





# THE TRUE MEANING OF LOVE



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*To our Most-Respected Metropolitan  
of Rethymno and Avlopotamo  
Prodromos  
who surrounds his spiritual children  
with much love*

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## PROLOGUE

Saint Maximus the Confessor says that many have attempted to write various explanations and analyses about love. Nevertheless, if one wholeheartedly wishes to know the true meaning of love then the only means for one to search and find it is through Orthodox Christians; the ones that accurately believe in the true God. Our God, the God of love, of true Love, who is the One that has taught us precisely what love, is.

Unfortunately, while everyone talks about love, it is precisely the opposite which prevails in people's lives these days; malice, hatred, disagreements, injustice, all of which reveal a lack of true love. Something similar also happens to us, Orthodox Christians, who, as mentioned above, should know exactly what love is. Of course, regarding Orthodox Christians, we should note the following:

Despite their Christian status, some ignore the meaning of true love, which is, the love that the Gospel teaches.

Others, despite knowing the meaning of true love, do not accept it in their lives.

Others, that also know the meaning of true love, do not have the fortitude needed for its implementation.

Finally, even though a lot of contemporary men also know the meaning of true love, they are simultaneously influenced by teachings, theories and religious trends that are foreign to the Orthodox faith.

In this study, we wish to present the meaning of true love through the light of the Gospel and the divinely inspired interpretations of the Holy Fathers.

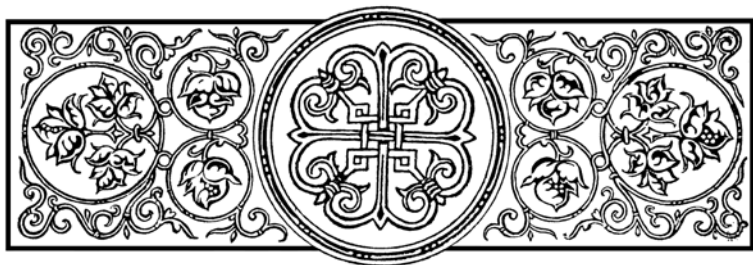
In the Orthodox teachings, the meaning of love is mainly revealed through the spirit of self-sacrifice. A Christian sacrifices a lot of his own personal desires and happiness in addition to a lot of the things that belong to him; even things which he deserves; in order to give happiness to the ones he loves.

This study is divided into three parts. The first refers to God's love for humankind, which surpasses nature. The second refers to the love that men ought to show to their Creator and Saviour, and the third, looks at the love that men ought to have between each other.

The third part of this book is also divided into three sections. First, it refers to the effort to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Second, it refers to the effort to love our neighbour more than ourselves, and third, to the beautiful teaching of having love for our enemies.

Let us strive to learn with precision the Orthodox teachings about the virtue of love. Then, let us strive with all our strength to acquire it. Finally, let us ask from God to strengthen us for this battle, by giving us, at the same time, this divine virtue as a sacred gift because 'God is love' (1 John 4:8).





## PART ONE

# GOD'S INDESCRIBABLE LOVE FOR MANKIND

## 1. GOD IS LOVE

**S**aint John the Evangelist teaches us that 'God is Love' (1 John 4:8), although he goes on to stress that 'no man hath seen God at any time' (1 John 4:12). Therefore, we can clearly deduce that the One that no man has ever seen is love.

Of course, it is perfectly normal that man, imperfect and finite cannot face, approach, know, and all the more so, unite with the substance and nature of his God and Creator because *'this supersubstantial and infinite substance and nature of God, is not only incommunicable to His creation but it is also invisible. Not only is it invisible, but it is also incomprehensible, inconceivable and unfathomable'*<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 346.

Nevertheless, as Paul the Apostle goes on to say, God *'left not Himself without witness'* (Acts, 14: 17). Thus, He did not abandon humankind, leaving them in complete ignorance about their Creator. God Himself *'gave testimony about Himself, mainly by sending us His only begotten Son. We therefore know God by His actions, from what He does for us; for our benefit and salvation. While God's actions reach us, God's essence is, and remains, unapproachable'*<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, according to Saint Basil the Great, *'we know our God from His deeds, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His deeds come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach'*<sup>3</sup>.

Also, according to Saint John Chrysostom, while we know God's deeds, we ignore His essence<sup>4</sup> because *'it is impossible to know Who, in essence, God is.'*<sup>5</sup> According to Saint Gregory Palamas, *'one part of God is unknown, that is His essence; while another, which is what is related to His essence, is known'*<sup>6</sup>; His divine power.

Consequently, even though God *'is invisible and entirely incommunicable, He is always communicable and visible in a different way; with His actions: Grace and power'*<sup>7</sup>.

Consequently, we know God, not from His essence or nature but from His uncreated deeds (that is the things which are not

2 Ἀθανασίου Δελφικωστοπούλου, *Ἡ πίστις τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων*, σελ. 49-50.

3 *Ἐπιστολή σλδ'*, κεφ. α', P.G.32, 869.

4 *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸν ρμγ' ψαλμόν*, κεφ. β', P.G.55, 459.

5 *Περί ἀκαταλήπτου, λόγος ε'*, κεφ. ε', P.G.48, 742.

6 *Κεφάλαια φυσικά...*, κεφ. πβ', P.G.150, 1180C.

7 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 575.



creations) and divine energies that *'they too are God, but without being His essence'*<sup>8</sup>.

With these uncreated energies of God, as we will go on to see, man has the potential of being existentially united, thus, becoming a god by grace, and in this way, of achieving what the holy Theologians of our Church call *'Theosis'*<sup>9</sup>. Having these divine energies, God gives man the possibility to unite with them and therefore, be able to be in communion with God; to be united with His Grace without coinciding with God, as it would happen if he was united with His essence.

The holy Theologians of the Orthodox Church also refer to the uncreated energies of God as divine gifts, divine qualities, natural characteristics of God, Divine Grace, glory and greatness<sup>10</sup>, divine virtues, qualities and finally, the natural and essential power of God<sup>11</sup>.

These energies and qualities of God are, among others, omniscience, ultimate wisdom, omnipotence, holiness, justice, peace, as well as goodness and love<sup>12</sup>. *'Of course, when we refer to the multiplicity of the energies of God, it does not mean that His energies are independent and autonomous but instead, according to the teachings of our Church and as Saint Mark Eugenikos referred to them, the many energies of God 'identify towards the*

8 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 36.

9 Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ, *Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζόντων*, ΕΠΕ τόμος 2, σελ. 256, Ἀγίου Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, *Κεφάλαια διάφορα...*, ἑκατοντάς α', κεφ. μβ', P.G.90, 1193D.

10 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 344, 346.

11 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', ὑποσημείωσις 41, σελ. 74.

12 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Α', κεφ. ιδ', P.G.94, 860A.

*one energy' since 'the one energy multiplies with unity and is shared unreservedly just like the sun, for instance, which shines its many rays into one light'<sup>13</sup>.*

But let us see what the love of God is. *'The love of God is the nature of God, with which, God imparts His gifts to the world, and especially to humankind, and in this way, He makes His creations participants of His beatitude...*

*...Outwardly, the love of God manifests in various ways in the different creations. Towards nature, it takes the form of benevolence, while towards rational beings, it manifests as philanthropy and the imparting of gifts. Towards Christians, in particular, it manifests as love, in a narrow sense, that is related to redemption. The imparting of spiritual gifts forms the perfect manifestation of love. For this precise reason, John the Evangelist refers to God as love (1 John 4:8), 'God is love'. The love of God towards the sinners manifests as graciousness, patience and mercy'<sup>14</sup>.*

In his interpretation of the above saying of Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite presents us with his wise and profound observations on the fact that God is love. 'It is not the [love] that consists of a courteous opinion, and which easily ceases and comes to an end since it exists among men, but instead, it is an essential power of God... in which, by loving all beings benignantly, God brought them into existence from non-existence...

...We said that God's love is essential to prove that it is not like our love, which is achieved by choosing what is best, but that He is love personified.

Nevertheless, although God is said to have life, truth and peace, first and foremost, He is life personified, truth personified,

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13 Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου Ἱεροθέου, *Τό πολίτευμα τοῦ Σταυροῦ*, σελ. 111-112.

14 Ἀθανασίου Δελφικωστοπούλου, *ἐνθ' ἄνωτ.* σελ. 63-64.

and peace personified because this supersubstantial and beatific essence of God is the root and the cause of life, truth and peace. In the same way, not only is it said that God has love but rather, that He is love personified and goodness personified.

... As it is the characteristic of goodness to benefit everyone freely and to be long-suffering towards the sinner, in the same way, this is also a characteristic of love. And since God is called Goodness personified due to the fact that He has goodness, principally, truly and in essence; therefore He is called Love personified.

I have to tell you the truth so that you know the difference between the love of God and the love of man. Since not only does God have love, but he also is literally (truly and precisely) love. Owing to the fact that He is an infinite and indefinite sea of goodness, and similarly, an essential, immeasurable and incomprehensible sea of love<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, as the Blessed Chrysostom stresses, all that God offers *'are not proportional to the value of the beneficiaries but instead, they are works of His essence because His very essence rejoices with justice and is exulted with philanthropy. This is His work; this is His way. Because, as the attribute of fire is to warm and the attribute of the sun is to illumine, in the same way, the attribute of God is to be benevolent; and not only this but a lot more'*<sup>16</sup>.

Consequently, God is and is called: love. He is love in its Entirety because He only knows how to love and not how to hate. God only knows how to help and not how to take revenge. He only knows how to bless, to forgive and to save.

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15 *Ερμηνεία εις τας Καθολικας Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 568-569, 586.

16 *Ὁμιλία εις τόν μὴ ψαλμόν*, κεφ. γ', P.G.55, 220.

## 2. GOD'S LOVE FOR MANKIND

**L**et us see how God's infinite and perfect love for mankind was initially manifested, through the vivid and concise writings of Saint Basil the Great.

*'What words can fitly treat the gifts of God? So many are they in number they even defy enumeration; so great and marvellous are they that a single one of them claims for the Giver all our gratitude.*

*Some, therefore, I shall pass over, although these in themselves show forth transcendent greatness and glory, yet, being surpassed by greater ones as are the stars by the rays of the sun, they appear to be of less striking worth. I have not the leisure, in fact, to leave the surpassing benefits and measure from His lesser gifts the goodness of our Benefactor.*

*Let us, then, say nothing about the rising of the sun, the phases of the moon, climates, the changing of the seasons, the water dropping from the clouds, other moisture rising from the earth, the sea itself, the whole earth and its produce, the creatures that live in the waters, those which inhabit the air, the countless varieties of animals all beings destined to minister to our well-being.*

*But what we may not pass over, even if we wished, that which it is quite impossible for one of sound mind and reason to be silent about yet to speak of it adequately is more impossible is the fact that God made man according to His image and likeness, that He deemed him worthy of the knowledge of Himself, that in preference to all the animals He adorned him with rationality, bestowed upon him the opportunity of taking his delight in the*

*unbelievable beauties of paradise, and made him the chief of all the creatures on earth.*

*Then, even after he was seduced by the serpent and fell into sin, and by sin into death and its attendant evils, God did not forsake him.*

*First, He gave to him the law as an aid, appointed angels to watch over and care for him, sent prophets to refute evil and teach virtue, checked his impulses towards vice by threats, aroused his eagerness for good by promises, revealed again and again the fate of each of the two classes [the good and the wicked], by making a pre judgment in the case of divers persons so as to warn the rest.*

*In addition to all these and other favours equally great, He did not turn away from man when he persisted in disobedience. We have not been deserted by the Lord's goodness, nor have we impeded His love for us by our stupidity in treating our Benefactor contumeliously through not comprehending the greatness of the favours bestowed nay, we have even been recalled from death and restored to life again by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Even the manner in which this favour was granted calls for the greatest wonder: 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.' (Phil. 2:6, 7)*

*He has, moreover, taken upon Himself our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was crucified for us that we might be healed by His bruises. (Isa. 53:5)*

*He also redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us and endured the most ignominious death that He might restore us to the life of glory.*

*Nor was He content with merely bringing back to life those who were dead, but He conferred upon them the dignity of divinity and prepared everlasting rest transcending every human concept in the magnitude of its joy. (1 Cor. 2:9)*

*What, therefore, shall we render to the Lord for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us? He is so good, indeed, that He does not exact recompense, but is content merely to be loved in return for His gifts.<sup>17</sup>*

### 3. THE INCONCEIVABLE LOVE OF GOD

**L**et us now see the distinctive works and the extent of divine love, according to Saint John Chrysostom, in some successive sermons.

