide us with His Holy Spirit, enabling us to live according to His holy commandments and bearing with our weaknesses until we are cleansed and purified. And so, let us pray:

"Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Forty Fifth Sermon, the Third on the Sixth Chapter

> "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against incipalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." - Ephesians 6:10-12

We understand that prosperity often leads individuals to become conceited, thinking they are entitled to privileges and exempt from common rules, believing they can act without restraint. Conversely, the most impoverished among us, often despised and neglected, may feel abandoned by God, questioning His care for them. Therefore, it is essential to humble those who, intoxicated by their positions of authority and influence, have grown arrogant. Here, they are reminded that they have a heavenly master who will hold them accountable, even if they manage to evade the judgments of men.

On the other hand, it is of utmost importance to offer solace to those on the verge of despair, those tempted to lose hope. In these words, Paul addresses both concerns. He reassures the servants, urging them not to fear, for God watches over them as they walk in His reverence. He affirms that God values and acknowledges their service as if they held an honorable and esteemed place in the world. To the Masters, he conveys the truth that they have a superior authority in heaven before whom they must answer. Their worldly power and lofty status will not serve as recompense, for all such earthly distinctions lose their significance in the presence of the sovereign judge.

Furthermore, he underscores the importance of comforting the faint-hearted, especially those who bear the world's contempt. They must be reminded that God has not forsaken them and that it is His purpose to humble them for a time. Each of us should apply this lesson according to the circumstances God has placed us in. When we encounter unjust tribulations, when others neglect or cast us aside, or when we endure various forms of ridicule, we must remember that we remain under God's protection. He esteems and treasures us, and in due course, He will manifest His care for us. Even in moments when it seems that God is distant, when we might entertain doubts of His remembrance, we should hold fast to the knowledge that we are still cherished by Him.

Nevertheless, after He has humbled us for a period and tested our humility and obedience, we will come to realize that our faithful and unwavering walk in His fear will be taken into account in the end. Our toil will not have been futile, and this is a truth we must hold dear, especially when the mighty and powerful of the world exalt themselves in their pride, potentially treading upon us. Nonetheless, let all who exercise authority over others treat them with kindness and remember that God has not granted them dominion without reserving His own authority. Whether one is esteemed, holds power, or possesses any advantage over their fellow beings, keep in mind: there is no partiality before God.

In this temporal realm, some may lead while others follow, yet when the trumpet of judgment resounds, and we must all stand before the supreme judge, these distinctions will cease to have significance. Even kings and rulers must come to acknowledge this reality, as the Scripture proclaims, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High." God has appointed them as His representatives, elevating them to positions of honor. Nonetheless, they too shall face mortality, just like any ordinary person. In that moment, they shall confront their own transience, for all their worldly splendor will fade into obscurity. Indeed, the term "person" serves as a

reminder that it pertains to transitory things, which we cannot bring before God as if they were truly our possessions.

When Scripture declares that there is no partiality before God, it essentially signifies that He will judge us solely as mortal human beings, frail and feeble. We cannot rely on our wealth, status, titles, nobility, or any worldly acquisitions to shield us. The affluent cannot bear their riches, lands, or possessions with them to elevate themselves above others. Those who held exalted positions will not be able to assert, "All trembled under my authority," for all such worldly accomplishments will bear no weight before God. All worldly grandeur and dominion will serve no purpose, and each individual shall be regarded as a child of Adam. Thus, those who may have cause to exalt themselves should always remember that worldly renown and acclaim shall dissipate like vapor and be utterly consumed when we confront the judgment of our God.

Therefore, let every individual, whether of high or lowly status, embrace humility and trust. This is why St. James encourages, "Let the humble take pride in their exalted position." Why, you may ask? It is because God has graciously adopted us as His children. Even though we may be as insignificant as earthworms, even if the world regards us as worthless and discarded, God has chosen to mark us as His own beloved offspring. He has granted us the extraordinary privilege of addressing Him as our Father with unwavering confidence. Therefore, we have every reason to take pride in our exalted position, even if we are considered of lowly stature, for we possess a lofty standing by which God has elevated us above the entire world.

Conversely, St. James asserts that those who hold great influence and power should find their pride in their humility. When unbelievers succumb to the snare of arrogance, elevating themselves so high that they disdain God's authority, considering themselves exempt from all moral obligations and

believing their status to be singular and detached from the rest of humanity, believers must comprehend that all worldly honor and distinction are transitory and fleeting. When we stand before God, we will have nothing to lean on, whether it be worldly honors or possessions. The worldly trappings referred to as "things" in Scripture, such as garments and possessions, are only temporary embellishments.

Consider this analogy: if a person bedecked in splendid attire seeks to evade God's judgment by asserting that they clothed themselves in their resplendent plumage and that the world esteemed them, they are gravely mistaken. All these worldly adornments must be cast aside when God summons us to account. Likewise, those who are destitute and may barely cover their bodies, perhaps with mere tattered and threadbare garments, should not deem themselves less valued by God. There will be no distinctions in worldly standing; ultimately, we will all stand as we truly are —fragile human beings and descendants of Adam. In essence, this is the lesson we should draw from this.

After the Apostle Paul has outlined the specific responsibilities of each individual, he returns once more to the broader teachings of the faith. As mentioned previously, there exists a universal principle that applies to all individuals without exception, encapsulated within God's law. It directs us to lead lives of sanctity, dedicating ourselves to His divine service, loving one another, living with purity and self-restraint, displaying gentleness and integrity. This universal guideline is followed by an elucidation that every individual must also recognize their own calling, just as a husband has specific duties towards his wife, and a wife towards her husband, as we have discussed previously. Paul has expounded upon all these aspects.

Now, the Apostle addresses all of us collectively, saying, "Furthermore, my fellow believers, find your strength in the Lord." Here, he reveals that our journey in the service of God is not without its challenges. We must put in

the effort to prepare ourselves for this task. It's true that if our nature were pure and uncorrupted, if we were whole and healthy, we would willingly and joyfully follow God's commandments, as the faithful have experienced. When God touches them deeply, they willingly respond. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said that His yoke is not burdensome or harsh. He meant that He desires to guide us with gentleness and love.

However, when we consider our own condition and realize how weak we are in maintaining steadfastness and consistency in following the path God has laid out for us, we understand why the Apostle urges us here to find our strength. In other words, he is saying, "I have encouraged you to fulfill your duties, but I am aware that each of you will face such resistance within yourselves that you will struggle to overcome your sinful desires unless you fight courageously. Do not use your weakness as an excuse when your passions strongly rebel against God on one side, and you, on the other hand, are feeble. Do not think this will absolve you before God, as you will be judged for your sins."

So, what should you do? "Find your strength in the Lord," he says. This means that even though many people, plagued by sinful thoughts and affections, tend to yield to their sins and believe they are excused, you should acknowledge your own imperfections and seek a remedy for them. And what is that remedy? It is to strengthen yourselves. In other words, you must exert significant effort. The path is challenging, and you will encounter numerous obstacles. The devil will not cease to use every possible means to divert you from the right path, and you will face many trials and tribulations. His cunning is boundless, and his traps are countless.

Furthermore, he has attacked us in various ways, and we have not had the means to resist him. Therefore, it is essential for us to gain strength, but he says, "In the Lord," so that people do not think they can handle things through their own willpower and cleverness. So, "find your strength in the

Lord," he says, "indeed, in the mightiness of His power." When God grants us such power, we need not doubt our victory over all the devil's schemes, provided we remain vigilant and do not fall asleep. Thus, let us call upon God to aid and uphold us when necessary. These two aspects should go hand in hand in our lives: vigilance and a sincere desire to call upon God.

This passage holds great significance in a few simple words. First, it teaches us that if we desire to live in accordance with God's will, we must not be idle. Each of us carries our own burdens, and unless we are exceedingly frail, we should cast off the things that weigh us down. We must understand that in our service to God, we must exert ourselves and engage in a battle against the devil. The devil is not idle and will not allow us to fulfill our duties with ease, as if we were taking a leisurely stroll. Instead, he will place thorns and obstacles in our path to hinder us. He will throw challenges at us that could easily overwhelm us many times over unless God comes to our aid. Therefore, since we cannot walk in the fear of God without engaging in a struggle, we should heed St. Paul's warning.

Furthermore, St. Paul intended to make us aware of our own weakness. We know that people are generally inclined to indulge in their pleasures and seek nothing but to revel in them. Some even presume they possess the strength to perform wonders, believing themselves as robust as required. This misconception has deceived wretched individuals throughout history and led to the prevalence of the idea of free will. However, St. Paul informs us here that we need to be strengthened, indicating that we are naturally weak. He articulates this more clearly by stating that our strength should be "in the Lord," emphasizing that He possesses all the power needed to grant us the strength required. Therefore, if we attempt anything without calling upon Him, we shall be punished for our recklessness and pride.

St. Paul shows us that individuals degrade themselves through their overconfidence, imagining they possess qualities they do not have. This

conceit diverts them from calling upon God. It might be argued that it is a superfluous exhortation for us to "be strong in the Lord" because no one can sustain themselves; it is not within anyone's power to do so. However, we do observe that God works in such a way within us that we accomplish deeds similar to His. Yet, this must be understood as a work that originates elsewhere, not from within ourselves. We are not like inanimate logs, and thus, we do perform good deeds. Nevertheless, we must recognize that this working comes from a source beyond ourselves and is not due to our own abilities. If it is asked whether people can do good, the answer is yes, but not of their own accord or volition, but solely because they are guided by the Holy Spirit. If it is asked whether people can do evil, the answer is yes, as they are inclined towards it; it is their common inclination.

So, people do evil by their own inclination, and the root of it resides within them. The blame for it is rightfully attributed to them, and they should not search for futile excuses. Those who have done evil will always remain under condemnation. However, we must carefully consider that God works within us when we do good, and the praise for it should be rightfully given to Him. Although there is nothing in us or on our part when we serve God, St. Paul's exhortation to be strengthened in God is not in vain. We must not be indolent, as he mentions elsewhere when he says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who gives both the will and the ability to perform it, all according to His good pleasure, freely and out of His own mercy."

At first glance, this statement may seem strange, as St. Paul seems to allow us to work out our salvation. Is it within us to do so? No. But he corrects any presumption or arrogance by adding that it must be done with trembling and in fear. This means that we must distrust ourselves, humbling ourselves to acknowledge that we cannot even move one of our little fingers or think a good thought unless God grants it to us from above. He further reinforces this point by concluding that God provides both the will and the ability to

act. Therefore, it is God who accomplishes everything, yet we do not cease to act, but we act through Him and in Him, as I have already explained.

In summary, the Holy Scripture does not state that God renews us with His Holy Spirit only for us to relapse into forgetfulness. Instead, it emphasizes that this renewal is intended to glorify God and prevent us from believing that we are the architects of our own salvation. We must give Him all the credit for the goodness that He instills within us. Regardless of the circumstances in the world, we must remain vigilant, guarding against the devil and striving to devote ourselves to goodness. Each of us must make an effort, restraining our own intellect and wicked will to make them obedient to God. Ultimately, all credit must be attributed to Him.

His addition of the words "the mighty power of God" is meant to dispel any doubts within us. We often become discouraged, thinking that we cannot accomplish what He has commanded us. In the end, we tend to lose heart. However, St. Paul reassures us by saying that God will manifest His mighty and victorious power. It is said that He who is on our side is stronger than the entire world. Knowing that God is with us and upholds us with His power should alleviate our fear of being overcome by Satan. We can rest assured that despite the difficulties we face, we will ultimately triumph by relying on God's invincible power.

Indeed, God perfects His power in our weakness. This means that while He works within us, we may stumble, falter, and stray from the path. Our journey is marked by limping and setbacks. However, God's assistance, through the Holy Spirit, is designed to keep us humble. Our weakness is intertwined with God's strength to teach us the importance of calling upon Him and seeking refuge in Him. On our own, we tend to obscure God's glory, so He awakens us to our wretchedness. He reminds us that we would fall countless times if He did not hold us by the hand. God allows our weaknesses to remain to draw us closer to Him and cultivate humility

within us. This way, we can praise Him for not allowing our falls to be fatal and recognize that without His help, we would perish.

Therefore, under St. Paul's previous statement, we must also understand that God leaves some weakness in us as long as we live in this world. Yet, He does so not to highlight our frailty but to demonstrate His invincible power in enabling us to prevail. We must hold firmly to the conviction that even when Satan does his utmost, we must continue on our journey, knowing that God's power will come to our aid. God's power is not ordinary; it is mighty and transcends all earthly limitations.

Now, we can discern the stark contrast between the teachings of the papists and our own, which are firmly rooted in Holy Scripture. These blind Richards claim that they can perform wonders through their free will. They might acknowledge God's role in their inclination towards evil, but they insist that they are restrained by Him. According to them, God merely lends a helping hand when needed. They attribute most of their power to their own free will and natural abilities. However, even after they have exerted their utmost effort, they always remain in doubt. If they manage to hold their ground for a brief moment, they quickly stumble and cannot recover.

In contrast, our belief is that human beings must be utterly humbled, as the Holy Spirit has taught us. We should not retain even a trace of power within ourselves but be completely emptied. Once we reach this point, our Lord assures us that He will not forsake us. We must return to Him, acknowledge our weaknesses, and be ready to receive from Him. We should approach Him with open hearts, devoid of pride. Unlike the papists, who boast initially but often fall short, we rely on God's strength and stand firm against Satan's attacks, all the fortifications of hell, and the obstacles and temptations of the world.

This is how we should apply St. Paul's lesson. After emphasising the mighty power of God, he tells us that we must equip ourselves with His complete

armour. In other words, it is our own fault that we are not well-prepared and lack the weapons to overcome Satan's assaults. Our negligence leads to frequent defeats. God not only promises to support us with His power to the extent that we will prevail, but He also provides us with the means to defend ourselves. Nevertheless, we often neglect to use these readily available means. Now, what exactly is this armour? St. Paul will explain it in due course. For now, it suffices to understand his intention. When he says we must be armed with God's complete armour, he rebukes our negligence in failing to utilize the resources He has provided. We readily accept the idea that God is willing to help us and that we can be victorious against our enemies as long as He is on our side.

However, we often content ourselves with inaction, believing that our enemy is too strong for us to confront. We tend to let God's armour remain idle and unutilised, preferring that it stays prepared for us without us having to use it. This is why we are commanded to put on this armour, which means applying it for our own use. Our situation necessitates us to engage in battle, and God intends for us to be armed so that the devil cannot catch us unprepared.

St. Paul uses not only the word "armour" but also "outfit" to emphasise that we must be fully equipped, from head to toe. I will elaborate on this point in more detail later. His message in this text is that our ingratitude becomes all the more apparent when we consider that God has armed us comprehensively, leaving nothing missing except our own involvement. Indeed, some of us may apply a portion of God's armour for our use, not entirely rejecting His grace. However, we often do not fully equip ourselves as we should, missing out on the virtues that God offers us.

It is certain that God has provided us with sufficient means to fight from all directions – from the right, left, above, and below. We must not despise these means but receive them willingly, acknowledging our shortcomings.

This should motivate us to arm ourselves and accept the help that God generously provides. By doing so, we can withstand all the devil's assaults. This further reinforces the point that we cannot serve God at our own leisure. Obedience to God requires us to be armed, as the devil relentlessly troubles and obstructs us. Therefore, if we wish to walk in the fear of our God, we must be prepared for battle, for our enemy will never allow us to rest.

St. Paul makes it clear that Satan's assaults on us to lead us into wickedness are not occasional but a continuous battle. After one attack from one direction, he returns from another, requiring us to strengthen ourselves and repel him with armour no matter where he strikes. Furthermore, he emphasises that our fight is not against mere human beings but against the powers and principalities of the air, against the rulers of the world, and against wicked spirits from heaven. Often, when we perceive an enemy as weak and incapable of harming us, we become complacent and underestimate their potential. This has led many who were thought to be valiant to fall short because they underestimated their foe.

St. Paul reminds us that our adversaries are not ordinary mortals but far surpass them. He calls them "powers and principalities," suggesting that they have authority and dominance over us. Even if we were to engage an enemy who had the upper hand, it would be deeply troubling. These demonic forces not only have authority but also employ countless stratagems and ambushes to ensnare us. Our lack of vigilance and readiness is evident despite these warnings, and we seem to be in a state of apathy.

St. Peter similarly warns us, comparing the devil to a roaring lion seeking prey to devour. This serves to remind us not to be careless or overly confident but to remain steadfast. We should not be overwhelmed with excessive fear; instead, we should rely on faith. Both St. Peter and St. Paul

stress that the devil is powerful, but God's armour equips us to overcome Satan and his attacks, ultimately gaining the upper hand.

Therefore, we must remember that whenever we encounter obstacles hindering our path in God's call, and when we see that we fall short as required, we must acknowledge our weakness. We should reject the notions of popery, such as the idea of free will and preparatory works, which delude people into thinking they can approach God on their own merits. All such misconceptions must be cast aside.

Once we have admitted our complete inability to achieve anything by ourselves, we should turn our attention to our enemy. This should not overwhelm us to the point of despair, but rather, it should serve as a wake-up call, motivating us to seek help from God through prayer and supplication, and to embrace His promises with unwavering faith. God's promises are more powerful than anything in the world, and we should trust that He will always prevail over Satan and his schemes. God has promised us His infinite power and support in our times of need.

In light of the fact that we are surrounded by many enemies and are inherently prone to evil while lacking any inherent goodness, we should walk in a state of vigilance and caution. It is essential to recognise our own weaknesses and be stirred by fear due to the presence of our enemies, who could easily overwhelm us if not for the sustaining hand of God. Despite our weaknesses, we must move forward with heads held high, confident in the promised help from above. We will experience God's strength manifesting itself through our weaknesses, allowing us to remain unvanquished. Even in the midst of fierce battles and severe trials, where we may feel the intensity of the struggle, we should know that all will ultimately work to our advantage. Our trials will serve to humble us and motivate us to call upon God. They will also prompt us to give thanks and

honour to Him when we realise that it is He who grants us the grace to overcome our enemies.

To live a well-ordered life, it is essential to first know God and recognise that we owe Him for all the goodness and blessings we receive. This knowledge should not lead to complacency but should instead inspire us to continually glorify Him by walking in His fear. Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that our awareness of them will lead us to seek Him. May we not only obtain forgiveness for our past faults but also be strengthened to live our entire lives in accordance with His holy commandments, in line with the measure of grace He has bestowed upon us. We pray that He may cleanse us from the vices and blemishes that stain us as we journey through this world. And thus, we say, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc."

The Forty Sixth Sermon, the Fourth on the Sixth Chapter

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." - Ephesians 6:11-17

In the earlier discussion, I explained why St. Paul speaks here about the strength and cunning of Satan. This is to awaken us, so we aren't caught off guard, as has happened many times before. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand the nature of our enemy, which should motivate us to resist him. True, when we first consider our own weakness compared to Satan's schemes and preparations, we might be disheartened. However, the solution is clear, as I mentioned before, and as I will elaborate on further. First, he tells us that the battle we are engaged in is much harder and more perilous than if all the men in the world were against us because Satan's power surpasses them all. That is why he says our struggle is not against flesh and blood. With these words, he teaches us that our conflict is not solely with mortal men. It is true that men often challenge us, and they may serve as Satan's instruments to torment us. But that's not the real issue. The devil uses them to drive us to despair, provoke us to seek revenge, or make us complain against God. Ultimately, it is the wicked do not trouble us; they are incited by another, namely Satan, who is their ruler and directs their actions to achieve his ends. So, if we focus only on men, we are like dogs that bite at the stone thrown at them and neglect the hand that threw it. Similarly, we act foolishly when we think our struggle is only against men and fail to consider our invisible enemy. Therefore, let us remember the important point here, which is that Satan is our main adversary. Even though he employs various means to trouble us and turn us away from the fear of God, we must always keep our eyes on him to remain vigilant.

One might find it strange that the devils are the principalities of the air, lords of the world, and princes of heaven, as if they were somehow challenging God. However, when we understand St. Paul's intent, this becomes clear. There is no talk here of the devil having power that can rival God. Instead, we must firmly believe that the devil is an executor of God's

judgments and can only do what is permitted and allowed by God. If we consider the first chapter of Job, where the devil appears among the angels, who are referred to as the children of God, seeking permission to cause harm, it should satisfy our understanding. While the devil seeks to pervert and disrupt everything, God keeps him restrained, and the devil can only do what God permits. Even when the devils scheme and plan, they cannot act without God's consent. Indeed, if God has ordained something and given them specific instructions, they can carry it out. However, it is essential to recognize that the devil having any power or authority over humanity, who are created in the image of God, is unreasonable. If we had remained in our original state as created by God, the devil would have had no advantage over us. But because we are now in darkness and enslaved by our fallen nature, the devil is referred to as the ruler of the world. Therefore, we must understand that St. Paul's elevation of the devil's power serves to emphasize the source of this power, as he will explain further regarding the darkness of the world.