*'We cannot describe God's benefactions in words and this is the reason the Blessed Paul said: 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift' (2 Corinthians 9: 15). Also, in another part, he said 'But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' (1 Corinthians 2: 9)...*

*... What word can express the immeasurable love He showed us? The magnitude of God's love caused John the Evangelist to say with astonishment that 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son'. (John 3: 16)*

*If you also want to listen to the words of God Himself and to learn His love, listen to what He says through His prophet: 'Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? ...they may forget, yet will I not forget thee' (Isaiah 49: 15)...He said so, not because God loves us only so much, as much as a mother loves her child, but because there are no other terms, or rules, or examples that are greater for the proof of this love...*

*...Let us bring to mind how much God has done for us; the sky, the earth, the sea, the air, the earth's plants, the various flowers,*

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17 *Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος, ἐρώτησις β', κεφ. β'-δ', P.G.31, 912C-916A.*

*the beasts, the reptiles, the fish, the birds, the stars in the sky, the sun, the moon and in general, everything that we can see; the lightning, the orderliness of the seasons, the succession of the days and nights and the annual changes. He breathed a soul into us, and He gave us intellect, He honoured us with great power...*

*...Indeed, now it is the right time to say 'who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can show forth all his praise?' (Psalm 106:2) and also, 'what shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?' (Psalm 116:12)...*

*Do not only think of the benefits towards all men but also, the ones that were done especially to you. For instance, if you were defamed once and then you were freed from the accusation. If, during the night or at another difficult moment you were the victim of robbers and had fled your attackers. If you cast off some damage or trial once, or if you were once healed from a serious illness.*

*Think of all the benefactions that God did throughout your life, and not only throughout your life but even throughout a day. In fact, if God wanted to reveal to us all His everyday benefactions, of which we ignore, we wouldn't even be able to count them'<sup>18</sup>.*

*'From what motive have these things been done for us? From what necessity of His heart? None whatsoever. Over and over again, he lays down love as the cause. But the highest degree of love is that where men receive a benefit without any prior service on their part to call for it'<sup>19</sup>. 'For He needs nothing that we have to bestow, and this is also a special proof of sincere love, when*

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18 Ὁμιλία εἰς μαΰσαλμόν, κεφ. δ' - ε', P.G.55, 160-162.

19 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ. δ', P.G.62, 53.

one who needs nothing and is not in any necessity, does all for the sake of being loved by us'<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed, the following words of the Blessed Chrysostom, about God's divine eros towards His creations, are quite impressive.

*'Christ did not hesitate even to sacrifice His life for the bride, the Church, even though no bridegroom even sacrificed his life for his bride. Because no lover, however desperately in love, is as overcome by a burning love for his beloved one, as God yearns for the salvation of our souls. 'Even if', He said, 'I need to be spat at, beaten, or ascend on the cross, I will not refuse, even be crucified to receive the bride'.*

*Of course, He suffered all the above, without being impressed by the beauty of human nature, since, before the Incarnation of Christ, there was nothing uglier and more awful than human nature because of the malice and ill will that it was overcome with'*<sup>21</sup>.

*'After the first days, however, the bridegroom loses the intensity of his passion, whereas our bridegroom remains constant in his love for us, and even increases in intensity, as John suggests in calling him bridegroom in so far as his desire is at its peak'*<sup>22</sup>.

*'For certainly there is no lover of corporeal beauty, even he be very frantic, who is so inflamed with the love of his mistress as God longs after the salvation of our souls; and this we may perceive both from the things which happen every day and from the divine Scriptures'*<sup>23</sup>. *'God longs to have us constantly united with Him, just like a lover, and even more fervent than a lover'*<sup>24</sup>.

20 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία λ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 608.

21 Κατήχησις ιβ', κεφ. α'-β', ΕΠΕ τόμος 30, σελ. 602.

22 Ὅμιλία εἰς εὔψαλμόν, κεφ. β', P.G.55, 62.

23 Πρὸς Θεόδωρον ἐκπεσόντα, κεφ. ιγ', P.G.47, 296.

24 Εἰς τὸν ριδ' ψαλμόν, κεφ. α', P.G.55, 316.



*'For I, so far from asking you for a recompense of the things that I give you, to even make myself owe you a recompense for this very thing, if you be willing to use all I have.' What can be equal to this munificence?*

*'I am Father, I am brother, I am bridegroom, I am dwelling place, I am food, I am raiment, I am root, I am foundation, all whatsoever you will, I am'. Be though in need of nothing.*

*I will even be a servant, for I came to minister, not to be ministered unto; I am friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother; I am all; only cling though closely to me.*

*I was poor for you, and a wanderer for you, on the cross for you, I intercede above for you to the Father; on earth I have come for your sake as ambassador from my Father.*

*You are all things to me, brother, and joint heir, and friend, and member. What would you more?*<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. *THEOSIS*: THE TRUE PURPOSE IN LIFE

**T**he benefactions of God are countless, as countless should be the words that we would use if we wanted to describe them. For this reason, this study will go on to refer a little more analytically only some important samples of God's love towards humankind. Specifically, it will refer to the perspective of the creation of man, or *Theosis*, as well as to the Incarnation and passions of our Lord. This study will also refer to God's love during the Divine Eucharist, during the forgiveness of our sins and the sorrows of life.

One of the greatest tokens of God's love for humankind is also the potential of its creation; and thus, the purpose for which

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25 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία οστ', κεφ. ε', P.G.58, 700.

God created man. Although men's potential of becoming gods by grace is commonplace in the teachings of the holy Elders, unfortunately, this essential theological concept is still unknown to a majority of faithful Christians.

According to Orthodox Christian theology, the main purpose of every Christian's life is *theosis*. The faithful Christian does not simply struggle to become a good and virtuous person but, through his virtuous behaviour, to succeed in uniting with God in both this present life and eternity.

A Christian believes that his integration into the limits of the Church gives him the potential of becoming a god by grace, and in this way, to quench the existential thirst that every man has inside him, which is the thirst for the absolute.

Let us see, though, what we mean with the term 'theosis' in Orthodox Christian theology, with the help of my late elder, Father Georgios Kapsanis. *'God created man 'in His image and likeness.' From this we discover the great love the Triune God has for man: He does not wish him simply to be a being with certain gifts, certain qualities, or a certain superiority over the rest of creation. He wishes him to be a god by Grace.*

*Externally, man seems to exist in a purely biological way, like the other living beings, the animals. Of course, he is an animal, but 'an animal... which is in the process of theosis through its inclination towards God,' as St. Gregory the Theologian says in his characteristic [manner] (Homily on the Epiphany. Migne-Patrologia Graeca 36, 324, 13). He is the only being that is distinguished from all else in creation, because he is the only one which can become a god.*

*The phrase 'in His image' describes the gifts which God gave only to man in order to complete him as an icon of God, and not to any of His other creatures. These gifts are: a logos- related nous, conscience, and individual sovereignty, i.e. freedom, creativity, eros, and the yearning for the absolute and for God,*

*personal self-awareness, and anything else which puts man above all other living beings in creation and makes him a man and an individual. That is to say, everything that makes man a person. These are the charismata by which we are formed 'in His image.'*

*Having being endowed 'in His image', man is called upon to be completed 'in His likeness.' This is Theosis. The Creator, God by nature, calls man to become a god by grace.*

*The charismata that form us 'in His image' were given to man by God in order that he may reach very high; so that through them he may attain a likeness to his God and Creator; so that he may have not only an external, moral relationship, but a personal union with his Creator.*

*Perhaps it is very daring for us even to say or think that our life's purpose is to become gods by Grace. However, neither the Holy Bible nor the Church Fathers have hidden it from us.*

*Unfortunately, ignorance not only exists in people outside the Church, but also in many within the Church, because they assume that the purpose of our life is, at best, simply moral improvement to become better men; when we are told by the Gospel, by the tradition of the Church, and by the holy Fathers, that the purpose of our life is not just that man should become better than he is, more moral, more just, more self-controlled, more mindful; all these must happen, but none of them are the great purpose, the ultimate purpose for which our Maker and Creator moulded man.*

*As St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Dionysius the Areopagite and other holy Fathers repeatedly say, God is filled with a divine eros, a divine love for His creatures. Because of this infinite and ecstatic love of His, He comes out of Himself and seeks to unite with them. This is expressed and realised as His energy, or better, His energies.*

*With these, His uncreated energies, God created the world and continues to preserve it. He gives essence and substance to*

*our world through His essence-creating energies; He illuminates man with His illuminating energies. Finally, He deifies him with His deifying energies. Thus, through His uncreated energies, holy God enters nature, the world, history, and human life.*

*The energies of God are divine energies. They too are God, but without being His essence. They are God, and therefore they can deify man. If the energies of God were not divine and uncreated, they would not be God and so they would be unable to deify us, to unite us with God. There would be an unbridgeable distance between God and men. But as God has the divine energies and unites us with these energies, we are able to commune with Him and to unite with His Grace without becoming identical with God, as would happen if we united with His essence.*

*We have as our final aim to unite with holy God Himself. This is the purpose of the creation of the universe. This is what we desire. This is our joy, our happiness, and our fulfilment.*

*Holy God placed within him this holy thirst, the divine eros, the desire for union with Him, for Theosis, so he has in himself the erotic power, which he receives from his Creator, in order to love truly, strongly, and selflessly. Just as his holy Creator falls in love with His world, with His creatures. This is so that with this holy erotic impetus and loving power, he falls in love with God<sup>26</sup>.*




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26 Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, σελ. 13-15, 35-38.

## 5. THEOSIS BEGINS IN THE PRESENT LIFE

**T**heosis, according to the exceptional theologian, N. Vasileiades, *'begins in the present life with the help of ascetic life and the mimesis of the divine virtues of the good, just, and philanthropist God, but it will only be completed in the Kingdom of God. Then, the human nature of the just will become imperishable; illuminated, sanctified and glorified'<sup>27</sup>.*

Let us see some further representative extracts from certain sermons of Father George Kapsanis. *'In the depths of his existence, man thirsts for uniting with his Archetype, for Theosis, and he does not find rest in what is created and finite. In the Holy Mysteries and the Divine Liturgy, the union between God and man, through our Lord Jesus Christ, becomes a communion of life, resurrection, transfiguration, becoming like Christ, and the Theosis of man. The 'in God's image' is actuated, and the faithful and struggling man reaches Theosis. Theosis is not an idealistic desire but reality instead'<sup>28</sup>.*

*'Through struggle, man is purified to be deemed worthy to see and commune with God... The ones that are ascetic in Christ are even deemed worthy in the present life to receive an immediate and personal experience of God, according to their purity level, and the gift of Christ. For them, God does not remain external, unfamiliar, and strange, but instead, He becomes approachable, communicable and willing to participate'<sup>29</sup>.*

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27 Τό μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου, σελ. 552.

28 Ὁρθοδοξία καί Οὐμανισμός, σελ. 30-32.

29 Θέματα ἐκκλησιολογίας καί ποιμαντικῆς, σελ. 69-70.

*'Experiences of Theosis are proportional to the purity of man. The more someone is cleansed from the passions, the higher the experience he will receive from God; he sees God, just as it was written: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8). When man starts to repent, to confess, and to cry for his sins, he receives the first experiences of God's Grace. Such experiences are, first of all, tears of repentance, which bring inexpressible joy to the psyche, and then, the deep peace which follows this. Afterwards, we proceed to higher stages by divine illumination, in which the nous is illuminated and sees things and men with another grace. Then the Christian loves God more, and new and different tears come, higher ones, which are tears of love for God; tears of divine eros.*

*Of course, when he has been thoroughly cleansed and has offered himself entirely to God, he then also receives the greatest experience of divine Grace available to man, which, according to the holy Fathers, is the vision of the uncreated light of God. Those who are very advanced in Theosis see this light, very few in each generation<sup>30</sup>.'*

*Even in this life, the faithful receive experiences of the grace of God, 'so that faith and Christian life are not only something intellectual and external but a true and spiritual feeling of God, communion with God, the familiarity of God, in which, the whole man participates. The ones that are completely cleansed from their passions and sins, and pray with true and clean prayers, become worthy of this great experience of seeing the Light of God in this life. This is the Light that will shine in the eternal life<sup>31</sup>.'*

*'The sanctified Christian, the new man, can participate in the Uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity and to foretaste the blessedness of the Heavenly Kingdom in this life. Every Christian*

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30 *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, σελ. 53-55.*

31 *Ἐμπειρίες τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ, σελ. 14, 17.*

*that has entered a life of repentance begins to see something from the Uncreated Light. The more he is cleansed with tears of repentance, the more he is humbled with true obedience, and is united with Christ through the Holy Mysteries and prayer, the more he receives higher experiences of the holy Grace, and even of the Uncreated Light<sup>32</sup>.*

When referring to an exceptional sermon given by Saint Simon, the new Theologian, Hierotheos, the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos says the following: *'The Second Coming of Christ and the Judgement to come will be chiefly for the sinners who are living in passions and sin, but not for the saints who are already experiencing Paradise.*

*When in fear and trembling, a Christian keeps the commandments of Christ and lives in repentance, he becomes united with that light, and so in reality in this life, he passes through the Judgement.*

*The person who sees the light is baptised with the Holy Spirit and does not take into account the day of the Lord, because, by his association with God, he is a whole, bright, and shining day.*

*We must highlight the word 'association' which refers to the man's communion with God. Truly, since man is a whole, bright and shining day, since he is light, he cannot distinguish the coming of day. This day is his own existential fact. For the Saints, it is a natural state, which they are already experiencing now<sup>33</sup>.*

Finally, in a different sermon, the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos says that *'The Transfiguration of Christ shows exactly what the Church consists of and its exact purpose. Its purpose is to lead men to Theosis, which is to see the uncreated light. The Mysteries, as well as asceticism, aim for this outcome.*

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32 'Ο ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς διδάσκαλος τῆς θεώσεως, σελ. 32, 100.