And what is the source of this power? So that we do not think that God's sovereign rule is diminished by the devil's influence. Their power stems from the fact that this world is in darkness. Although the sun and moon shine upon us, we are still plunged into the dungeon of death and spiritual blindness because we are banished from the light of life, which is in God. Due to our lack of knowledge of Him, and our entanglement in wickedness, and the perversion of our reason, Satan reigns over us. Thus, the question of how the devils are referred to as the princes of the air and have such authority in this world, which was created by God, even though it has fallen from its original order due to the fall of man, is resolved. In any case, the devils have such power over us that we would be helpless against them if God were not our shield and protector, fighting on our behalf when we are powerless.

It's important to note that we need to suppress the foolish presumption deeply rooted in our hearts, where we tend to exalt ourselves. Scripture, however, calls us the slaves of the devil. As long as we do not have Jesus Christ as our King due to Adam's fall, the devil is our prince and has complete authority over us, and we are subjected to him. Despite the bravado of some who make claims and assertions, the Holy Spirit has spoken and issued an unalterable verdict that the devil is our prince, and we remain under his dominion until we are set free by our Lord Jesus Christ, as mentioned in the eighth chapter of John, where Christ liberates us from the curse, tyranny, and bondage of Satan.

Given our wretched and fallen state, the devil has authority over us, and we need to be rescued in a remarkable manner. This is why we must humble ourselves, as I explained earlier, and not rely on our perceived strength. We should also be vigilant, seeking God and praying for His protection, so that we are not given up as prey to our enemies. It is crucial for each of us to recognize that, even though we can do nothing on our own, God works through us. He does not want us to be mere spectators but to actively engage in the battle, overcoming all obstacles and challenges. Thus, while we may encounter hindrances and difficulties, we must press on without letting them deter us.

In summary, we should understand this text to mean that we must continue to resist the wicked days until we have completed everything. St. Paul reminds us that it is not enough to fight valiantly for a month or a year; we must endure to the end, throughout our entire lives. Even though God sometimes grants us moments of respite from severe trials, there will always be times of great testing and temptation. Therefore, we must be prepared and equipped to face and conquer them. This is not contrary to God's will; He could choose to treat us more gently but often allows us to endure difficulties. As a result, we must be prepared for continual battles and challenges, always ready to overcome them. It is important to note that

such trials serve to refine our faith, which is more precious than gold, as it is tested by fire, so that it may be purified and perfected.

Therefore, let us ponder well what is said here, namely, that we must finish what we start. This is so that no one should become complacent after holding on for a while and expending great effort in God's service. It is vital to continue until the end. Simple provides us with an example of this by his own actions. Even though he had accomplished remarkable feats, such as battling at sea and on land in various ways, he did not rest on his laurels. Instead, he declared that he forgot what was behind and pressed on, striving for the fellowship of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is to prevent people from thinking they have done enough and can now take it easy. Some might say, "I have laboured tirelessly for 20 or 30 years. The world has witnessed my faithfulness, zeal, and dedication to serving God. I have diligently carried out what my calling required. Therefore, I can now rest." However, we should not become complacent. Regardless of what we have achieved, we must forget the past and look ahead to the unfinished work. We have not yet attained the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there are still many imperfections in us. Our faith needs further refinement, like gold in a furnace. Thus, we must persevere until we have completed everything.

To clarify, what is meant by "finishing all things" is living in obedience to our God and dying in accordance with His will. We should not desire to linger in this world until we are weary of life. Instead, we should always be prepared to depart when it pleases God. In doing so, whether we live or die, we continue to be devoted to God, offering ourselves to Him as true sacrifices. We should seek nothing more than to surrender our souls and bodies into God's hands. Therefore, we must stand firm, armed with faith, righteousness, truth, God's word, and the gospel, as described by St. Paul.

It is not necessary to dwell on why St. Paul assigns the title of helmet, breastplate, and shield to different aspects of the Christian's armor. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he briefly touched on the same concept, mentioning the helmet of faith and charity. The intent here is not to provide a detailed breakdown of each piece of a Christian's armor, but to convey that by accepting the means provided by God and diligently serving Him, we will be equipped with all the necessary pieces. We need not fear, as we will have the means to withstand and overcome our enemies. St. Paul's primary message is clear. He emphasizes that we should live in truth, righteousness, and holiness, free from hypocrisy, and serve God with a sincere heart, not for appearance's sake but with genuine intent. We must understand that uprightness and soundness of life serve as our breastplate.

Thus, we must take to heart St. Paul's instruction that by putting on the armor that God provides, we will assuredly gain victory over all our adversaries. Righteousness is closely linked to this, serving as a guide for living in the fear of God, treating our neighbours with kindness, avoiding harm, fraud, malice, and extortion. Instead, we should seek to do good to one another, aiming for the common welfare. The devil may easily deceive us and attack us without warning, day and night, if we lack this righteousness. Unfortunately, many are content with superficial actions and avoiding outright rebellion against God, thinking it sufficient to avoid being openly despised by His Majesty.

If we merely put on a façade of religion, feigning righteousness and presenting a pleasing outward appearance, we might believe we have fulfilled our duty. In reality, the devil may have led us away from the true substance and soundness of faith, as described by Simpel. Similarly, concerning righteousness, we may proclaim with our mouths that it is right to serve and honour God, live in harmony with one another, and strive to do good deeds. We may condemn theft, extortion, adultery, deceit, and injustice. However, we may be content with offering God very little and

expect Him to be satisfied with it. This attitude leaves us vulnerable to the devil's influence, allowing him to gain a stronger hold on us. It would be wiser for us to persevere in our faith and remain steadfast.

Many people may initially show great zeal and commitment, but their fervour fades quickly. Why? Because they are not adequately protected against Satan's schemes. To support this, if we follow the guidance given here, it is clear that God's promise will not disappoint us. While Paul encourages believers to stand firm and endure to the end, there is a certain guarantee that God will always come to their aid when needed, ensuring they are not left disappointed. This is contingent on them remaining under His banner, continually relying on His power, and using the means provided through His Word. Thus, if cowardice and fear of the devil lead us to stumble, deviate from the right path, and stray from the way of righteousness, the fault lies with our own negligence. This is because we have failed to put on the spiritual armour God has provided but have instead hung it up on a peg.

Next, Paul mentions that we should have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This description may remind us of the ancient practice of soldiers who wore shoes only when going to war. These shoes served to protect their feet from the cold and to provide stability in battle against the enemy. Paul is suggesting that the gospel functions as our spiritual footwear, enabling us to walk safely through the world. Unbelievers, not prepared to receive the gospel, find themselves deeply entangled in the affairs of the world, as if their legs were broken, sinking deeper into worldly concerns day by day.

The only way to navigate this world and reach the kingdom of heaven is to possess the guidance found in the Gospel. In the Gospel, we learn that God, having chosen us as His children, does not intend for us to dwell on this Earth indefinitely. Instead, He desires us to come to Him swiftly.

Furthermore, the Gospel teaches us to separate ourselves from the impurity of unbelievers. This separation is crucial.

Now, turning to the term "preparation" used by St. Paul, it signifies that if we have the wisdom to benefit from the Gospel, we will be liberated from all hindrances preventing us from approaching God. What do we discover within the Gospel? We learn that previously, we were in a kind of spiritual slumber, lost in our pleasures and vanities. The world is in darkness, and as long as we remain in it, we seem to sleepwalk, unable to perceive the way ahead. Without rescue by our Lord Jesus Christ, we would remain lethargic and wander aimlessly in this darkness. Let us, therefore, prepare ourselves so that our loins are girded up in readiness, guided by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is aptly referred to as the light of the world. We must awaken from this spiritual slumber that ensnares unbelievers, keeping them trapped in the lower realm, leading ultimately to their destruction.

Understand that we cannot fully benefit from the Gospel until we are adequately prepared. This entails distancing ourselves from worldly distractions. God must draw us closer to Him so that our sole purpose is to draw nearer to Him day by day until we leave this world. We must be entirely free from the bonds of Satan and any hindrances he might employ to impede our progress. Once we comprehend this, we will have gained valuable insight.

Lastly, Simpel adds another descriptor to the Gospel to inspire our affection for it, referring to it as the "Gospel of Peace." This designation serves to embolden us for the battle. It suggests that although our adversaries are formidable and we will face fierce conflicts, we should not be discouraged. We might be defeated repeatedly in a short span if God did not come to our aid.

However, if you do not reject the help that God offers but, instead, make it effective by resolutely resisting all evil, you will find peace amidst the

turmoil. This is the remarkable blessing that the gospel always brings with it. It is a great achievement when we can engage in battle without fear. We see how those who lack peace are constantly troubled, without counsel or composure. Their hearts are troubled, and they are easily dismayed. Yet, we must carry our care with us, as mentioned earlier. If we are careless, we will quickly be overwhelmed. However, this care should not hinder us but rather allow us to enter the battle with a steady and resolute mind because God is on our side and will unleash His mighty power to defend us. This knowledge should bring us peace, so that no fear can turn us away or deprive us of sound judgment. Instead, it should drive us to God in prayer, seeking His aid and provision for all our needs, which He knows better than we do.

Now, we understand what Simpel means when he encourages us to take up the Gospel. It is not to bind us to this world but to prepare us to journey freely towards the kingdom of heaven. It also means having a peaceful heart to serve God, trusting assuredly that despite the troubles we endure, we will not perish. God has promised not only to help us in a single assault but to remain with us until the end, delivering us from all the grief and troubles we face today.