33 Ἡ ζωὴ μετὰ τὸν θάνατο, σελ. 226-228.

*The uncreated light is the experience of the Kingdom of God; it is a taste of Heaven. At the same time, though, it is a foretaste of the future riches. The Transfiguration shows what the Kingdom of God and the future reality is. The 'Theanthropos [deified man]' will be among the deified, who will rejoice in the presence and the glory of God in varying degrees, and a varying methexis [rooted participation] of the uncreated Grace.*

*Hence, in this way, David's psalm will be applied: 'God presides in the great assembly; He renders judgment among the 'gods.' (Psalm 82:1) Christ, and the Triune God, in general, will be God in nature, and the saints will be gods in participation and grace.*

*Consequently, the Kingdom to come, just like our presence in the Church, will not be a gathering of pious people. Instead, it will be a congregation and an ecclesiasm of gods by grace, who in reality will be 'deified by Him, Who is God by nature' (St. Symeon of Thessalonica).*

*In our Church, we do not refer to the human evolution from ape to man, but from man towards God. This ecclesiastical theory of evolution gives meaning to life and satisfies all the internal problems and the existential concerns of man <sup>34</sup>.*




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34 Οί δεσποτικές Έορτές, σελ. 182-184.



## 6. THE COMMUNION OF DIVINE NATURE

**A**s already mentioned, the purpose of man's life is *Theosis*, which is only made possible through God's uncreated energies. Indeed, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, God is *'the Maker of the nature of man, not doing so due to any necessity, but because of the superabundance of love driving the production of such a creature. For needful it was that neither His light should be unseen, nor His glory without witness nor His goodness unenjoyed, nor that any other quality observed in the Divine nature should in any case lie idle, with none to share it or enjoy it'*<sup>35</sup>.

The views of Saint Maximus the Confessor are similar: *'God, full beyond fullness, brought creatures into being not because He had need of anything, but so that they might participate in Him in proportion to their capacity and that He Himself might rejoice in His works, through seeing them joyful and ever filled to overflowing with His inexhaustible gifts'*<sup>36</sup>.

For this reason, Saint Gregory the Theologian, too, urges us: *'Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for His sake, since He for ours became Man'*<sup>37</sup>. Thus, let us also become gods for Him, because He, too, became Man for us.

Besides, as Father Georgios Kapsanis states, *'According to the Holy Bible and our sacred Orthodox Church, the purpose of our lives is to become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4). To be united with God. To reach Theosis by Grace. Christ,*

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35 Λόγος κατηχητικός, κεφ. ε', Π.Γ.45, 21BC.

36 Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης, έκ. γ', κεφ. μστ', Π.Γ.90, 1029C.

37 Εἰς τό ἅγιον πάσχα, κεφ. ε', Π.Γ.35, 397C.

and the holy Fathers, give many names to this final destination of our lives. They call it 'perfection' (Matthew 5:48), 'holiness' (1 Peter 1: 15-16), 'adoption' (Matthew 5:48, Ephesians 1:5), 'being like Him' (1 John 3:2). Nevertheless, all the names are summarised into the term '*Theosis*' since they all reveal the call to participate, by Grace, to what God is by nature, and is offered to us by philanthropy<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, '*Theosis is nothing else but the communion and unity of man with God. Thus, what God is by nature, man will become through transfiguration*<sup>39</sup>.'

According to N. Vassiliadis, '*Men become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4) through Theosis. They become 'sons through methexis' because of the Incarnation. Son by nature, is only the Logos. We become 'gods by grace'. Somehow, we are saturated by divinity, as a red hot iron is saturated by the flame of fire*<sup>40</sup>.'

Let us see, though, the excellent description of the opportunity of *Theosis* of man, in the interpretation of the characteristic passages of the Holy Bible, by Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite.

In his interpretation of the quote mentioned above, from Saint Peter '*through these you may be partakers of the divine nature*' (2 Peter 1:4), Saint Nikodemos mentions the important following:

Virtuous Christians, '*receive, even in this life, the betrothal and the preamble of the wished-for Theosis of the eternal life because in this life, too, they achieved sinlessness and purity, as much as it is possible to man.*

*They will also receive perfect and total Theosis after death, and after the common second resurrection, when they become similar to the angels, as our Lord said, and they will enjoy this*

38 Περιοδικό ό ὁσιος Γρηγόριος, τεύχος 34, σελ. 38.

39 Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου Ἱεροθέου, Ὑπαρξιακή ψυχολογία καί Ὁρθόδοξη ψυχοθεραπεία, σελ 99.

40 Τό μυστήριον τοῦ θανάτου, σελ. 552.

*sweetest and inconceivable beauty of God. They will eternally relish the shimmering brilliance and the pouring forth of light that comes from the divine beauty, having been made worthy of the face-to-face vision of God.*

*Nevertheless, when one hears the sayings of Saint Peter, in which, he mentions that Christians received the gift of becoming communicants of divine nature, let him not be deceived and thus think that the nature and essence of God can be shared. Be gone! Because this is impossible to every rational creature, both angels and man... Because the finite cannot contain infinity.*

*Thus, the communion of the divine nature, in which Saint Peter refers to, is the communion and methexis that the Christians, who will have been purified and perfected through their faith and virtuous life, will enjoy from the perfections of God, from the (holy and uncreated) energies, powers and beatitudes, and simply, from the attributes of God.*

*The saint called all these the nature of God because they are united with the nature of God, and they are inseparable from it, thus they are essential and natural elements of God because what is natural is also called the nature of God. Just as the divine nature is eternal and uncreated, in the same way, they, too, are co-eternal and uncreated.*

*Of all these natural perfections of God, the purified partakers reach Theosis and become gods by grace; now as in an engagement but then, more perfectly<sup>41</sup>.*

*At different times, the Blessed Nikodemos says that 'by saying Communion of the Divine Nature, Peter means imperishability, immortality, turning away from evil, and simply, the grace and energy of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity<sup>42</sup>.'*

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41 *Ερμηνεία εις τας ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 345-346.

42 *Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. ὑποσημείωσις γ'*, σελ. 347.

Let us now see the interpretations that the Blessed Nikodem-os gives of the following wonderful extract from Saint John the Evangelist. *'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'* (1 John 3:2)

In the interpretation of the above extract, the Blessed Nikodem-os says that *'We have not completely and properly met the power of the divine adoption that was given to us. Because, although we know and believe that we were honoured with divine adoption, therefore became children of God. If we then wish to understand the magnificence and glory of this given adoption, we will be surprised. Thus, we have no reason to represent its great worth accurately because we have not yet clearly understood what we are to become. In the heavenly kingdom, we will see God as He is. Then, we will become deserving of the direct and face-to-face sight and brilliance of God.'*

*Therefore, just like when transparent and clear bodies, or like mirrors and glass, receive the light of the sun and they, too, shine as they reflect the sun, this is the reason why John says that 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' This, in turn, means that we will become similar to God in glory because we will see Him as He is, in the state of divine glory, which, just like other spiritual mirrors, will be reflected and shine on us.*

*Consequently, we will not see God in His essence and nature. Be gone! This is impossible for every born and created nature, which includes both the angels and mankind.*

*We will not see, then, the invisible nature of God, neither will we become the same as Him. Instead, we will see the glory of God and the divine Virtues, and through them, we will become similar to Him; as pure with the pure, as bright with the bright, as light*

*with the light, as suns through the participation in the original and natural sun, and as gods by grace, with the God by nature*<sup>43</sup>.'

## 7. THE UNCONDITIONAL CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE INCARNATION

**W**e all know that the crucifixion and death of Jesus was the cause of the elimination of the power of death on the human race. For this reason, during the day of Easter, we chant with devotion: *'Christ has risen from the dead, trampling down death by death.'*

Before referring to the greatness of the passion of the Theanthropos, which was due to His excessive love for His creation, we should refer to the significant theological position of the holy Fathers of our Church regarding the unconditional character of the divine Incarnation.

Does, then, the fact that with His death Christ defeated death, indicate that Christ was incarnated, or else, took human nature, for this reason only; thereby freeing humankind from its shackles because He had to redeem man from sin and its consequence, which was death?

In other words, did Christ receive human nature because humankind sinned? Did the incarnation of the Divine Logos require the fall of Adam? Was the Incarnation to only happen if humanity sinned? Or would it have taken place regardless of humanity's fall?

The Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos refers to this essential matter, in which he summarises the teachings of the Holy Fathers. *'The incarnation of the Word of God was to take place regardless of the fall of man. 'The Word of God became Man*

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43 Ἐνθ' ἀνωτ. σελ. 517-518.

*to deify human nature, with love and philanthropy. The incarnation of Christ was the prior will of God, the ultimate aim of the creation of man. Man would not have been able to attain communion with God if there had not been the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ. For there is a great difference between created and uncreated. The created (man) could not have been united with the uncreated (God), had it not been for this hypostatic union of the two in the person of Christ.*

*Patristic teachings indicate that through the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, the divine united hypostatically with human nature in the Person of the Logos; that in this way, human nature was deified and thus became the true and only medicine for the salvation and deification of man. Deification could not have taken place had it not been for this hypostatic union of divine and human nature. This is why the incarnation was the final purpose of the creation of man<sup>44</sup>.*

The Metropolitan of Nafpaktos goes on to mention that 'In analysing the patristic teaching on the same point, St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite concludes that the incarnation of the Son and Word of God was not a consequence of man's fall. Instead, it was the original purpose of the creation of man because in this way he should and could attain deification.

*This seems right when we consider that Adam's fall could not have 'forced' God to become Man, and that Christ would not have taken on human nature eternally because of man's fall. It would allow us to conclude that the fall had to happen for God to become man and that in the end, the fall was not bad, but a blessing<sup>45</sup>!*

*St. Nikodemos, the Hagiorite wrote: 'The whole intelligible and tangible world came into being for this purpose; for the The-*

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44 *Οί δεσποτικές Εορτές*, σελ. 388-397.

45 *Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ.* σελ. 389.

*otokos. And again, the Theotokos came into being for our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

*Pursuant to another chief Father and Theologian of our Church, St. Maximos the Confessor supports that this view is characteristic. 'Christ's incarnation is the great and profound mystery for the sake of which the Triune God established the whole world. The mystery of the incarnation is the divine purpose which was preconceived from the beginning of the creation of beings<sup>46</sup>, and everything came into being for this purpose; it did not happen for any other purpose. That is to say, the decision of the incarnation preceded. God created the world with this purpose, since the end of God's providence and the recapitulation of the whole creation is the incarnation.'*

Finally, the teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas is similar. He, in turn, teaches us that not only the events of the Old Testament, but also the beginning and creation of Cosmos, had this purpose, that is, the incarnation of Christ. The foundation and the unification of the creation of Cosmos were the unification of the divine and human nature; the unification of the created and the uncreated. Even the creation of man in God's image was purposed to fit the divine archetype.

Consequently, according to Saint Gregory, the incarnation of Christ was predetermined. God planned it regardless of the fall of man because, through the union of the created with the uncreated in the essence of the Logos, in the face of the Theanthropos Jesus, could created man be saved.

All the above show the great value and importance of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. Without the incarnation, the salvation of humankind would be impossible. Mankind would not be able to attain *Theosis* if the Theanthropos did not exist. Through the Theanthropos form of Jesus, man can move from

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46 'Ενθ' ἀνωτ. σελ. 392.

the ‘in His image’ to the ‘in His essence’; which is *Theosis*. In Christ, the acquired human nature was deified, and when man is united with Christ, he can deify his being<sup>47</sup>.

Indeed, this is how endless God’s love is for humankind. As Saint John of Damascus says, ‘what greater thing is there than that God should become Man<sup>48</sup>?’ What greater event can take place than God should become Man and take human nature Himself? God became Man to make man a god. God becomes Man for every man, and every man can now become god by grace.

Thus, the incarnation of Christ was the original purpose and the end of creation. It was independent of the fall of man since it, in God’s thoughts, preceded the fall. The incarnation of the Divine Logos was what the holy Theologians of our Church refer to as precedent: a gift, God’s will in His good pleasure and not His succeeding will, that is, what follows; what consequently leads to the fall of man.

God was still going to be incarnated, regardless of our fall. What was added with the fall of man, was the passion, the cross, death, and the resurrection of Christ because, after Adam’s fall, death entered the world. Thus, Christ willingly and freely took a mortal and suffering body to save humankind from death.



47 Ἐνθ’ ἀνωτ. σελ. 114- 115, 393, 43, 52.

48 Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Γ’ κεφ. α’ (με’), P.G.94, 984B.



## 8. THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS IS THE GREATEST EVIDENCE OF HIS DIVINE LOVE

**I**t is undeniable, of course, that in the passion of the Theanthropos, we encounter the climax of the divine love. Indeed, after the fall of man, God does not abandon His creation but, because of His immeasurable love, He instead, undertakes a salvation plan which surpasses nature.

According to Saint Paul the Apostle, the love which God showed us is awe-inspiring and inconceivable. *'For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.'*

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'* (Romans 5: 6-8)

Let us see, though, the words of Saint Nikodemos the Hagiogorite, in his commentary of the First Epistle of Saint John the Evangelist, and especially, of the following passage. *'In this love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.'* (1 John 4: 9-10).

The Blessed Nikodemos says that, because Saint John the Evangelist had previously said that *'God is love, here, he now reveals the great work and outcome of love, which exists eternally in God. Love, according to Saint John, is the provident and loving, benevolent approach and philanthropic energy towards humankind, which is worthy of God, and it is as if John says the following:*

*Due to the fact that God is love, and though revealing His love towards humankind, He sent His Only-Begotten and beloved Son*

*in this world so that we, being in the death and imprisonment of Hades, might be saved and find eternal life.*

*Our Lord's favourite disciple says almost the same things in the Divine Gospel, to show that it is him that wrote both this Epistle and the Divine Gospel because, there too, he says 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' (John 3:6).*

*He says that, from this, it is obvious that love is a divine thing, magnificent and most desirable because it beseeched and persuaded the Incomprehensible God Himself to reach for, to love, and to save human nature, which was lost, and did not love God, and neither did it entirely seek Him.*

*Since this incomprehensible love forced God, Who cannot be forced; so that He sent to the world His beloved Son and Logos, Who is of one essence and Coeternal; because of His inconceivable philanthropy. Not only did love force God to send Him but also, to want to suffer a disgraceful death: the cross. And in this way, through His blood and death, to pay the infinite debt of all humankind's sins and to vindicate them, since they were condemned for their sins.*

*Because our God and Father was reconciled and thus, His wrath against men, which was the result of their apostasy and disrespect, finally stopped when He saw His Son's precious, worthy, and above all honourable blood pouring out on the cross. Thus, from being an enemy, He became a friend of humankind, casting off His previous disfavour. His wrath subsided, and through the death of His Son by nature, He made them sons by grace<sup>49</sup>.*

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49 Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς..., σελ. 570-572.

## 9. MAN'S FREEDOM 'FORCES' GOD TO BE CRUCIFIED'

**A**t this point, of course, a particularly important question arises. Was not the all-powerful God able to save His rebellious creatures in another manner? Was He not able to redeem humankind from sin, and its consequence, which is death, without suffering the passion and death on the cross? In other words, why is it that without the death of Jesus, humankind would not have been able to be redeemed from death? Why is it, then, that without the crucifixion of the Theanthropos, the salvation of humanity would have been impossible?

The answer that the Holy Fathers give is truly awe-inspiring. God did not redeem humankind in any other way, but solely through His death because any other way would circumvent the freedom of man. Humankind had to be redeemed from sin and its consequential death, which had permeated humanity but with respect to freedom and volition, and not forcibly. Since man had sinned, he also had to defeat death. This was undoubtedly impossible since, after the fall humanity was subject to the power of death. Consequently, no man whosoever could achieve victory against death.

Of course, that which man could not achieve was something that only the Theanthropos could. Thus, Jesus sacrificed Himself for our own sins, and He died freely and willingly as man but, because He is the perfect God at the same time, He was resurrected and redeemed humankind from death by killing death with His own, voluntary death. Let us examine this in-depth, though, the crystal-clear theology of the Fathers.

Initially, Saint Isaac of Syria stresses that what forced God to be crucified was His immense love for humankind. Even though God could save humankind in any way, He nevertheless chose the most painful, to show humanity how much He loves them. Do not think, says Saint Isaac, which God could not redeem the human race, which had defected, in any way He wished. Nevertheless, He wanted to show His great love for it, and He made the most painful choice for Him; the incarnation and the sacrifice of His Son. And if He had anything more precious to sacrifice, He would not have hesitated, to allow us towards His love, and to give us a new chance to approach near Him and be united with Him<sup>50</sup>.

As the Blessed Nicolas Cabasilas also adds, *‘There are two basic characteristics of the true lover towards the one he loves. One is that he wants to do good to the love-oned, and the other is that he wants to suffer for him. The second characteristic is clearly superior to the first. But since God, being impassable, cannot suffer for man, ‘devises kenosis’, and He suffers in His body to show His great love for man’<sup>51</sup>.*

Of course, the Holy Fathers stress that our Lord was forced to be crucified not only because of His great love for humanity, but mainly due to the respect of man’s freedom. It is evident, of course that this respect of freedom, too, arises from our Creator’s infinite love for His creatures.

To understand this essential theological position of our Church, first, we need to be reminded that the fall of Adam was ontological because his entire existence was corrupted. Indeed, because of the fall, man was stripped of the Divine Grace, he lost his boldness towards God, the ‘in God’s image’ was tarnished,

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50 *Τά άσκητικά, λόγος πα΄, σελ.382.*

51 *Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου Ιερόθεου, Οί δεσποτικές Έορτές, σελ. 256.*

human nature weakened, his *nous* darkened and his will became feeble, wavering and inclined to evil, rather than good<sup>52</sup>.

At the same time, man was cast from paradise, and as God had warned him, he was encircled by decline and mortality; he thus became accountable to death and subject to decline. Therefore, the most critical consequences of sin, or mental death<sup>53</sup>, in other words, was physical death and decline; the various ills, the sorrows, the illnesses and the hardships that entered into human life<sup>54</sup>.

What could God do, then, wonders Saint Athanasius the Great, so that He would not see His creatures under the rule of death and the literal threat of extinction of humankind? Could He, perhaps, demand an apology and repentance from humankind for the transgression of His commandment and, in the same way that humanity ended up in decline and death through transgression, now return to honour and immortality through repentance?

The above Saint stresses that this was not possible, though. Simple repentance, he says, was not adequate for the return of humankind to the previous state; which was wholesomeness. If man's transgression was a mere misdemeanour and a minor offence that had caused decline and death to human nature, then apology and repentance would have been enough for the return of man to their previous state. If the sin had not caused corruption and death, then this return could simply be achieved with repentance. Nevertheless, as Saint Athanasius the Great

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52 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Θέματα ἐκκλησιολογίας καὶ ποιμαντικῆς*, σελ. 65.

53 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Κατὰ μεθυόντων*, κεφ. στ', P.G.50, 438.

54 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Β' κεφ. κη' (μβ'), P.G.94, 961BC.

says, repentance is enough for the sin to stop. Still, it cannot lead man, from the aftermath of sin, which is decline and death, to wholesomeness and immortality<sup>55</sup>.

What should God do, then, to free his creature from the shackles of death, when on its own, humankind was not capable of defeating and freeing itself from death?

Furthermore, “the just God”, says Saint John of Damascus, “does not create another human or another creature to fight with the devil. Even more so, He does not remove humankind violently or forcefully from death. Namely, He does not forgive man from his sins if he does not deserve it; neither does He release him from the consequences of sin: decay and death”.<sup>56</sup>

On the one hand, says Saint Athanasios the Great, something like that would present God, Who had warned man about the sentence of death, as dishonest and untrustworthy<sup>57</sup>. On the other hand, adds Saint Isaac, such a thing would be the extortion and coercion of man. Man, says the Saint, had to return to the communion and union with God, or *Theosis*, to wholesomeness and immortality, entirely free and through his own will, after having defeated death first<sup>58</sup>.

For this reason, both Saint Isaac and Saint John of Damascus stress that because of His love and righteousness, God does not forcefully and violently detach man from death, although He could, because He is all-powerful.

On the contrary, the just and wise God wishes that the very man that sinned intentionally and of his own free will, and con-

55 *Περί τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου...*, κεφ. ζ', P.G.25, 108CD.

56 *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Γ' κεφ. α' (με'), P.G.94, 984A.

57 *Περί τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου...*, κεφ. στ'-ζ', P.G.25, 105D-108C.

58 *Τά ἀσκητικά*, λόγος πα', σελ. 382.

sequently suffered the punishment of death, will succeed in defeating death also intentionally and of his own free will.

The one who was defeated, says the Blessed Chrysostom, was also the one that had to fight a new battle and win, thus atone for his defeat<sup>59</sup>.

Of course, since no man could do something like that, as mentioned above, all men, without exception, were subject to death, therefore the Theanthropos undertook to accomplish it.

Thus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity: the Son and Divine Logos, became a Man by willingly assuming a human body.

Of course, as mentioned above, the Incarnation of the Son of God had already been decided beforehand and it was independent of the fall of man. In essence, because of our fall and sin, the Son of God assumed a body like ours, which was mortal and subject to passion, therefore, a body that can be harmed, suffer and die.

In other words, because the Son of God was by nature immortal and not subject to weakness, He could not die. As Saint Athanasius the Great goes on to say, He was compelled to assume a body *'that could die'*<sup>60</sup>; a body that was able to suffer death.

According to Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *'the nature that was defeated through Adam, had to be victorious through Christ, and the man that had fallen and had suffered defeat, he, too, had to win and be resurrected'*<sup>61</sup>.

The Son of God, then, by making His body the human body which He assumed through the incarnation, is sacrificed and is submitted to death like a human, offering His body as a sacrifice to His Father, on behalf of all men.

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59 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία λθ', κεφ.γ', P.G.61, 336.

60 Περί τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου..., κεφ.θ', P.G.25, 112A.

61 Ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς..., τόμος α', σελ.652.

Nevertheless, since the immortal and imperishable Son and Logos of God had 'dwelled' in the human body, which is mortal and subject to weakness, Jesus was resurrected after His death on the Cross and in this way, He abolished the authority of death over men. (Hebrews 2:14)

With His sacrifice, then, which He offered to all men, Christ dissipated death immediately. In this way, He attired all men in immortality and imperishability, with the power of His promise and resurrection<sup>62</sup>. *'The resurrection of Jesus after His death was the annihilation of death'*<sup>63</sup>.

*'with the sacrifice of His Divine Body, Jesus abolished the inevitability against us and established a principle of life, since He gave us 'the hope of the resurrection'. Now we do not die as prisoners. With the hope that we will be resurrected, we await for the common to all resurrection'*<sup>64</sup>.

Thus, what absolutely no man could accomplish was accomplished by the Theanthropos. Through the sacrifice and death of the Theanthropos, human nature becomes victorious against death<sup>65</sup>. Man himself, who had fallen, sinned and had become accountable to death, becomes victorious against death<sup>66</sup> through the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the person of Whom, divine and human nature were united. By offering Himself willingly as a sacrifice, Christ gives humankind the ability to succeed victory against death willingly.

62 Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου, ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. P.G.25, 112AB.

63 Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, Ἀντιρρητικός..., κεφ. κα', P.G.45, 1165BC.

64 Νικολάου Π. Βασιλειάδη, Τό μυστήριον τοῦ θανάτου, σελ. 155.

65 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. Γ' κεφ. κ' (ξδ'), P.G.94, 1081C.

66 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Γ' κεφ. α', (με'), P.G.94, 984A.



With His death, then, Jesus abolished death and led man to incorruptibility and immortality. This could not have happened if Christ had not assumed a human body, and consequently, the salvation of humankind would have been impossible. *'For the race of men would have gone to ruin, had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come amongst us to meet the end of death,'* says Saint Athanasius the Great<sup>67</sup>. At the same time, Saint Gregory the Theologian stresses that *'we needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, so that we might live'*<sup>68</sup>. God Himself needed to be incarnated and die for us so as to be saved from death.

Indeed, without this divine plan of God, which surpasses nature, humankind would have never been redeemed from sin and its consequence, which is death. Since God, Who respects man's freedom, would never detach man from death without first being worthy, without being deserving of it; without man himself succeeding in this. After all, God does not wish that *'our salvation is achieved through violence and force'*<sup>69</sup>; He longs for our salvation, but He does not wish it to happen *'forcefully and violently'*<sup>70</sup>.



67 *Περί τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου...*, κεφ. θ', P.G.25, 112C.