Furthermore, we must above all else take up the shield of faith and the spiritual sword, which is God's word. Concerning this shield, Simpel explains that it allows us to deflect the fiery darts the enemy hurls at us. Some might consider Simpel's distinction between God's Word and faith unnecessary, as they are essentially inseparable. Faith is grounded in God's Word, and God's Word is of no use unless received by faith. However, Simpel makes this distinction for clarity. He speaks of faith as the shield to emphasize that it is through faith that we ward off the enemy's attacks. He wants to make it clear that we are powerless on our own to resist the blows Satan can deliver, as they could be fatal. He points out that Satan's attacks are not only physical but also involve subtle means. He previously

mentioned Satan's wiles, and here he refers to the devil's darts, emphasizing the need for us to be watchful against his cunning. Satan is the father of lies and employs various strategies to deceive and ensnare us. Therefore, we must heed these warnings to be vigilant and apply the promises found in God's Word to our lives. Simpel uses the term "fiery darts" to indicate that Satan's attacks can be lethal, but God's power preserves and defends us. This is the power of faith.

Now, consider that as much as is attributed to faith, that much is taken away from men. For faith borrows all things from God's pure grace and generosity. Therefore, let us understand that in this text, St. Paul intended to humble us and show us that God must provide us with all that belongs to and is necessary for our victory. So, whoever makes their shields out of any other fortifications devised to repel Satan will find them as weak as spider's webs. Satan will only mock their presumption. Even if they fortify themselves with all the mountains in the world, it will avail them nothing in times of need. Therefore, let us learn to make faith our shield. When we intend to enter the battle and persevere in it, let us remember that God is our Father, who chose us as His children out of His boundless goodness. He has assured us that He will always be on our side, for He is greater than the entire world. He has placed us under His care by appointing our Lord Jesus Christ as our shepherd. Let us gather all these promises together and fashion a shield from them to hold before us whenever we are assailed. Let us defy the devil because we are under the protection of our Guard, who possesses invincible power. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assumed the responsibility for our salvation and promised to faithfully guard our souls to the end. When we reach this point, we can fend off the devil's darts.

The devil will try to make us doubt God's grace on one side and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is distant from us on the other. He may tempt us to murmur or complain against Him, engage in trivial and unproductive arguments, or even blaspheme. All of these are darts. Furthermore, when

wicked desires or cravings stir in our hearts, we are vulnerable. Initially, these temptations may not seem harmful, difficult, or troublesome. Nevertheless, they are deadly darts. However, faith can repel them. For instance, if we are tempted with greed because we fear the earth will fail us, we should remember that God has undertaken the responsibility to nourish and sustain us. We can rely on Him and request our daily bread from His hand. If the devil tries to make us covetous, we should remember that Jesus Christ has incorporated us into Himself, making us His own members, one with Him. Shall we then defile ourselves with filth and impurity? If we are tempted with gluttony, we should reflect on whether we are subverting God's ordained order. He has created food for our use, but we should not turn these things into hindrances that lead us away from the heavenly life. If we are tempted by ambition to glorify ourselves, we should consider the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if we desire greatness in this world, we become enemies of God, for He resists the proud, and their pride and presumption must be humbled. In this way, we can repel Satan's darts in every situation.

And again, if any man opposes the saying, "How can you tell whether you will ever be better off for all your travels?" - whereas the thing that the gospel promises? Faith must work in this case, for we do not see the reward that is promised. Instead, we see a store of troubles, encounters, and sorrows. In short, we seem to be the most wretched creatures in the world. What shall we do then? We would need to quail every minute of an hour if God reached us not His hand. How do we take hold of His hand? That is to say, how do we benefit ourselves by His power? Faith must be found to work on His behalf. That is to say, we must look up to the things that are not seen, as the apostle says in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this way, we shall beat back Satan's darts.

Now, finally, he added the word, which, as I said, a fourth should not be separated from faith. But I have already told you that he simply meant to

add that saying for a further clarification of the matter. As if he had said, "My friends, when I told you that you might withstand your enemies and repel all their darts by means of faith, it is because God's word cannot fail you. Therefore, since you have the promises of salvation and God speaks to you, you know that He has you in His keeping, and you cannot be confounded if you trust Him. Therefore, I set faith before you as a shield. However, if you have faith, you have more shields than one, for God's word is the true spiritual sword. With it, we can not only repel our enemy but also discomfort him and conquer him under our feet."

What remains now is to learn to benefit ourselves better from God's word, just as we have learned from seeing that our Lord Jesus Christ grants us this inestimable grace and benefit by teaching us in His school. Let us consider, therefore, for what end He does this - to arm us against Satan. We cannot live in obedience to Him and keep the path He has shown us except by fighting, and He also gives us armour. Therefore, let us be assured that we have a good sword when we can skillfully apply God's word to our use. Moreover, that faith which precedes fear will be a good shield for us. We shall also have the helmet of the hope of salvation, and in short, we shall be thoroughly fortified on all sides. Our outcome will be the soundness of conscience and holiness of life, of which He has spoken.

Finally, we shall lack nothing if we can skillfully use the means that God has set forth for our warfare. So then, though the state of the faithful may seem as burdensome as it can be, because God exercises them against all the devils in hell, and not just for one day but for their entire lives, we must consider it sweet and amiable, knowing that God has provided for all our needs. At least, we should awaken to consider the dangers we face and resist them.

Let us consider, on one side, Satan's violence and force, and on the other side, his cunning and craftiness. With all this, let us call upon our God, as

St. Paul will show us later. Also, let us consider the benefits that God's word brings us. Hereby, we see how wretched priests have stripped themselves of all the armor that should serve them for their salvation. What has become of the word of God among them? It has dwindled away. They have not been ashamed to propagate the blasphemy, both in their books and in their sermons, that there is no certainty in God's word. But we would be wrong to call it the spiritual sword if it did not protect us against all the assaults of Satan. We could not repel the temptations that provoke us to evil unless God's word served us there too. If we did not find it so by experience, St. Paul would never have given it that name.

Now, let us strive to benefit more and more from it, and let us be diligent students, paying close attention to it while God's mouth is open to teach us. We will find that St. Paul has not promised us in vain that we shall always prevail until we reach the Heavenly Kingdom, where we will fully enjoy the fruits of our victory.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults and praying that He makes us more aware of them. In the meantime, let us always turn to Him and not lose heart, even though we may feel unworthy to present ourselves before His Majesty or be discouraged by our vices and imperfections. Seeing that He is on our side, let us trust that He will provide the remedies we need. We should desire them from His hand and strive to profit from His Word so that it guides us to the end. This way, we will not falter in any encounter, and the devil will be confounded, while our Lord Jesus Christ is exalted. It is under His power that we fight, and our victory comes from Him.

May it please Him to grant this grace, not only to us but to all people, etc.

The Forty Seventh Sermon, the Fifth on the Sixth Chapter

> "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." - Ephesians 6:18-19

Many, believing themselves to have made significant strides in their faith, yet remain oblivious to the profound essence of prayer. They erroneously assume that merely uttering, "God aided me" when confronted with peril suffices, failing to seek refuge in Him earnestly. However, such souls fail to grasp the profound intent behind the promises bestowed upon us. These assurances do not solely pertain to God's provision and assistance in times of need but also encompass the vital purpose of drawing us closer to Him and kindling the flames of supplication within us. These two facets are inseparable. We ought to anchor our hopes firmly upon God's promises, nurturing them deep within our hearts, and allowing them to ignite the fervor of turning to our Divine Creator. Thus, our faith should invariably propel us toward prayer and entreaty, for these are inexorably intertwined. The greater our faith, the more passionately we should beseech our God, recognizing that our salvation lies solely in His benevolent hands, and that all blessings flow from Him.

As we often tend to be sluggish in this aspect, divine guidance steers us towards the employment of words, prayer, and supplication. The intent is clear: we are not to approach this matter casually or with mere politeness. Instead, we must be stirred to persevere in it, as the divine instruction is

unequivocal in its call for unceasing devotion. While it is true that the Prophet Isaiah conveys that God hears us before we even cry out, and His helping hand is swift before our words form, this is not an invitation to indolence. We are not to stand idly with open mouths, expecting divine intervention. Instead, it serves as a reminder that God will not delay when we earnestly call upon Him, as we have experienced.

Nevertheless, God desires us to exhibit a tangible proof of our faith through prayer. The genuine demonstration of His promises taking root within us and our unwavering trust in them is when, in times of sorrow or tribulation, we turn directly to Him and pour out our hearts. As stated elsewhere, we must recognize that we need to employ God's Word to fortify our assurance that He shall never forsake us. By seeking those things in Him that He has promised, we effectively employ prayers as keys to access the treasures He has set aside for us, and He will not withhold them.

Thus, we must pave the way to these blessings through prayer. Moreover, it is insufficient to assert that faith must be accompanied by prayers and supplications offered to our God in all instances. Indeed, in all prayer and petition, our reliance on Him must be apparent. It is as if we are urged to declare that in every circumstance, in all matters, both significant and trivial, and in all our undertakings, this must be our steadfast anchor. Some may be tempted to call upon God solely when they remember Him or when facing significant matters. However, the Apostle Paul, as previously stated, insists that we render homage to God at all times and in all places. We must acknowledge that we can receive no good thing except as a gracious gift from His hand. The word "all" holds profound significance. In truth, we observe how our Lord takes charge of every aspect of our existence, with the condition that we turn to Him even for the most fundamental necessities, which we would not hesitate to request from our friends or peers. Even these necessities He desires us to seek from Him, for when He provides us with our daily sustenance, it is certain that He encompasses all

aspects of our life. Indeed, we require many trifling things that we might be ashamed to admit even to our inferiors. Yet, in His boundless mercy, God deigns to care for us, despite our frailty and wretchedness. Nevertheless, He still expects us to petition Him for those things that are beneficial and essential for our well-being. Therefore, let us heed the words of St. Paul, granting us the privilege to approach our God in prayer for all our needs, assured that He will bestow upon us every blessing, with nothing escaping His watchful gaze.

He explicitly emphasizes that we must engage in prayer ceaselessly and with sincerity of heart. The phrase "in spirit" signifies the exclusion of all hypocrisy, for many in the world engage in empty verbosity when they approach the presence of God. Their lips move in mechanical duty, devoid of genuine devotion. This is not the manner in which God desires to be invoked and petitioned. He takes no pleasure in mere verbiage or hollow supplications. When we pray insincerely, we construct a false image of God, perpetrating a form of self-deception. Believing that God hears us solely due to our loquacity, while our hearts remain lifeless and our prayers lack authentic ardor, we reduce God to the status of an idol or a figment of our own imagination. Therefore, our prayers must not only flow from our lips but must also emanate from the depths of our innermost being. As we lack the inherent capacity to achieve this, it is incumbent upon the Holy Spirit to work within us. Hence, the term "spirit" implies beseeching God to govern us in such a way that He stirs our innermost souls, enabling us to pray in a manner that befits His divine presence. In this, He accepts our supplications, discerning within them the indelible imprint of His Holy Spirit.