68 *Εἰς τό ἅγιον πάσχα*, κεφ. κη', P.G.36, 661C.

69 Ἀγίου Ἰσιδώρου τοῦ Πηλουσιώτου, *Ἐπιστολή ρκθ'*, βιβλίο β', P.G.78, 573B.

70 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Προς τοὺς ἐγκαλέσαντας...*, κεφ. στ', P.G.51, 144.

## 10. THE LOVE OF GOD DURING THE HOLY EUCHARIST

**B**ecause of His incommunicable love, as mentioned previously, our Lord Jesus Christ was sacrificed for His creatures. By virtue of the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist for us, which is repetition of His sacrifice on the cross without the shedding of blood, Christ ensured that the results of His sacrifice, which are: *Theosis*, forgiveness of sins, vindication, eternal salvation, happiness and glory; will be approachable to the devout through all of time. Thus, by participating in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist and by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we become participants of all the above blessings and gifts.

Jesus proclaimed that *'he who eats My Flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him'* (John 6:56). During the Divine Liturgy, then, the faithful receives the body and blood of our Lord and is united with Him, truly and existentially; he becomes *'one body with Christ'*, according to Saint John of Damascus<sup>71</sup>. *'God has nothing more to give man than what he gives him in Holy Communion. Man cannot ask anything more of God than what he receives from Christ in Holy Communion'*<sup>72</sup>.

Let us approach the magnitude of the divine love in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist with the help of the Holy Fathers, beginning with Saint John Chrysostom. *'Wherefore it is necessary to understand the marvel of the Mysteries, what it is, why it is*

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71 Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Δ' κεφ. ιγ' (πστ'), P.G.94, 1153A.

72 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 30.

*given, and what the profit of the action is. We become one Body, and 'members of His flesh and of His bones.'* (Eph5:30)...

*...In order then that we might become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh. This is effected by the food which He hath freely given us, desiring to show the love which He hath for us. On this account He hath mixed Himself up with us; He hath kneaded His body up with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head. For this belongs to them who love strongly...*

*...Wherefore this also Christ hath done, to lead us to a closer friendship, and to show His love for us; He hath given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy all their love.*

*Let us then return from that table like lions breathing fire, having terrified the devil; thinking on our Head, and about the love which He hath shown for us.*

*Parents often entrust their offspring to others to feed; 'but I,' saith He, 'do not so, I feed you with Mine own flesh, desiring that you all be nobly born, and holding forth to you good hopes for the future. For He who giveth out Himself to you here, much more will do so hereafter. I have willed to become your Brother, for your sake I shared in flesh and blood, and in turn I give out to you the flesh and the blood by which I became your Kinsman...*

*...This blood causeth the image of our King to be fresh within us, produceth beauty unspeakable, permitteth not the nobleness of our souls to waste away, watering it continually, and nourishing it. The blood derived from our food becomes not at once blood, but something else; while this doth not so, but straightway watereth our souls, and worketh in them some mighty power. This blood, if rightly taken, driveth away devils, and keepeth them afar off from us, while it calleth to us Angels and the Lord of Angels. For wherever they see the Lord's blood devils flee, and*

*Angels run together. This blood poured forth washed clean the entire world...*

*... This blood is the salvation of our souls, by this the soul is washed, by this is beautiful, by this is inflamed, this causeth our understanding to be more bright than fire, and our soul more beaming than gold; this blood was poured forth, and made heaven accessible<sup>73</sup>.*

*'For neither was it enough for Him to be made Man, to be smitten and slaughtered, but He also [combined] Himself with us, and not by oath only, but also in very deed maketh us His body. What then ought not to exceed in purity that hath the benefit of this sacrifice, than what sunbeam should not that hand be more pure which is to sever this flesh, the mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by that most awful blood? Consider with what sort of honour thou wast honoured, of what sort of table thou art partaking!*

*That which when angels behold, they tremble, and dare not so much as look up at it without awe on account of the brightness that cometh thence, with this we are fed, with this we are [combined] and we are made one body and one flesh with Christ...*

*...Let us not then be remiss, having been counted worthy of so much both of love and honour. See ye not the infants with how much eagerness they lay hold of the breast? With what earnest desire they fix their lips upon the nipple? With the like let us also approach this table, and the nipple of the spiritual cup. Or rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the Spirit, let it be our one sorrow, not to partake of this food<sup>74</sup>.*

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73 'Υπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία μστ', κεφ. β' - γ', P.G.59, 260-261.

74 'Υπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία πβ', κεφ. ε', P.G.58, 743-744.

Let us further review, however, the similar views of Saint Gregory Palamas. *'In order to not be one with Him in spirit only, but also in body, and flesh from His flesh, and bone from His bones, He gave us kinship to him through the bread of life...*

*... Therefore, we, who [combine] with the Body of Christ through the communion of this divine bread, not only become one body, but also one spirit. Do you see that the excessive magnitude of God's love for us becomes a reality, and is revealed through this transference of this bread and cup? ...*

*...Christ connected and attached us to Himself, like a bridegroom with a bride, through the communion of this blood, having become one flesh with us. ...*

*... Christ leads us to a greater desire for Him, and at the same time, He offers us the fullness of this desire, as each of us can now, not only see Him, but also ingest Him, enjoy Him, have Him in our hearts, and keep him in us. ...*

*... Christ tells us, eat My Body, drink My blood, to all that wish eternal life, so that you may not only be in the image of God but also, gods and kings eternal and heavenly, clothed in Me, the King and God of Heaven. So that you may be terrified by the demons and be marvelled by the angels, and beloved sons of the heavenly Father, immortal, beautiful beyond the sons of men, a fertile and pleasant abode of the supreme Trinity. ...*

*... Let us [combine] our blood with the Blood of God, to extinguish the perishability that exists in our blood. Because there is much and indescribable profit in this Divine Blood; from old, it makes us young, and from temporary eternal. ...*

*...As we approach the Divine Mysteries, we become royal purple (garment) and rather royal blood and body. And, oh wonder, we are transformed into divine sonship, as the splendour of God reaches us in secret, it wonderfully enchants us, it makes us sons of God. According to the divine promise, it gives us the power*

*to shine like the sun in the presence of our Father, as long as no stain in our souls prevents us.<sup>75</sup>*

## 11. THE LOVE OF GOD DURING THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

**O**ne of the basic tokens of the love of God is also the forgiveness of our sins. Our Lord only demands our sincere repentance. Consequently, He cleanses us entirely of our sins, and thus regards them involuntary from then on. Let us see, though, how Saint John Chrysostom describes this gift of God that surpasses nature, in successive homilies.

*'And do not tell me again, 'I sinned a lot; how can I be saved?'* You cannot save yourself, but your Master can, and to such a great degree as to obliterate your sin. Pay attention very carefully to the discourse. He wipes out the sins so completely that not a single trace of them remains.

*Of course, this does not happen to bodies. However, if the physician eagerly attends to it millions of times, and if he applies medicines to the wound, he does away with the wound.*

*Someone was wounded in the face many times, and the physician mended the wound; nevertheless, the scar publishing the deformity of the face, remained as evidence of the wound. The physician struggles emulously and does all he can to erase the scar; but he cannot, because the infirmity of nature resists him, as well as the weakness of technology and the imperfection of medicines.*

*When God, however, wipes out the sins, He leaves no mark. He does not permit even a trace to remain. Rather, He grants*

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75 Ὁμιλία νστ' Περὶ τῶν ἀγίων καὶ φρικτῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστηρίων, ΕΠΕ τόμος 11, σελ. 400-420.

*beauty together with health. Together with the deliverance from damnation He grants righteousness; and He makes the sinner to be equal with the one who did not sin. For He annihilates the sin, He causes it not to exist and for it not to have occurred at all. He annihilates it to such a perfect degree that neither a mark remains, nor a trace, nor a proof, nor a sign<sup>76</sup>.*

*'Beloved, let no one then despair for his salvation. Evil works are not in our nature. On the contrary, man has been honoured with the freedom of will and deed.*

*Are you a publican? You can become an evangelist. Are you a blasphemer? You can become an apostle. Are you a thief? You can seize paradise. Are you a sorcerer? You can venerate our Lord. There is not a sin that cannot be forgiven with repentance. For this reason, Christ chose to save the greatest sinners, so that finally, no one will escape salvation.*

*Do not tell me that 'I am lost. What have I got to wait for?' Do not tell me 'I sinned. What can I do now?' You have a physician Who is superior to your illness. You have a physician that confronts the nature of the illness with success. You have a physician Who heals with one sign only. You have a physician Who can heal you because He simply wants to; He both can and wants to save you.*

*From non-existence, He brought you into existence. Now that you already exist and have just turned to malice, He will correct you very easily... Can you really tell what manner in which you were created? Similarly, you cannot tell how sins are cleared. Because if a sudden fire devours thorns, the will of God wipes out our sins and completely uproots them, even more so. In this way, He makes the sinner equal to the sinless. Do not ask to*

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76 *Περί μετανοίας, ὁμιλία ν', κεφ. β', P.G.49, 339-340.*

*know the way. Do not examine what is happening but instead, believe in the miracle<sup>77</sup>.*

*‘There is no sin, which does not recede and disappear in front of the power of repentance, let alone in front of the grace of Christ. Because, if we quite simply repent, we now have Him our Helper.*

*If then, you decide to become a good person, no one can stand in your way. On the one hand, there is he that stands in your way, that is the devil, but he does not have any power because you have already decided to do virtuous deeds, and with this decision of yours, you have already acquired the alliance of God.*

*Nevertheless, if you do not decide to become virtuous, but you take the opposite path instead, how will God protect you? Because God does not want to save you by obliging or forcing you, He wants you to do so only through your free will.*

*Furthermore, God, Who does everything for your salvation and not because of some need of His, would not want to keep you close to Him forcibly<sup>78</sup>.*

*‘When we reflect upon our sins, both the intentional and in ignorance, and reflect upon the fact that it is not just a small token of beneficence that God does not examine our sins on a daily basis and that He does not punish us immediately after their perpetration, then we will be able to increase our love towards God.*

*You should consider, then, how many times you sin every day, how many beneficences you receive, how much forbearance and forgiveness He gives you, and also, that if God judged and punished you every day for your sins, you would not even be worthy to live for one moment.*

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77 *Εἰς τὴν ἐπίλυσιν τῆς Χανααίας*, κεφ. γ´, P.G.52, 451.

78 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία κβ´, κεφ. ε´, P.G.57, 305.



*And this is precisely what prophet David says; 'If You, O Lord, should mark transgression, O Lord, who would stand?' (Psalm 129: 3). If then, you consider all these, you will thank God, and you will not begrudge anything that is happening to you<sup>79</sup>.'*

*'Let us try, then, by any means necessary, to eliminate sins in the present life, to exempt ourselves from shame and punishment hereafter. Because if we have committed countless sins, we will be able, if we want, to extirpate the burden of all sins<sup>80</sup>.'*

## 12. THE LOVE OF GOD DURING THE SORROWS OF LIFE

**I**ndeed, the love of God appears even during the various sorrows in life. Both corruptibility and mortality that were inserted in human life after the fall of the first created man, which are namely the multiple sorrows of: illnesses, hardships, and their climax: death, are all the expression of God's love and philanthropy.

According to Saint John of Damascus, corruptibility and its result, which is death, have been *'introduced by our wickedness for our punishment or benefit<sup>81</sup>*'. Indeed, God chastens His creature, which rebelled, but He does so with love, allowing man to suffer many sorrows in his life, to return in his former state and to regain communion with His creator.

Thus, through the various sorrows of life, man is also humbled, he realises the weakness and the real measures of human nature, he understands how much he needs God's help, he feels

79 *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸν μα' ψαλμόν*, κεφ. ε', P.G.55, 162.

80 *Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Πεντηκοστήν*, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. στ', P.G.50, 463.

81 *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Β' κεφ. κη' (μβ'), P.G.94, 962B.

the need to repent, to abandon sin, to pray and come closer, as much as possible, to His Creator.

The Blessed Chrysostom says the following, in successive homilies: *'It is because He loves us deeply that He allows us to suffer distress, so that we may be united with Him more diligently. For mothers, too, induce their recalcitrant children to fly to their arms by frightening them with various masks, not wanting to cause them pain, but devising these means of encouraging their approach.'*

*God, too, in like manner, is always anxious to unite us with Himself, like some ardent lover – or, rather, being more ardent than any lover- allows you to be brought to such states of need so as to be exercised constantly in prayer, by constantly calling on Him and being concerned with His affairs by letting go of the others<sup>82</sup>.'*

*'Not only is our deliverance from evil, but also the permission for evil to arise originates from the benevolence of God. For when He sees us failing away into listlessness, and starting off from communion with Him, and making no account of spiritual things, He leaves us for a while; that thus bought to soberness, we may return to Him the more earnestly<sup>83</sup>.'*

*'For just as a gold refiner casts a piece of gold into the furnace and allows it to be scorched by the fire until such time as he sees it has become purer: so does God permit the souls of men to be tested by troubles until they become pure and transparent and have reaped much profit from this process of sifting: wherefore this is the greatest species of benefit...*

*...We ought therefore everywhere to yield to Him and always give thanks, and to bear all things contentedly, whether He bestows benefits or chastisement upon us, for this is also a form*

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82 *Eis τόν ριδ΄ ψαλμόν*, κεφ. α΄, P.G.55, 316.