We must ever bear in mind what is articulated in the Epistle to the Romans – that we do not possess an innate comprehension of what to pray for. Within the scope of our own limited understanding, this surpasses the capabilities of our faith. Notwithstanding the claims of some who believe

they possess perfect knowledge of how and what to communicate to God, St. Paul dispels such notions. He shuts the door on self-righteousness, except we humbly acknowledge our frailties and deficiencies, as he avers that the Spirit of God intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings that words cannot convey. Without this divine intercession, we would not even be able to utter the word "Father," as attested elsewhere.

It is undeniable that we shall never be truly inclined to entreat God unless He bestows upon us the gift of His Holy Spirit. Moreover, as previously elucidated, St. Paul's underlying intention is to obliterate all semblance of pretense. We must not seek to validate our standing through ceremonial observances or external displays of piety, such as protracted prayers and ostentatious rituals. Rather, we should yield to the guidance of the Spirit. Therefore, let us first be deeply moved, allowing the Spirit to be our master and instructor, directing our petitions when we approach our God. Secondly, our prayers must spring forth from the depths of our hearts. Let us ponder the psalmic injunction that asserts we must seek our God in truth, for His nearness is reserved for those who exhibit this quality. This exposition is expounded for a reason, as previously emphasized, for we are naturally inclined towards superficiality, erroneously expecting God to accommodate our flawed human nature. However, reality dictates otherwise.

For those who misuse His name, offering prayers veiled in hypocrisy and falsehood, bereft of substance or sincerity, St. Paul unequivocally asserts that we ought not to anticipate being heard or receiving anything from the Almighty unless our petitions are suffused with genuine intent - that is, unless we approach God with heartfelt devotion. This is a crucial point to grasp concerning St. Paul's admonitions. When he employs the phrases "steadfastly" and "holding out throughout to the end," he underscores the perennial nature of our need to call upon God. This emphasis arises because we are inclined to seek exemptions, revealing the imperfections and irrationality inherent in our human minds. Our well-being hinges upon our

proximity to God, our reliance on His assistance, and our unwavering belief in His care for us. Nevertheless, how often do we find ourselves hesitating to pray, approaching the act as an obligation rather than an outpouring of love, as I elucidated earlier?

Hence, the notion of indifference and detachment, where we only resort to prayer when coerced or compelled, requires correction. St. Paul admonishes us not to wait for necessity to be the impetus; instead, we should comprehend that every moment is opportune and fitting for turning to God. Indeed, the more fervent our yearning, the swifter our approach, recognizing that afflictions and trials ordained by God often act as a spur, much like a recalcitrant donkey requires a firm prod to move forward. God, discerning our reluctance to approach Him willingly, at times draws us near to Him almost as if by coercion. Nevertheless, each individual should muster their own resolve, even in the absence of pressing necessity. In sum, we ought to pray to our God in times of both prosperity and adversity. This is the essence encapsulated by the phrase "at all times."

And thus, St. Paul imparts the directive that we must maintain vigilance in our prayers, exercising unwavering diligence and interceding for all the saints. When he speaks of being watchful, he addresses a failing to which we are all too susceptible – the tendency to grow lethargic when it comes to communing with God through prayer. Frequently, we require a deliberate awakening from our slumber and torpor, and we are enjoined to remain alert, maintaining unceasing vigilance. This is to ensure that we do not allow the opportunity to turn to God in prayer to pass us by. Indeed, there is scarcely a soul free from the distraction of the mind during prayer. Numerous thoughts flit through our consciousness, leading our minds astray. We may ponder why, instead of concentrating wholeheartedly, our thoughts meander elsewhere.

Given our inherent inconstancy and proneness to distraction, it is imperative that we exercise vigilance. We must redirect ourselves when our thoughts wander, without yielding to the devil's machinations aimed at disrupting our prayers and undermining the continuity and steadfastness they demand. When we engage in prayer, we must do so with complete concentration and unwavering commitment, as if we were securely bound to it, held fast by unbreakable bonds. In essence, all our attention and contemplation should be singularly directed towards the task at hand. Even among pagans, in their rituals of idol worship, they grasped the significance of this principle. They would admonish themselves, saying, "Be wholly engrossed in the act of worship and let no other thought intrude." If such dedication was expected of them in their veneration of false deities, how much more resolute should we be when presenting the supreme offering that God cherishes above all else? It is during these moments that we acknowledge our absolute dependence on Him for every good thing.

Shall we, then, dilute the sanctity of prayer by intermingling it with our own vanities, offering petitions for the sake of mere tradition and fashion? Thus, the vigilance spoken of by our revered author is profoundly indispensable due to the frailty of our minds. Our thoughts tend to stray, especially when we endeavor to commune with God. Let us direct the entirety of our minds toward this sacred act, guarding against the entanglement of our thoughts in the web of worldly concerns and earthly affections. Our approach to prayer should be akin to severing all other bonds, which is why we are exhorted to "lift up" ourselves in our prayers and supplications. While it is true that when we present ourselves before God, we must do so with utmost humility, we must also lift up our hearts in a manner that places us in reverent awe before our Creator. This is what the phrase "diligent watchfulness" signifies.

Furthermore, he instructs us to pray "with all insistence," a reminder that if we desire to prepare ourselves adequately for prayer, we must not approach

it with lethargy. Indeed, should we follow the course of our natural inclinations, we would remain far from reaching God. Hence, each individual must exert themselves, as if to say, "My dear friends, within you lies a propensity towards spiritual coldness, a tendency that will hinder you from approaching God in prayer unless you actively provoke and compel yourselves. The adversary will continually cast a veil over your eyes, obscuring your recognition of the need to implore God. Idleness in prayer will lead you to appear ungrateful for His blessings and fail to honor Him for His benevolence. To truly acknowledge the gifts bestowed by God, we must recognize that all things come from His hand. Unless we grasp this truth and turn to Him both in our times of need and in expressions of gratitude for what we have already received, we negate His blessings.

Hence, let us learn to couple our watchfulness with insistence, and by "insistence," we mean unwavering persistence. It is insufficient to engage in sporadic prayer; we must cultivate a continuous habit of prayer. This unfolds in two dimensions: firstly, when we have prayed in the morning and evening, and throughout the day, we must persist in this practice as long as we live. Our faith must remain ceaselessly active, and prayer stands as the exercise of our faith. Secondly, in terms of persistence, when we petition God for assistance in a specific matter, we should not cease to reiterate our request, not merely two or three times, but as often as necessary, be it a hundred or a thousand times. Although God has pledged to aid us even before our pleas are uttered, He does not always manifest this openly to us. Hence, we must never falter in waiting for His assistance. Furthermore, it is not a prerequisite that our petitions be granted exactly as we desire, for God knows what is suitable and expedient for us. He governs us according to His sovereign will. Nonetheless, if we approach Him in prayer according to His will, He assures us that our requests shall be fulfilled even before we utter them aloud.

However, there may come moments when it appears that God is distant, seemingly asleep, or has turned His countenance away from us when we call upon Him. In these times, perseverance becomes an indispensable virtue. When we find ourselves in distress and seek solace from God, we must not do so in a single, fleeting entreaty, only to abandon it. Instead, we must return to Him persistently, with unrelenting fervor, akin to the widow in the parable shared by our Lord Jesus. She had to contend with a judge who neither revered God nor cared for the welfare of people. Yet, through her unwavering persistence, she obtained her request. Similarly, we must exhibit persistence in our supplications to God, not because He is slow to assist us, as I mentioned earlier, but to test the unwavering resolve of our faith.

Individuals who approach God in prayer, only to grow impatient, petulant, and restless, demanding instantaneous relief, are not truly engaged in prayer. Rather, they seek to command God to gratify their desires. We ought to cultivate the restraint of our passions and align our desires with the divine will. When we beseech Him for swift intervention, we should simultaneously nurture patience, prepared to await His timing, whether it be today, tomorrow, or as long as it pleases His sovereign wisdom. Thus, we must persist in prayer and supplication. We should pray today for the exigencies of the present moment and continue to pray tomorrow for those that may arise. Our prayers should become a daily practice. Moreover, if God does not promptly grant our petitions, we should not desist from renewing our entreaties until we witness the fulfillment of His promise.

Considering that it can be arduous for us to approach God with sincerity, Saint Paul, in this discourse, presents an argument grounded in our own frailty. We ought to recognize that our responsibility extends beyond individual self-interest to the care of our fellow beings and intercession on their behalf. If we contemplate our own vulnerabilities, the myriad sins that afflict us, and our dire dependence on God's succor, we would find ample

cause to dedicate our lives to unceasing prayer and supplication, even if this were our sole endeavor – to confess our sins before God and implore His aid in warding off the encroachments of Satan. However, we must broaden the scope of our prayers beyond our personal concerns to encompass the entirety of the Church of God. God desires us not only to be engrossed in our individual needs but also to remember His chosen ones, with whom He has bound us together. Consequently, we must strive to include them in our prayers to the best of our ability. With this awareness, our hearts should be stirred even more profoundly, and our ardor should blaze brighter as we uphold the care outlined in this exhortation, maintaining the same spirit of devotion.

While our revered author explicitly mentions praying for the saints or the faithful, this should not preclude us from lifting our petitions for all people, including those unfortunate unbelievers and the uninformed. These souls are in dire need of intercession before God, for they tread a perilous path toward their own ruin. Imagine if we were to encounter a helpless creature facing certain doom; our hearts would surely stir with compassion. How much more profound should our compassion and benevolence be when we behold a precious soul in jeopardy, a soul that God, in His divine wisdom, has deemed valuable enough to redeem through the precious blood of His own Son? When we witness a soul imperiled, we should be moved to beseech God's divine intervention and provision of redemption.

Thus, the true essence of St. Paul's message in this passage is not that we should neglect the unfortunate unbelievers but rather that we should extend our prayers to encompass all humanity. We must harbor a special concern for those to whom God has forged a close bond with us. In a parallel vein, when St. Paul speaks of acts of charity, his intent is that they should be extended to all individuals in need, leaving no one excluded. Nonetheless, he underscores the importance of rendering special assistance to those who belong to the household of faith.