83 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ιδ΄, κεφ. α΄, P.G.49, 143.

*of benefit. For a physician is a physician all the same, not only when he bathes and nourishes the patient and takes him out into pleasant gardens, but also when he cauterizes and operates on the patient. In addition, a father is a father all the same, not only when he caresses his son, but also when he expels him from his house, and when he chides and scourges him, making him no less a father than when he praises him<sup>84</sup>.*

Also, according to Saint Basil the Great, ‘sufferings are brought to us by the wise and good Master for our advantage. For wealth is taken away from those who have used it badly, thus destroying the instrument of injustice. He sends illness to those for whom it is more profitable to have their limbs constrained than to move unhindered toward sinning. Death is brought to those whose time of life is completed; from the beginning the just judgement of God has appointed this for each person, as He foresees from long before what is advantageous to each of us. Famines and droughts and floods are in a certain manner common blows to cities and nations punishing the excess of evil.

As therefore, the physician is a benefactor even if he produces distress or pain in the body (for he fights the illness, not the sick person), so God is also good, Who provides salvation to all, through particular punishments<sup>85</sup>.

Also, Saint Dorotheos says that ‘everything that God does for us, He does for our benefit, because He loves us and because He is compassionate. It is certainly our duty, as Saint Paul the Apostle said (1 Thes. 5:18) to thank His benevolence for everything and never be sad or petty for anything that happens to us. On the contrary, we ought to calmly accept everything that happens to us with humility and hope in God, believing, as I said, that God does everything because of His benevolence and His love, and

84 *Eis tón paralutikón...*, κεφ. α' - β', P.G.51, 50-51.

85 *Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αἷτιος τῶν κακῶν ὁ Θεός*, κεφ. γ', P.G.31, 333AB.

*in the best possible way... as a benefactor and good Lord; even when this is sorrowful<sup>86</sup>.*

The various trials and sorrows of life also become the reason for men to acknowledge the insignificance of the earthly life and to fervently wish for the eternal and true life. At the same time, the trials and sorrows encourage them to reflect, to practice virtue, to strive to achieve perfection and thus, to make themselves worthy of the divine gifts and the eternal crown.

The Blessed Chrysostom also says in successive homilies that *'then the soul is also purified, when it is afflicted for God's sake: it then enjoys greater assistance as needing more help and worthy of more grace. For affliction rends pride away and prunes out all listlessness and exercises unto patience: it reveals the meanness of human things and leads unto much philosophy. For all the passions: envy, emulation, lust, rule, desire of riches, of beauty, boastfulness, pride, anger; give way before it as do all the remaining swarm of these distempers...*

*... For what fire is to gold, affliction is unto souls; wiping away filth, rendering man clean, making them bright and shining. It leads unto the Kingdom, than unto hell<sup>87</sup>.*

*'For in proportion as tribulations are more intense, so also are the rewards augmented; yea, even far more: 'for the sufferings of the present time,' it is said, 'are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us<sup>88</sup>.'* (Romans 8:18)

*'Let us then give thanks to God even for these things, that we have reaped so much fruit from the tribulation; that we have received so great an advantage from the trial. If there were no wrestling, there would be no prize; if there were no lists marked*

86 Διδασκαλία ιγ', κεφ. α', P.G.88, 1761B- 1764A.

87 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία κστ', κεφ. γ'-δ', P.G.61, 579-580.

88 Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. θ', P.G.49, 59-61.

*out, there would be no honours; if there were no tribulation, there would be no rest... Let us not then be out of heart for the present evils; for if you have any sins remaining, they will disappear, and easily be burnt up by the tribulation; but if you possess virtue, you will become thereby more illustrious and distinguished<sup>89</sup>.*

According to the Blessed Chrysostom's above sentence, some of our life's sorrows have further beneficial character, since, among the various benefits that they give us, at the same time, they also cleanse us from some sins that we have committed during our lifetime<sup>90</sup>.

These sorrows exculpate us, to a smaller or greater degree, from future punishments<sup>91</sup>, since they substitute the pains of repentance, which we should all offer, for the sins we have committed.

If we had repentance, which would be analogous to our sins, some of the sorrows that we suffer would not be necessary. Since our repentance is insufficient and disproportional to the sins that we have committed, we must be cleansed differently; in the furnace of sorrows.

Thus, because of His great love and philanthropy, the most merciful God cleanses us from some of our sins through involuntary pain and indeed, without us being worthy since we neglected to shoulder the voluntary pain of repentance for these sins.

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89 'Ενθ' ἄνωτ. ὁμιλία δ', κεφ. α'-β', P.G.49, 59-61.

90 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία θ', κεφ. β', P.G.57, 177.

91 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Εἰς τὸν στ' ψαλμόν, κεφ. β', P.G.55, 73.





## PART TWO

# MAN'S LOVE TOWARDS HIS CREATOR

### 1. LOVE AS A VIRTUE

**A**ccording to Saint Basil the Great, 'no one has taught us to love God. Aside from that, no one has taught us to rejoice in the light, to wish to live, and certainly, no one has taught us to love our parents or the ones who brought us up. In the same way, and even more so, the learning of the divine yearning does not emanate from external factors. On the contrary, during the creation of the living being called man, a seminal logos is planted in him which has the natural tendency to direct him towards love<sup>92</sup>.'

Indeed, as we have seen in the first part of this study, *'the psyche of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God, yearns for God and desires union with Him... For holy God placed within him this holy thirst, the divine eros, the desire for union with Him, for Theosis, so he has in himself the erotic power,*

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92 Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος, ἐρώτησις β', κεφ. α', P.G.31, 908BC.

*which he receives from his Creator, in order to love truly, strongly, selflessly... just as his holy Creator falls in love with His world, with His creatures. This is so that with this holy erotic impetus and loving power, he falls in love with God. If man did not have the image of God in himself, he would not be able to seek its prototype. Each of us is an image of God, and God is our prototype. The image seeks the prototype, and only when it finds it does it find rest<sup>93</sup>.*

Thus, man must make fair use of his natural tendency, which is to love God, but also, love his fellow man. Love is one of the essential powers of the soul, which, on the one hand, he ought to entirely and freely direct towards God and on the other, towards his fellow-man, most certainly always loving his fellow-man according to God's law.

When this power of the psyche, which is love, is correctly directed towards both God and their fellow-man, therefore always loving their fellow-man according to God's law, then love becomes a virtue. This is the fact that reveals that our soul is healthy, that our soul is in its natural state, and that it is on its way to its natural course.

On the contrary, when love is wrongly and excessively directed towards ourselves, material things, or our fellow man, in other words we love them contrary to the law of God, love then becomes a passion and an illness since we are overcome with selfishness and self-love, which is the immense love of ourselves, the carnal, forbidden and passionate affairs, avarice, and the love for wealth in general, as is, with other similar passions. The erroneous use of love, this power of our psyche, reveals the illness of our soul, and its unnatural state and course.

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93 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 38.



Saint John Chrysostom also stresses that love is not merely a virtue. *'It is the mother of good things, it is root and spring, and is the queen of the virtues'*<sup>94</sup>; 'it is the greatest of all virtues'<sup>95</sup>. Whoever possesses love, 'possesses a virtue that is complete, whole and perfect'<sup>96</sup>, because 'love constitutes virtue'<sup>97</sup> and is 'the beginning and the end of all virtues'<sup>98</sup>. 'Love is the most superior of all virtues, and the foundation of all the commandments of God, because the love for our fellow men also follows the love for God. Because the one that loves God does not disregard his brothers'<sup>99</sup>.

The Saint stresses that it is natural for all the devout then, during their effort to reach perfection, holiness and become '*in God's likeness*', to strive to acquire the virtue of love as a priority<sup>100</sup> because through this virtue, '*we become similar to God, as much as it is possible to humans*'<sup>101</sup>; we thus become 'sons of [our] Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:45)

Of course, because love is a virtue, the free will of man is an immediate prerequisite for its acquisition. Man should be entirely free to guide love towards its correct course.

After all, it is commonplace in Orthodox Theology that God created man to have independent will, thus giving him the possibility to become perfect if he wishes to. In this way, He gives man the potential to reach '*in God's likeness*', which is the Theosis, freely and through his own will. Thus, man was created to have

94 *Ὁμιλία εἰς τόν ρλβ' ψαλμόν*, κεφ. ζ', P.G.55, 385- 386.

95 *Εἰς προδοσίαν τοῦ Ἰούδα*, ὁμιλία β', κεφ. ε', P.G.49, 391.

96 *Περί Ἀκαταλήπτου*, λόγος α', κεφ. α', P.G.48, 702.

97 *Ἐπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην...*, ὁμιλία οζ', κεφ. α', P.G.59, 415.

98 *Περί Ἀκαταλήπτου*, λόγος ι', κεφ. ζ', P.G. 48, 795.

99 *Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία νε', κεφ. γ', P.G.54, 483.

100 *Ἐπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία μστ', κεφ. δ', P.G.58, 481-482.

101 *Εἰς τὸν Σταυρόν*, ὁμιλία β', κεφ. ε', P.G.49, 418.

the freedom to do good, if he wants to, and to have the freedom to choose virtue if he wishes to.

As Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says, *'the benevolent God, Who is goodness Himself, created man also to be good. Nevertheless, He did not wish to force him to be good (because this is not a characteristic of God), but instead, He created man to have free will (because He too has free will). Thus, He gave man a natural power... with which, he will advance towards good, not out of necessity and with force, but deliberately and through his own free will... Or, as Saint Gregory the Theologian<sup>102</sup> says, He allowed man, by himself, too, to want what is good and thus receive a greater pay, and in this way, the good deed to be considered as his<sup>103</sup>.*'

The Holy Chrysostom supports that even though He could force us to be virtuous and then receive what He wishes from us, even if we do not want to, God conversely prefers that we do our good deeds willingly for our actions to acquire moral value and for us to receive the payment of virtue<sup>104</sup>. The Saint says, *"the knowledge of virtue He has implanted in our nature; but the practice of it and the refraction of sins He has entrusted to our moral choice<sup>105</sup>.*'

Saint Basil the Great also supports that *'God does not wish that anything be done forcibly, but whatever is achieved by virtue only. Virtue is achieved with intention, which is free will and desire, and not force<sup>106</sup>.*'

102 *Eis tá Θεοφάνεια*, λόγος λη', κεφ. ιβ', P.G.36, 324.

103 *Πηδάλιον*, σημείωσις στόν ρκδ' τῆς ἐν Καρθαγένῃ..., σελ. 527.

104 *Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμιλία ι', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 85.

105 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ιγ', κεφ. γ', P.G.49, 140.

106 *Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αἷτιος τῶν κακῶν ὁ Θεός*, κεφ. ζ', P.G.31, 345.

Since love is a virtue then, which means that it depends on our desire and struggle, it is entirely normal that it can increase, reduce, or even disappear, in accordance to our willingness and the zeal we demonstrate for its acquisition.

Thus, as we will go on to examine this concept analytically, our love for both God and our fellow humans have many gradations in which we can increase in many ways until we align ourselves with perfect love.

As Saint John the Evangelist says, the ones who succeed to align themselves with perfect love towards God and their fellow humans (1 John 4: 18), *'do not do good out of the fear of hell, or else out of fear that they will go to hell, but they do good because of goodness itself and out of the filial love they have for their heavenly Father and God of love'*<sup>107</sup>.

Similarly, love gradually weakens in those who neglect the works of love and virtue. Our Lord's words are entirely clear: *'And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.'* (Matthew 24: 12)




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107 Άγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 591.

## 2. LOVE AS THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**L**ove, as we mentioned above, is a virtue, and for this reason, it requires free will and man's participation. According to Orthodox Christian theology, every virtue, every good deed, and our salvation in general, are not our exclusive achievement but instead, the result of two factors: on the one hand, of man's free will and on the other hand, the grace of God.

Although man offers his free will and effort for the acquisition of various virtues *'with his nous, words and deeds'*<sup>108</sup>, 'no real virtue is his own exclusive achievement.

Besides, this is the reason why Jesus stressed that *'without Me, you can do nothing'* (John 15:5), while Saint Paul the Apostle called our virtues the *'gifts'* (Romans 12:6), which God gives to us (Philemon 4:29), as well as *'fruit of the Spirit.'* (Galatians 5:22)

By saying all this, we do not mean that man's free will is abolished. Nevertheless, since the greatest part of the acquisition of every virtue is the result of the divine grace and help, *'for this reason, Saint Paul the Apostle calls these virtues the fruit of the Holy Spirit; because we offer and plant the seed of virtues, which is our free will and desire. Its fruition, though, is the work of the power of God'*<sup>109</sup>.

The Holy Chrysostom says that *'hence we learn a great doctrine, that a man's willingness is not sufficient unless any one receive the succour from above; and that again we shall gain*

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108 Αγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ερμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 591.

109 Θεοφυλάκτου Βουλγαρίας, *Τῆς.. πρὸς Γαλάτας Ἐπιστολῆς Ἐξήγησις*, P.G.124, 1020B.

*nothing by the succour from above, if there be not a willingness... For indeed, of these two things is virtue's web woven<sup>110</sup>.*

*'Let us strive then and do what is within our control and also, to attract divine assistance from above. In this way, because of our effort, the works of our virtue, and God's philanthropy, will increase every day<sup>111</sup>.*

*'Not everything is within our control; some things belong to us, and some belong to God. Thus, to choose virtue, to wish for it, to portray diligence and attention, as well as to endure every effort to obtain it, depends on our own will and disposition. To complete the works of virtue, though, and to not allow them to fail but instead, to become genuine achievements, is the work of the Divine Grace. Thus, God shared the effort with us... after assigning a very small part of the effort to us. He is the One that accomplishes the greatest part of the virtue<sup>112</sup>.*

The Holy Nicholas Cabasilas expresses the same views but in a different way<sup>113</sup>. He says that there are two types of virtues; the ones that are our own achievements, and the ones that are the gift of God's grace.

Every faithful man then, ought to strive with all his strength to acquire the various virtues, such as meekness, prayer and peace. At the same time, he ought to strive to acquire the virtue of love. If, of course, he wishes for the virtue of love to become a real virtue and that it will remain in him forever, then he will have to ask from God to give him His real virtue of love; the divine gift of the Holy Spirit.

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110 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία πβ', κεφ. δ', P.G.58, 742-743.

111 *Εἰς τήν Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία νη', κεφ. ε', P.G.54, 513.

112 *Εἰς τό ρητόν τοῦ προφήτου Ἰερεμίου...*, κεφ. δ', P.G.56, 160.

113 *Ἐρμηνεία τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας*, κεφ. ιβ', P.G.150, 393D-396A.

In other words, with his continuous strife for the acquisition of virtue, the faithful man ought to make himself worthy of attracting God's grace, of receiving the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and in this way, his virtues to be perfected and to become divine and real virtues.

Similarly, Saint Makarios teaches that God demands our intention and agility. Next, God *'implants the fruit of the Holy Spirit in us'*<sup>114</sup>, which are the *'true'*<sup>115</sup> virtues of love, goodness, prayer and meekness. These true and divine virtues are *'unchanging'*, says the saint, which means that they are *'not altered'*<sup>116</sup> by the various insults that the virtuous (and filled with the Holy Spirit) man endures.

For instance, by trying to acquire the virtue of love through the exact observance of God's commandments, and by the participation in the Sacramental Church life, the faithful men gradually succeed to attract the grace of God and to acquire love, not as a human achievement but as a divine gift, as a real virtue and as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

We should not forget that *'all the virtues, according to Saint Maximus, come from God as His energies, and as the natural qualities and perfections of God.'*<sup>117</sup> The virtue of love, especially, *'the pure and sincere love for our brothers and sisters, is the energy of God'*<sup>118</sup>; it is the grace and gift of God. The virtue of

114 *Ὁμιλίες Πνευματικάι*, ὁμιλία νστ', κεφ. β', ΒΕΠΕΣ τόμος 42, σελ. 31.

115 *Περί φυλακῆς καρδίας*, κεφ. ιγ', ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. σελ. 186-187.

116 *Περί ἀγάπης*, κεφ. ζ', ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. σελ. 226.

117 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος β', ὑποσημείωσις, 26, σελ. 541.

118 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικάς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 575.

love then presupposes our own effort, but mainly, 'the love for God and the fellow humans<sup>119</sup>' is something that God gives us.

Thus, the faithful man that strives with sincerity to acquire real love as a gift from God can achieve very important things in his life. As we will also examine in-depth, he loves God in practice, by keeping all His commandments. He loves all men equally, even his enemies. He prays for the ones that harm him, he is long-suffering towards everyone, he never, not for any reason, loses his peace. He tolerates the unkindness of his fellow-man, he sacrifices his wishes for their sake, and he does not demand love and respect from anyone. Instead, he spreads the fruit of real love to everyone.

In contrast, the man who does not ask from God, and does not succeed in acquiring real love as the fruit and gift of the Holy Spirit, but instead, limits himself to a simple, poor and weak human virtue, which is the result of his efforts only, cannot usually achieve anything particularly important in his life.

Instead, this man loves God in a formalistic, conventional way. He loves the ones that love him; he gives alms only when he has money to spare, he is gentle only with the ones that do not exacerbate him, he is at peace with the ones that respect him, he offers to the ones that offer to him. In other words, he does something as a form of transaction, like trade, and which will not be able to go beyond the narrow human limits and the limited human capabilities.

The views of saint Gregory Palamas are similar<sup>120</sup>. He stresses that the acquisition of real virtues, although this presupposes our personal strife, is, in fact, a gift from God. The man that strives to acquire the virtues, he says, becomes both a receiver

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119 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Τιμόθεον Ἐπιστολὴν δευτέραν*, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. β', P.G.62, 603.

120 Ὅμιλία ι', P.G.151, 121C.

and a projector of the divine magnificence. As a gift from God, he receives true virtues, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and he literally shines because of them. Our Lord says, *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.'* (Matthew 5:16) This true Christian is a light that shines since he is filled with the uncreated light of God; he is filled with the light of the divine virtues; the divine gifts.

Finally, Father Georgios Kapsanis mentions that the virtuous Christians are already united with God in this life by living various experiences of *Theosis*. A typical experience of *Theosis* is the genuine love that God gives man; the fierce love for God and the great love for all humans.

The faithful man, *'even in this life, are deemed worthy to receive an immediate and personal experience of God, depending on their purity and the gift of God. Inner joy, emotions of inexpressible love for God, devout tears, moments of brilliance of the nous and the view of the uncreated light; all constitute different forms of experiencing God<sup>121</sup>.'*

*'The more someone is cleansed from the passions, the higher the experience he will receive from God; he sees God... Afterwards, we proceed to higher stages by divine illumination... Then the Christian loves God more, and new and different tears come, higher ones, which are tears of love for God, tears of divine eros... These new tears, which bring to the psyche a greater happiness, joy, and peace, are a higher experience of Theosis<sup>122</sup>.'*

In a different sermon, Father Georgios mentions the teachings of Saint Gregory of Sinai. According to Saint Gregory, the true Christian experiences different kinds of *Theosis*, which is the union with the uncreated Grace of God. Among others, these experiences are, *'love and peace, that is non-combatant, towards*

121 *Θέματα ἐκκλησιολογίας καὶ ποιμαντικῆς*, σελ. 70.

122 *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 53-54.



everyone<sup>123</sup>. True love and absolute peace with all men, even with our enemies, are basic experiences of Theosis; which are profound gifts of God.

God, says Saint Paul the Apostle (Galatians 5:22), is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and kindness. When man obeys God and is united in a Sacramental and existential way with Him, he, too, is filled with real-not superficial- love, joy, peace, longsuffering and kindness.

### 3. THE OBSERVANCE OF THE COMMANDMENTS AS THE EVIDENCE OF LOVE FOR GOD

**W**hen one of the scribes asked that our Lord told him which is the most important of all commandments, Jesus replied the following. *'The first of all commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with your entire mind, and with all your strength'* (Mark 12: 30).

Our Lord then, taught with clarity that the real love for God is not only confined in words or pedantic ceremonies. Instead, it requires sincere adoration, complete devotion, pure obedience and, if we want to use the term that our Holy Fathers did not hesitate to use: true divine eros.

All the above duties are considered entirely natural, if we take into account the multitude of the gifts and beneficences of our Creator and Saviour, Who, because of His inexpressible love for man, even went to the extent of incarnation and more importantly, being sacrificed for him. According to Saint Basil the Great:

*'If we accept the beneficences of God with full awareness and apprehension, but also with gratitude, how is it possible that we*

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123 'Ο ὁσιος Γρηγόριος, τεύχος 25, σελ. 64.

*do not love the One Who is responsible for so many and great beneficences? After all, I would say, a loving disposition of this kind towards such a Benefactor is created in a considerate soul, completely naturally and without the need of teaching*<sup>124</sup>.'

Saint Mark the Ascetic adds that *'whoever does not forget the multitude and great benedictions of God, will easily propel his heart towards the labour of virtue and for the love of God. In this way, he will return these benedictions, as much as he can, with a virtuous life, with continuous discipline in kindness and meekness, and with labour to achieve holiness. He will always be ready to do God's will, as he will be encouraged by the recollection of the so many benedictions that he has received from our Good Lord Who loves humankind*<sup>125</sup>.'

God, stresses Saint John Chrysostom, *'needs nothing that we have to bestow, and this is also a special proof of a sincere love, when one who needs nothing and is not in any necessity, does all for the sake of being loved by us*<sup>126</sup>.'

Thus, the recollection of the beneficence that surpasses nature, of the great gifts and the great love of our Saviour for His creature, as well as the admiration for the omnipotence and the magnificence of our Creator, lead us to glorify Him, to worship Him, to love Him just as He asked us to: with all the strength of our soul, heart, nous, and will. The magnificence of God, His love, and His gifts lead us to a complete worship, dedication, and obedience to Him and His law, with all the strength of our soul.

Indeed, our Lord Himself considers complete obedience to Him and His Law, and the precise obedience of His commandments, as essential characteristics and criteria, in addition to

124 *Ὅροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν, ἐρώτησις σιβ'*, P.G.31, 1224B

125 *Εὐεργετινός, τόμος δ', ὑπόθεσις δ', κεφ. ια', σελ. 58.*

126 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία λ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 608.*

essential prerequisites for our love for Him. Saint John the Evangelist refers with clarity to the above, as he goes on to say the following:

*'If you love Me (says the Lord), keep My commandments... . He who has My commandments and keeps them, is who loves Me... . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word... . He who does not love Me, does not keep My words.'* (John 14, 15:21, 23, 24 )

*'If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love... . You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.'* (John 15, 14) *'For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.'* (1 John 5: 3) *'This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.'* (2 John 6)

Whoever keeps the commandments of our Lord with faith, they then do precisely what our Lord commands. They subdue their will to the will of God and live a life that is consistent with the Gospel; these are the ones that truly love God and remain in His love forever. In other words, our Lord always loves them.

On the contrary, the ones that think that they love or that they believe in God but-as they claim- do so *'in their own way'* by ignoring the faithful and precise observance of His commandments and scorn, not just the smaller but also, the most important commandments of our Lawmaker, probably do not tell the truth. They probably do not love Jesus.

"I love God, but I do not do what the Gospel teaches", is a contradictory sentence. Saint John the Evangelist verifies this, too, with the following: *'Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.'* (1 John 2: 3-5)

With the above words, Saint John means that keeping the commandments of God is the real, necessary and indisputable proof of our love for Him. In reality then, whoever keeps the

words of our Lord with great precision, has fully developed the love for God in the depths of his soul.

On the contrary, whoever does not keep the commandments of our Lord, while at the same time says that he loves God, meaning that he loves God and believes in Him in *'his own way'*, which is a way that does not conform to the commandments of the Gospel and the rules of the Orthodox Christian Church, is lying and he does not love truth.

Our Lord considers perfect obedience in His holy commandments, which are not something burdensome (1 John 5: 3) but something very light and beneficial instead (Matthew 11: 30), not only to be the basic proof of our love for Him but at the same time, the betrothal of the eternal life (John 12: 50), as well as the condition of the salvation of our soul (Matthew 19: 17) and the existential union with Him, since man abides in God and at the same time, God abides in this obedient man. (1 John 2: 3-5)

Indeed, the Triune God loves the man who keeps the commandments of the Gospel to the extent that *'He manifests Himself to Him'* (John 14: 21). Also, He will come and make His home in him, changing his heart into His living temple (John 14: 23).

The view that God presents Himself to all the ones who adhere to His commandments because He Himself is in them, is also commonplace in the teachings of the Holy Fathers of our Church.

Saint Mark the Ascetic mentions that *'Our Lord is hidden in His commandments and appears Himself to the ones that search for Him, in proportion to the degree of keeping these commandments'*<sup>127</sup>. Saint Maximus the Confessor also stresses that *'God is in secret in each one of His commandments. Thus, whoever practices the commandment of God, finds God hidden in the*

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127 *Περί νόμου πνευματικού*, κεφ. ρ', Φιλοκαλία, τόμος α', σελ. 107.