This same principle extends to our prayers and supplications for the spiritual brotherhood within the Church. These individuals have been divinely placed in our midst, a reminder that we should remember the Church of God in our prayers. These words serve as a poignant reminder that our prayers should not be steeped in selfishness. None among us should declare, "My Father alone." Instead, we invoke "our Father," emphasizing that we must not become so engrossed in our own concerns that we overlook those who are connected to us and share in the bonds of our spiritual family, as I previously emphasized. Therefore, St. Paul explicitly states that we must offer our prayers for the saints.

If this profound understanding were to take root in our hearts, it would kindle within us an ardent desire to commune with God unceasingly. Let us contemplate the plight of the churches in these trying times. Despite the occasional respite granted to us by our Lord, our fellow brethren endure torment at the hands of tyrants and adversaries of the faith. Some are left weakened or forced into exile, while others have their worldly possessions seized. Many find themselves imprisoned, and, grievously, some face the ultimate sacrifice at the stake. These suffering souls are constantly immersed in distress, confronting new terrors with each passing moment. We bear witness to the relentless onslaught launched by the forces of evil against those who labor to uphold the teachings of the gospel. We observe the stumbling blocks strategically deployed by champions of Satan to disperse the faithful, as well as the concerted efforts to tarnish the gospel's message. Meanwhile, the dedicated servants of God, committed to His divine service, endure manifold trials and tribulations.

Considering the manifold miseries and adversities that afflict the Church, and pondering the distress of each of our brethren, we would be more insensible than brute beasts if our hearts were not stirred to earnest and persistent prayer before God. Even though I may be on my knees in prayer today, there exist countless thousands entangled in grievous perplexity. It

would be an act of spiritual isolation, a severance from the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, should I fail to extend compassion toward those members with whom I share profound connection.

With good reason, then, does St. Paul declare, "All the saints here are for us," as he aims to kindle within us the right disposition toward prayer, urging us to persevere in it unwaveringly. Additionally, he humbly beseeches others to intercede in prayer on his behalf. "Pray for me also," he entreats, "that God may grant me boldness in opening my mouth to proclaim the hidden truths of the gospel."

Hence, when St. Paul encourages the Ephesians to engage in such prayer, he not only issues an exhortation but also exhibits his own humility. He openly acknowledges, before God and His heavenly host, that he, too, stands in need of the prayers of others.

Now, let us assess ourselves in comparison to St. Paul. Is there any among us so self-sufficient that they can dispense with the prayers of their fellow believers, especially when the great Apostle Paul himself acknowledged his dependency on this sacred support? Therefore, in our communion with God through prayer, may each of us earnestly desire to partake in all the supplications offered throughout the Church, embracing both the general and specific petitions.

The enduring truth remains that God is always near to those who call upon Him. Even Jonah, while confined within the belly of the great fish, was not abandoned by the divine providence. Hence, when we feel forsaken by others and seemingly teetering on the precipice of despair, God does not cease to watch over us, extending His unfailing assistance. As the Scripture attests, "The eyes of the Lord are continually upon those who revere Him, and His ears are attentively inclined to those who seek His presence."

However, in His wisdom, the Lord seeks to humble us, emphasizing our mutual reliance on one another's assistance and fostering a profound sense of community among us. Moreover, He encourages us to actively manifest our love and charity by extending support through acts of kindness, offering counsel, and providing various forms of assistance. In this way, we come to recognize that none among us should fixate solely on our individual interests and gain.

Yet, as God has united us in this spiritual bond, each of us bears the responsibility to uphold and sustain our fellow believers, engaging fervently in shared prayers and supplications. Commending one another in this manner to the divine care is the loftiest expression of love, and it was with this very understanding that St. Paul earnestly implored the Ephesians for their prayers.

Should anyone raise an objection, contending that such a plea implies a deficiency in faith, as though the promise of obtaining our individual requests were insufficient, the answer is plain and straightforward. When God pledges His compassion to all who earnestly seek Him, He does not intend for us to disregard His command that we should maintain a steadfast regard for one another.

Moreover, we must grasp that obedience to God's Word can never be construed as an act of unbelief. It is when individuals venture beyond the limits established by God's Word that they tend to veer into the perilous territory of unbelief. For instance, some fashion an excessive multitude of mediators and advocates, rendering themselves unwilling to participate personally. Such actions betray a lack of trust in the sacred teachings contained within God's Word.

We are imparted with a universal lesson: "Call upon Me in your times of need, and I shall heed your plea." God encourages us to turn to Him, fixing our gaze solely upon His divine presence, secure in the knowledge that

when we approach Him in the name of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, He shall not withhold His favor. Our Lord Jesus Christ stands ever ready, extending Himself as a mediator on our behalf, assuring us that as long as we remain steadfast in this path, there is no cause for apprehension. We need not fear being denied access to His Father, nor shall we be met with anything but a warm reception.

However, there have been those among the clergy who have asserted that we require additional advocates to intercede on our behalf. While this assertion carries a measure of truth, we must bear in mind that God has appointed Jesus Christ alone for this purpose. Regrettably, certain members of the clergy have taken it upon themselves to appoint advocates in the celestial realm according to their own preferences, thereby undermining the exalted position bestowed upon Jesus Christ by God the Father. Their inventions have only served to perpetuate confusion, resulting in a lamentable state of affairs.

As for us, adhering to the teachings elucidated in God's Word ensures that we walk the path of faith without trepidation or suspicion of unbelief. Thus, the query arises: Is it indicative of distrust to seek the intercession of others in prayer, given that each individual possesses the capacity to pray for themselves? The answer is unequivocal: that which God has united, we ought not to presume to sever.

It is imperative that we bear in mind the command to engage in personal prayer and, moreover, to encourage our neighbors to partake in this sacred practice. By doing so, we fortify ourselves against any deviation from the path of faith. Should anyone contend that the inclusion of intercessory prayer amongst fellow believers diminishes the sole advocacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, the response is straightforward: Jesus Christ is undeniably the solitary mediator, and both the great and the humble alike must turn to Him to beseech the fulfillment of our supplications. Our prayers must be

sanctified by His divine holiness, lest they be found wanting and rejected by God.

Reflecting upon the prophet Isaiah's divine commission, we recall his heartfelt exclamation: "Alas, my God! I am but a mortal with impure lips, dwelling amongst a people similarly tainted. How, then, can I dare to converse with my God, as though in direct discourse, when I, too, am tainted by impurity and corruption?" Hence, we learn that all our prayers must be sanctified through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, lest they fail to find favor in the sight of God.

It is undeniably true that Christ stands as the solitary advocate and intercessor—an unequivocal principle upheld by the ancient patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of their eras, a tradition we must continue. Nevertheless, this does not exclude us from offering prayers on behalf of one another, for we all share a common head, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, our prayers find unity, allowing us to bear witness unanimously and in perfect accord that our well-being hinges solely upon God's providential care. With this unwavering trust, we may boldly approach Him.

To safeguard our adherence to the right path and avoid any misrepresentation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must regard Him as our exclusive advocate, resisting the inclination to follow our own desires, as regrettably seen in certain instances. We have observed how some individuals have not hesitated to employ this text to advocate for prayers to St. Peter, St. Paul, and even saints canonized by the Pope, or rather, the idols whispered into his ear by the devil.

Yet, we should bear in mind that we are enjoined to offer prayers for one another, as God has also instructed us to seek solace and support from our fellow believers. God has promised that in this manner, we shall find it. As James asserts, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another." This implies that when you are assailed by temptation, grappling with

myriad weaknesses and vices within you, you should open your heart to your brethren. Share your burdens with them, saying, "Alas, I am engaged in such a fierce struggle within myself. I have transgressed against my God in this manner." By doing so and revealing your vulnerabilities to one another, you will find inspiration to pray on each other's behalf.

However, is there any parallel between the departed saints and ourselves, or even St. Wilson, Peter, and St. Paul? Can we discern their sins so that we may beseech God on their behalf, or have they endured sufficient years to heed our petitions? Indeed, it is evident that mutual prayer was intended for those still residing in this world, engaged in the ongoing spiritual warfare. Therefore, those who stand in need of our prayers will also lift their voices in prayer for us, and we, in turn, should extend the same grace towards them.

Regarding those who have departed from this world, we must recognize that we lack the authority to appoint them as advocates before God. Just as in a legal case, we cannot designate an advocate for a matter of minor consequence; it is the prerogative of the judge to assign an advocate in such cases. How audacious it would be for us to assume the role of appointing advocates in heaven! Such an act would be steeped in pride and presumption, tantamount to usurping God's divine authority.

Therefore, let us cultivate the practice of praying for one another within the prescribed boundaries, refraining from straying into self-appointed roles. Let us take contentment in caring for all the members of the church, as it is our sacred duty to do so. Through this mutual communion, we bear witness to our membership in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, let us collectively turn our attention to our Head, knowing that our prayers would be deemed unworthy unless sanctified by the perfect holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With this awareness, let us never venture to approach God except in the name of our Mediator, being assured that it is His role to intercede on our behalf and secure an audience with God for us. In this manner, we may find God inclined to extend His assistance. This serves as the means for us to pray to God with boldness and confidence, as I have previously referenced in the texts from the eighth chapter of Romans and the epistle of St. James. Additionally, as elucidated in the third chapter of this epistle, we must call upon God through the faith we have in Jesus Christ, recognizing that He did not merely come into the world to shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins once, but also continues to stand before God as our perpetual advocate, ceaselessly interceding on our behalf.

We must firmly believe that, despite our lowly and insignificant nature, He intercedes on our behalf, acknowledging us as His children through His mediation, and He will always be compassionate in heeding our prayers and supplications. These prayers are not offered in our own name or by virtue of our own merits, for that would be presumptuous. Rather, we pray because He has commanded us to do so and has shown us the way.

Therefore, let us humbly prostrate ourselves before the majesty of our benevolent God, confessing our transgressions and seeking His forgiveness, even though we are deserving of being entirely cut off from the hope of salvation. Since He has beckoned us to draw near to Him and promised us His mercy if we approach Him with faith and humility, let us pray that He prepares our hearts so that our petitions align with His divine will. May He also display patience toward our weaknesses, recognizing that our prayers may be riddled with imperfections. Thus, let us collectively utter, "Almighty God, Heavenly Father, and so on."

The Forty Eighth Sermon, the Sixth on the Sixth Chapter

> "For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." - Ephesians 6:20-24

This morning, we discussed the importance of praying for one another and the resulting benefit, namely, that every member of the Church, being part of the Body of Christ, can rest assured that the entire Church is praying for them. It is a collective effort, and it signifies that both Jesus Christ and all His followers are united in prayer, with the understanding that they are entirely dependent on God.

However, we must also note that when Paul asks for prayers from the Church, he is not primarily concerned with his own physical well-being but with a much more significant matter. He is more focused on fulfilling the responsibilities and duties entrusted to him. When someone is sick or facing difficulties in the world, it is natural to cry out for help and seek assistance from others. In such situations, we expect everyone to come to our aid, driven by our natural concern for the well-being of our bodies.

Yet, when it comes to serving God, individuals often believe they can manage without the help of others. However, Paul's example here indicates that he does not consider himself self-sufficient to carry out his duty of preaching the gospel without divine assistance. Therefore, he requests the prayers of the Church. Furthermore, he demonstrates that he values the

advancement and execution of God's Word more highly than his own life, despite being imprisoned and facing the constant threat of death.

In this text, St. Paul is in prison, facing dire circumstances and the daily expectation of death. However, his primary concern is not his own life but the promotion and fulfillment of God's Word. He would rather die than be negligent in fulfilling the task assigned to him. This is the main lesson we should draw from this text.

In the Epistle to the Thessalonians, he provides additional insight into why he desires to be delivered from the wicked and unfaithful individuals who continuously plot against him and why he considers his life valuable. Nevertheless, he never places his own interests before the duty he has towards God, particularly in serving the Church by faithfully preaching the gospel.

Therefore, if the Lord assigns us any task, whatever it may be, we should first recognise our limitations and acknowledge our need for God's support. We should not rely on our own strength or wisdom but realise that God must sustain us. Just as St. Paul commended himself to the prayers of all the members of the Body of Christ, it is reasonable for us to mutually pray for others as well.

Finally, while it is appropriate to seek prayers from others when we are sick or facing adversity, we must not become so attached to this world and our transient lives that we cry out for help in times of need while neglecting what is of greater importance, namely, the advancement of God's kingdom and the glorification of His name.

Therefore, let us learn to be mindful of our way of life, ensuring above all else that God is glorified through our actions, whether in life or in death. The Apostle Paul sets an example for us in his letter to the Philippians. You can see what we need to remember first and foremost. He explicitly states

that he desires to be given the ability to open his mouth, which means God should grant him the courage and conviction to preach the gospel freely and openly. He should not hold back but boldly proclaim the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the countless benefits He has brought us. That's what "opening of his mouth" signifies.

Experience has shown that this request for an "opened mouth" was not without reason. Many who profess to preach the gospel often refrain from speaking openly or fearlessly about it. They may utter a few words but disguise the truth, speaking with such timidity that their message becomes unclear. Rather than boldly proclaiming who our Lord Jesus Christ is, the nature of true religion, and the concepts of faith and repentance, they touch on these topics briefly. They hesitate to delve deep and explore them thoroughly.

God's true servants must follow St. Paul's advice to Timothy, that they should not have a timid and fearful spirit but boldly pursue their calling. They must rise above the world's concerns and maintain unwavering confidence, even in the face of difficult battles and the enmity of many who oppose them. They should freely and fearlessly proclaim the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, since we are naturally fearful and weak, we need God to work in us and grant us the boldness to speak as we should. It is not enough to be aware of our duty; we must also acknowledge our shortcomings and turn to God, seeking His help.

In general, let us understand that the task of preaching the gospel is too weighty and profound for us to handle on our own. We require the guidance of God's Spirit, as St. Paul exclaimed in his second letter to the Corinthians: "Who is sufficient for it?" He was referring to the preaching that reconciles men to God, assures them of their salvation, opens the gates of heaven, provides evidence of the forgiveness of sins, and offers the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse us from all our stains. Who is capable of such a

task except by God's enabling? We cannot even think a good thought without God's gift. We are so helpless that we cannot do anything good unless God grants us the ability to do so.

Therefore, those called to the office of teaching in God's Church must recognise their own weakness and completely rely on God's guidance to fulfil their responsibilities. They must understand that they can never accomplish even a fraction of their duties without divine assistance from above. Therefore, everyone should pray for those ordained as teachers and ministers of the Word, as they are gifted by God to shepherd our souls effectively. It is crucial to maintain the Church in a healthy and sound state. Thus, both great and small should be aware that God must empower those who teach and lead, and it is the responsibility of all to pray for them. In doing so, everyone secures their own well-being and salvation. Neglecting this duty is a sign that one does not value their spiritual life or the collective welfare of the Church.

And here we see what we should think of those who claim to preach God's word today but are so fearful that they do not speak until they have carefully considered whether what they intend to say may offend or please the ears of the hearers. They are like merchants who want to appear pure but still taint the doctrine they proclaim, just as Simile uses this analogy when speaking of those who abuse God's Word to gain the world's favour and maintain it. These individuals argue that they must be cautious, avoid causing stumbling blocks, and not strive against the stream, implying that they are wiser than God. However, St. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ must be preached thoroughly without dissimulation, even if there is no persecution by sword or fire. Nowadays, some preachers who call themselves ministers of the gospel want to curry favour so much that they compromise the truth, forcing our Lord Jesus Christ to stoop and accommodate their liking.

When these preachers perceive that it is unpleasant to subject people to the yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, they say, "Shall we offend the great and powerful? Shouldn't we win them over with gentleness?" Yet, they are like wild beasts opposing our Lord Jesus Christ and resisting church discipline, yet they demand that the gospel be preached to their liking. Such hypocrisy is evident, and there is no need to look far to find these unstable preachers who change their stance to please others.

It is crucial to pay close attention to this text, where Simile emphasises that the gospel is not truly preached unless it is proclaimed fully, openly, and with a clear voice. He speaks of the secrecy of the gospel to emphasise the importance of this doctrine, which would otherwise be despised by those who seek to appear clever and sophisticated. Some presumptuous individuals believe they are so wise that the gospel is not meant for them, as it appears simple. They attempt to soar above the clouds and engage in complex speculations that leave them and others bewildered, as they cannot comprehend the gospel's simplicity at first glance. God presents it this way to accommodate our simplicity, knowing that we are like little children. However, beneath the surface, the doctrine is deep and profound, beyond human wit. Even the angels marvel at it and are compelled to honour it, as stated elsewhere.

Let us understand that in the simplicity seen in the Gospel, there is such divine wisdom that is beyond our comprehension unless God, by His Holy Spirit, reveals it to us. Even if we were the most learned scholars in the world, we would not grasp it unless God enlightens our understanding, as mentioned in the first two chapters of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. St. Paul tells us that there are profound mysteries in the gospel, beyond our understanding, which God works within us, and no human tongue can express them unless God guides both the speaker and the listener. Therefore, it is crucial for all to be governed by His Holy Spirit. As St. Paul states, mere recitation of words is insufficient; God's Word must penetrate

people's hearts and lead them to obedience. The Kingdom of Heaven is not based on eloquent rhetoric but on the power of God.

To ensure that preachers are effective instruments in God's service, St. Paul requests that people pray for him. Therefore, let us understand that stepping into the pulpit to expound a Scripture text is not the entire duty. There must be a unique grace, which originates from God's extraordinary goodness and not human effort. As St. Paul emphasizes elsewhere, no one can fulfil the role of a good and faithful teacher unless sent by God. It is essential to implore God to provide what is necessary for fulfilling their role because they lack it on their own. Furthermore, St. Paul takes pride in being an ambassador of the gospel, even as a poor prisoner in chains. He uses the term "ambassador" to ensure that his imprisonment does not diminish the importance of God's message. He says, "If you have a problem with me as His ambassador, remember that my suffering and imprisonment do not undermine the office entrusted to me—preaching the gospel in His name." It is not only in this text that St. Paul emphasises the honourable dignity of his role, but he also reveals that nothing can diminish it. What is more, he greatly glorifies being held in iron chains and confined in prison. This serves as a testament that he had preached passionately, and people should accept his teaching without resistance.

Indeed, it is true that when we carry out God's work with a free heart and endure trials, we become His servants. However, the best proof of our commitment is when God tests us, such as when we are imprisoned, driven from place to place, or subjected to various troubles and vexations. When we are wrongly accused and torn apart, yet remain steadfast without swaying in any direction, this authenticates and confirms our calling. It demonstrates that God has appointed us as His servants.

Now then, since St. Paul was in prison and ready to deny himself, he could have left if he wanted, forsaking the truth of the gospel. However, he

remained steadfast, showing that his life meant nothing to him. His constant aim was to magnify the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. When such unwavering commitment was evident in St. Paul, it could be concluded that he had never been a counterfeit before. For when a person merely preaches and then, when the pressure comes, starts to backpedal and withdraw from their stance, it is evident that they were mere pretenders. They are like someone who, while playing a game, tries to snatch their coin back from the stake. Doesn't the world see that they are only actors and jesters? If a person is a great orator and an excellent teacher, but refuses to make even a small sacrifice when God calls them to it, revealing that the doctrine they carry is not truly their own, then it is clear that they are nothing more than mockers deserving of contempt and reproach, even more than an ignorant beast.

Therefore, St. Paul takes pride in his chains, declaring that even though the world held him in contempt and disdain, God had appointed him as His ambassador. Let us learn from this not to be scornful and dismissive of God's servants when we see them imprisoned. Let us understand that God often raises them to a much higher rank and honour than those who stand in lofty pulpits. A person who remains steadfast in their pure confession of the gospel while in prison holds a much more honourable position than all those who preach freely from pulpits. Remember this point.

In times of peace and leisure, let us prepare ourselves with courage and constancy so that we may be God's ambassadors when it pleases Him, whether in prison or amidst threats from enemies, or in the face of death's fury. This is the lesson we should take from this passage. So, let us not be discouraged, as many fickle people are, when they hear that someone is imprisoned in one place, and another is burned in another. These unstable individuals lose heart, and the gospel loses significance to them. Those who create such stumbling blocks for themselves demonstrate that they never had a deep-rooted faith.

On the contrary, when we see that our Lord Jesus Christ strengthens Himself through those whom He has chosen for trials, placing them in the hands of tyrants and enemies of His truth, and yet granting them invincible constancy, it strengthens our faith. We should be inspired by this, for it is certain that such strength is not possible in any person unless God is at work within them.

Therefore, we must pray to God to strengthen us when we need it, and also to show us that the doctrine of His gospel, which possesses sufficient authority by itself, must be further endorsed through a certain manner of provision. However, the blood of the martyrs and those whom God has sanctified for His glory serves this purpose because they act as His representatives before us. Paul adds that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus so that the Ephesians might be informed about his situation. This, too, is mentioned for the common edification of the church. When St. Paul speaks of his condition and actions, he does not refer to matters concerning his physical health or anything related to this present life. Instead, he especially relates it to the confession of faith and his unwavering support for the gospel.

We know that when a person is in prison, especially someone of renown, people are concerned about them, fearing whether God will grant them steadfastness. Moreover, the devil does not rest during such times. Whenever a person of influence, who has edified God's Church, is imprisoned or accused, slanderous stories are circulated to disgrace them and cast them in a negative light. All of this is done to undo what God has accomplished through their efforts and to undermine their work. This is one of Satan's strategies. Therefore, St. Paul, knowing that many feeble souls could be affected by his situation, causing them confusion, and that others might be discouraged from embracing the gospel, wants his circumstances to be known. The devil's slanderous accusations must be refuted, and the mouths of all gossipers must be silenced.

This is especially important concerning those who seek only to disrupt the church, such as troublemakers and slanderers. St. Paul intends to address all these concerns by sending Tychicus.

We can see from this text how much care St. Paul had for the continued goodness of the churches. He could have claimed that he had enough to deal with himself, that he was overwhelmed by enemies, and that he had no time to think about others. He could have argued that, given his situation, it was sufficient not to waver even unto death. However, he did not content himself with merely being a faithful witness and martyr of our Lord Jesus Christ. He believed it was his duty to remove any stumbling blocks that the devil might set up to defame the gospel. He dedicated himself to this task, as we can see from this example.

Therefore, let us learn to serve God in such a way that we care for our neighbours and seek their welfare to the best of our abilities, as God has bound us to do. Let us serve God faithfully until our last breath, following St. Paul's example. He called Tychicus his brother and a faithful minister in Christ, giving him the credit he deserved. We should also strive to elevate those who can serve the church, acknowledge their qualities, and grant them the authority they need. St. Paul's example teaches us this, as he did not seek glory or favour but desired that Christ's faithful minister be known and accepted for the benefit of others.

To conclude his epistle, St. Paul prays that the brethren may receive peace, love, and faith from God and our Lord Jesus Christ. The word "peace" is often used by St. Paul to signify general welfare and prosperity, not just harmony. It signifies God's favour, mercy, and His prospering of all goodness. This text reminds us that all prosperity among the godly comes solely from God's goodness. St. Paul adds faith and charity, demonstrating that these spiritual gifts are gifts from God alone, even though many people believe they possess the ability to believe the gospel and discern good from

evil without God's intervention. We must acknowledge that faith and charity are singular gifts from God, and we are blind and in darkness without His enlightening through the Holy Spirit. We need God to soften our hearts and grant us obedience. Without His work, even if we hear good doctrine all our lives, it will be in vain.

It is not only in this text that it is said so, but one can scarcely find any passage in the Holy Scripture where God does not reserve to Himself the giving of faith. In all honesty, we can see for ourselves how utterly destitute we are of God's Spirit when we compare ourselves to faith and the blessings it brings. This is why there is just cause for us to pay homage to God for such a great and excellent gift. The Scriptures tell us that when God looked upon humanity, He found everyone given over to evil and steeped in filthiness, with not one seeking goodness.

Furthermore, when it comes to our reason and wisdom, it is considered ignorance, and we are called utterly brutish. We must become fools in our own eyes if we want to make progress in God's wisdom. As for our hearts, they are filled with wickedness and stubbornness from our childhood, as the Holy Scriptures frequently report. Since we are blind in our understanding and rebellious in our will, let us now consider what faith is.

Faith is an understanding of God's mysteries, allowing us to know His fatherly love for us, assure ourselves of it, and grasp the heavenly life, which is nevertheless incomprehensible to human understanding. In short, it acquaints us with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which extends high, low, deep, and wide. So, if we, on one side, contemplate what faith is and, on the other side, examine ourselves honestly, acknowledging our complete lack of goodness, it is only right that we confess that without God's gift of faith, we have no faith at all. This is the lesson to be drawn from this text.

The same can be said of charity. It is evident that every person is inclined towards self-love, and our desires often lead us to seek our own gain at the

expense of others. Greed and covetousness often dominate our hearts, preventing us from truly loving our neighbours. Therefore, we must receive charity from an external source. God must break the cursed inclination within us, specifically the excessive love of ourselves.

Moreover, when we have renounced ourselves, we must understand that we are indebted to our neighbours, and we should strive to fulfil our duties towards them. Hence, faith and charity are rightly called special gifts from God. This is clearly expressed in this text when it says, "Charity and faith be unto you from God our Father." It is certain that this wish was not made casually but to remind us that we must receive these gifts from God's hand.

Let us, therefore, cast aside any foolish overconfidence and realise that all the spiritual benefits we possess are freely given by God to demonstrate His generosity towards us. The perfection of Christians resides in faith and charity. Therefore, we must acknowledge that everything related to the salvation of our souls, or anything worthy of esteem and commendation, is not of our own making but comes from above.

Regarding the confession of our faith, it is said that neither flesh nor blood reveals to us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but the Father reveals it to us. Our Lord Jesus Christ also thanks the Father for revealing His truths to the humble, not the wise. Therefore, we must become humble and fools in our own eyes to become recipients of God's wisdom. We should give honour to God according to the measure of the gifts we have received from Him and not be so wicked as to claim praise for ourselves, which rightfully belongs to Him.

Just as St. Paul unites us with our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father to make us understand that we can obtain nothing except through Him, who reconciled us to God. The reason for our corrupt nature, our lack of goodness, and our fullness of vices, making us utterly abominable, is that we are estranged from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all

goodness. He is indeed filled with the fullness of grace, given to Him by the Father. Not in a limited portion, but in such a way that all of us can draw from Him without ever running dry. He is the unending source.

We cannot have even a single drop of spiritual gifts without them flowing down to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the sole conduit. Our Lord Jesus Christ not only has the duty of providing us with whatever is necessary for our well-being as our mediator, as discussed in the fourth chapter, but St. Paul further emphasises that He gives us faith and charity through His own authority and power. Thus, He stands in equal authority with His Father.

Now, let us understand that the role of our Lord Jesus Christ in enlightening us with faith and reforming our hearts doesn't only pertain to Him as our mediator and God's minister but is also His very own. St. Paul's choice of words here would not make sense otherwise.

One might question St. Paul, as he prays for God to grant faith to the faithless and charity to those who are worldly, but not to the brethren - that is, the members of the church. If they belong to the church, they are already God's children, born again through the Holy Spirit, and therefore possess both faith and charity. However, St. Paul reveals that it's not enough for God to initiate faith in us; He must also nurture it continually. Just as we call faith a gift from God, He must make it grow and develop daily. This is the essence of the statement that we are not only given to believe in Jesus Christ but also to suffer for Him.

When God bestows faith upon us, it isn't just to prepare us so that we might believe the gospel if we choose to, and then rely on our own power to advance. No, once God has predisposed us to believe, He must also infuse us with a profound conviction that stirs us to action, propels us forward, and equips us to persevere. This enables us to make progress, be strengthened, and remain steadfast until the end. Hence, St. Paul emphasises that even

with the faithful, who have already embarked on the right path and have experienced God's grace, God continues to work in them, allowing their faith and love to grow and flourish.

This is why we should pray to God for an increase in faith and the intensification of charity. We should also ask Him to make us aware of our imperfections, so that we don't become proud or complacent, thinking that we have already attained full faith while others have not.

Therefore, let us be assured that we are still on our journey as long as we are in this world. Hence, we must strive to progress further. No matter how advanced we may be in faith or charity, it is certain that we fall short in many ways. How far have we really come? However much we may have grown in charity, one will struggle to find any of us who has completely subdued greed, ambition, and other tendencies that can lead us away from seeking our neighbour's well-being and serving them. Knowing this, we should acknowledge our imperfections in such a way that we are not content with ourselves, but are driven to improve. Even if others praise and commend us, we must humbly and meekly confess that we are still far from reaching our goal.

Now, returning to this point, St. Paul addresses those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity. Earlier, when he mentioned "the brethren," he did not refer to all who claim to follow the Gospel but specifically to those who love our Lord Jesus Christ genuinely. This means their affection for Him is untainted and enduring, not a passing emotion. St. Paul's choice of words here is deliberate because it is evident that there are very few who truly love Jesus Christ. While there is a great number who profess to embrace the Gospel, few genuinely love Christ. Many, after confessing Him with their words, renounce Him with their deeds. When examined closely, even those who initially show promise and live a decent life may falter and go astray when faced with trials or persecution.

And what causes this is that Satan often places new stumbling blocks in their path to lead them away from the right path. When everything is carefully considered, you will find very few who truly love Jesus Christ with sincerity, meaning that they possess unwavering steadfastness at their core. These individuals, when faced with trials like the fear of death or poverty, remain unwavering in their faith and continue in their calling, demonstrating that the Holy Spirit reigns in them, deep within their hearts, until they are completely free from the imperfections of their flesh. Without a doubt, even those who are considered perfect still have their share of imperfections. Just as a tree may appear completely withered from its branches outwardly, yet if the root remains vigorous, the tree will survive. It may shed some excess branches, but it will regrow, clearly showing that life still resides within. Similarly, we prune away the corruptions of our flesh day by day, which still reside within us, until we reach the fullness of our incomprehensible perfection, a goal we strive to attain daily.

Now, let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, acknowledging our faults, and praying that He may open our eyes more and more so that we can recognise the weaknesses and vices within us. We should also acknowledge those vices from which God has delivered us and those from which He continues to lead us away day by day. We should mourn before Him, confessing ourselves as wretched sinners who would be well-deserving of condemnation if He did not show us mercy. As we study His Word, may it lead us to correct the things that are still amiss within us. In our pursuit of holiness, let us call upon the grace of His Holy Spirit, knowing how essential it is for us, given our recklessness, or rather, our rebelliousness. Yet, despite this, let us not cease our pursuit of heavenly perfection, seeking His guidance in achieving it not only for ourselves but also for all people and nations of the earth. Amen.

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