*commandment*<sup>128</sup>.' Finally, Saint Nikodemos says that '*when you practice the commandments, in them you also find Christ, Who commanded them*<sup>129</sup>.'

#### 4. THE COMPLETE DEVOTION TO GOD

**T**he importance and value of the precise observance of the commandments of Christ, becomes evident from all the above writings. Since, according to our Lord's words, the most important commandment is love for God, and love for God means faithful observance of His commandments, then, it follows that parallel to our love for God is also the observance of His commandments.

For this reason, as Saint Basil the Great goes on to stress, love for God might be one achievement, but it is only a specific virtue. Still, this particular virtue is so important and great in value because it contains and requires the application of all the remaining commandments of our Lord<sup>130</sup>.

In the question '*what is the measure of love for God,*' Saint Basil replies that it is '*the continuous struggle of the soul to rise above its power in its effort to implement the will of God, aiming and wishing for His glory*<sup>131</sup>.'

Let us see, though, the concrete views of the Holy Chrysostom, concerning the close relationship between the love for God and the observance of His commandments. '*Let us, too, strive to love God. Indeed, as Christ says, He does not ask anything else from*

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128 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ερμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 477.

129 *Χρηστοθήεια*, σελ. 342.

130 *Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος*, ἐρώτησις β', κεφ. α', P.G.31, 908D.

131 *Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος*, ἐρώτησις σια', P.G.31, 1224A.

*you other than to love Him with all your heart and to observe His commandments.*

*Whoever loves God, then, as one should love Him, makes it apparent that he strives to invoke His commandments. When we have sincere feelings for someone, we strive to do everything and anything possible, which will make the one we love, love us as well.*

*Thus, if we, too, love our God sincerely, we will both succeed in observing His commandments and avoid anything that could enrage our beloved Lord. This is the Kingdom of Heaven. This is to take delight in gifts. These are the innumerable gifts; to manage to love our Lord sincerely and in the right way<sup>132</sup>, and not insincerely and 'in our way', which is the way that God refuses and abhors.*

In his interpretation of Prophet David's phrase 'Happy is the man who fears God, who finds great delight in His commands' (Psalm 112, v.1), the Holy Chrysostom mentions the following:

*'The Psalmist did not say, 'He will perform his precepts,' but He will find complete contentment, requiring something further. What kind of thing, in fact? Performing them with enthusiasm, being ardent lovers of them, following up their requirements, loving them not for the reward offered for them, but for the one decreeing them, practising virtue with satisfaction, not for fear of hell, nor from threat of punishment, nor from promise of the Kingdom, but for the sake of the lawgiver...*

*...Thus, whoever fears God, as he should, accepts His commandments with great yearning. Hence the love for the lawgiver renders the law kindly, even if it seems to contain some difficulty<sup>133</sup>.*

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132 *Eis tήn Gένεσιν, όμιλία νε΄, κεφ. γ΄, P.G.54, 482-483.*

133 *Όμιλία εις τόν ρια΄ ψαλμόν, κεφ. α΄, P.G.55, 290-291.*

On a different occasion, the Holy Chrysostom says: *'And should it be needful to give wealth or body, or even life for this love, let us not grudge them. For it is not enough to say in words that we love, but we ought to also give the proof of deeds; for He did not just show love by words only, but by deeds also. Do thou then also show this by your deeds and do those things which please Him, for so shall you yourself reap again the advantage... Wherefore also Moses said, 'For what does the Lord require of you, but to love Him, and that you should be ready to walk after Him?' (Deuteronomy 10:12)*<sup>134</sup>

Also characteristic are the views of Saint Dorotheos: *'Sanctified men offer themselves to God and are sacrificed every day, while they remain in this life. As David says: 'For Your sake, we are put to death all day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter' (Psalm 43: 22)...*

*...Let us sacrifice ourselves, then. Let us put them to death like all the Saints, for our Christ and God; for the One that died for us...*

*...But how did the sanctified men offer themselves? By living, not as they wished, but according to the commandments of God. By subjugating and abandoning their wishes for the sake of the obedience to the commandments of God and their fellow man. As Saint Peter said to Christ: 'See, we have left all and followed You' (Matthew 19: 27)*<sup>135</sup>.

Finally, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, wonders: *'what is the benefit when Christians believe in God, but then they do not observe the commandments of Christ? Indeed, the Holy Chrysostom says that 'correct faith is of no benefit when we live a sinful life.' What is the benefit when they boast that they love*

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134 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολὴν*, ὁμιλία λ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 608.

135 *Διδασκαλία ἱστ'*, κεφ. γ', P.G.88, 1824D.

*Christ, and then disobey the commandments of Christ? What is the profit to be Christians in name only and in practice to live an unchristian life? ...*

*... If Christians want to have the name, which will be in accord with the action, they have to become imitators and followers of the life and state of Jesus Christ, Whose name they have. When do they become imitators of Christ? When they observe all the commandments of Christ, and because of their observance, they are even ready, if the time calls, to die. Because Christ, too, observed to death, the death on the cross, all the commandments of His heavenly Father as a Man. Because in this way, Christ showed that He loves His Father and that He is His real Son. In this way, too, Christians show that they are genuine disciples of Christ and that they truly love Him...*

*Do you, my brother, wish to receive love for God, which is the most perfect of all the virtues, and to become a temple of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, which is the Supersubstantial and undivided Trinity? Observe with all eagerness, and love the commandments of our Lord, and you will enjoy this because this is what the Lord promised; to come with His Father and live in him that observes His commandments and to make his heart a temple and a sanctuary of His<sup>136</sup>.*




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136 Χρηστοθήθεια, σελ. 329, 345.



## 5. THE DIVINE EROS

**O**f course, as my late elder Father Georgios Kapsanis says, 'the relationship of the Saints with God is erotic and not simply moral'<sup>137</sup>.

Let us see then, through successive sermons of Saint John Chrysostom, what the characteristics of true love for our Creator, God, and Saviour are, and what the extent of this love has to be; this love that, because of its excessive breadth, our Saints do not hesitate to call '*divine eros*'. Let us also examine whether it is ever possible for something to estrange us from this love for God.

In one of his sermons, the Saint says the following: '*When someone is inflamed by love for God, he does not continue to desire what is visible to the bodily eyes. On the contrary, when he acquires other eyes, and I mean the eyes of faith, he always imagines and turns his attention to the heavenly gifts.*

*This man, then, even though he lives on earth, encounters everything in such a way as if he lives in heaven; without anything human preventing his course of acquiring that virtue. This is due to the fact that he oversees and overcomes both the notable things of this life, its adversities and difficulties... Let us then have a lot of love for God so that we will be able to suffer the pains for the acquisition of this virtue easily*<sup>138</sup>.

The Holy Chrysostom does not hesitate to call love for God, a '*divine eros*': '*Let us consider the ones that were the first to believe the teachings of the Holy Apostles, who in turn dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to God, and were unswerving*

137 Ὁρθοδοξία καί Οὐμανισμός, σελ. 29.

138 *Eis tήn Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία κη', κεφ. στ', P.G.53, 259-260.

*every day, night and day, to these teachings because such is the spiritual flame that burns in our souls; It does not allow us to have any wish for material things but instead, it transfers us to another kind of love.*

*Thus, whoever is overcome by this spiritual and divine eros, even if he needs to abandon all his possessions, or to scorn merriment and glory, or even to sacrifice his own life, will do all the above easily. It is when the warmth of this spiritual flame enters the soul, that it repels every indolence and it renders the one who is captivated by it, lighter than a feather.*

*Whoever loves God so much, then, now scorns all temporary things and at the same time, he is overcome by a constant spiritual pathos; always shedding rivers of tears, and his soul receives great pleasure. Because there is nothing that makes us as inseparable or unites us, so much with God, as these tears<sup>139</sup>.*

As we will also see in the following homily extracts, the Holy Chrysostom does not hesitate to compare divine eros with the romantic love one can have for another human.

*'Having such a Master, 'he is saying, 'is pleasure for me, is rejoicing for me. If anyone experienced such pleasure as should be experienced, they would take no account of any other pleasure. This, after all, is pleasure properly speaking; at least as far as all other things are concerned, they are pleasure in name only, bereft of substance.*

*This lifts human beings above this world, this liberates the soul from the body, this gives it wings in heaven's direction, this elevates it above worldly things, this gives freedom from evil, and rightly so.*

*You see, those who aspire to bodies that are radiant have no sense of worldly things but are interested in one thing only, the longed-for vision; what in future will people who love God as He*

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139 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία στ', κεφ. ε', P.G.57, 68.

*ought to be loved take notice of in this life, helpful or harmful? Nothing. Instead, they will be above it all, taking delight in imperishable things, especially since the One they love is of that nature.*

*After all, people loving those other things are quickly if unwillingly brought to a point of oblivion since what they love perishes and wastes away. By contrast, this love is infinite, everlasting, possessing the greater pleasure and the greater gain<sup>140</sup>.*

*'Let us not love any of the living things, then, for the divine eros to remain unspoiled in us and not weaken by fracturing here and there. This wealth will be able to give us all the abundance, all the treasure, all the prosperity, all the glory, and all the brilliance. Let us have this wealth, and we will need nothing else.*

*Consider the ones who are overcome by carnal love and are often aflame with desire for a beautiful woman, despite being threatened by their parents, or are taunted by their friends, or are reproached by many others. They do not change their mind but instead, they focus their attention on her, and they even shun their family, their inheritance, glory, prosperity, and their friends' advice. In response to all these, they consider it a huge consolation to be with their beloved, even if she is unimportant or unworthy of honour, or anything else. In the same way, for those who truly love God; will they be moved or annoyed by human actions, regardless whether these things are pleasing or sorrowful?*

*Of course, they will pay no attention to the challenges of this life, as their attention will be on this love. They will consider every happiness to be worthy of laughter and they will conquer every difficulty of this life, as they will be attached to the love and the desire for God. They will see nothing else but Him, they will always think of Him anywhere they may be and they will consider themselves happier than everyone.*

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140 'Ομιλία εἰς τὸν θ' ὑπαλμόν, κεφ. β', P.G.55, 124.

*Thus, even if they are poor, scorned by other people, imprisoned, or experiencing sorrows and face the greatest evils, they will consider themselves to be in a better state, even to kings themselves because they have as a great consolation for all the things they suffer, the thought that they endure them for the One they love.*

*For this reason, when he endured the daily danger of death, imprisonment, destruction, isolation, flagellations and countless other tribulations, Saint Paul had happiness, exultation, awe, and at the same time, pride for his sorrows.*

*Sometimes, he would say that 'we not only rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but we also rejoice glory in tribulations.'* (Romans 5:3)

*At different times, he would say: 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body.'* (Colossians 1: 24)

*At the same time, he considers these sorrows to be the grace and gift from Christ, proclaiming it with the following words: 'For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.'* (Philippians 1: 29)

*Then, let us also strive to have such a spirit and to endure with delight in everything unpleasant that we are beset by, and we will, in turn, be able to endure them if we love Christ a lot <sup>141</sup>.*

These last words of the Blessed Chrysostom belong to Saint Paul, and they are impressive, indeed. Consequently, proof of the divine eros is, not only when someone endures every sorrow of this life without complaining, by knowing that God permits these sorrows, but also when someone rejoices because he suffers for the sake of the beloved Jesus. Besides, he wants to suffer because of the love he is overcome with.

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141 'Ομιλία εἰς τόν μα' ψαλμόν, κεφ. ε'-στ', P.G.55, 163-164.

After all, as the Holy Chrysostom says in other sermons, one characteristic of the ones that are in love is that they want to sacrifice themselves and to suffer for the one they love. *'It is customary with those who love, to glory more in the things which they suffer for those who are beloved, than in the benefits they receive from them'*<sup>142</sup>.

*'Let us love Christ according to our power, and let us spend all upon His love, our life, our riches, our glory, everything, with delight, with joy, with alacrity, not as rendering anything to Him, but to ourselves. For such is the law of those who love. They think that they are receiving favours when they are suffering wrong for the sake of their beloved'*<sup>143</sup>.

*'I do not admire these Christians as much because they suffered various sorrows but instead, I admire them for the joy they felt when they suffered for our Lord'*<sup>144</sup>. *'After all, there is nothing better than to suffer for Christ's sake'*<sup>145</sup>.

Let us finish this chapter with the wise words of Saint Mark the Ascetic: *'The ones who love God 'die daily' (1 Corinthians 15: 31). Thus they strive to rise above everything of value in the present life. They do not think of anything else except how to achieve perfect love for Christ... . By seeking this, in contrast to the values of the present life, Saint Paul the Apostle used to say: 'I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me' (Philippians 3:12), which means that I strive to love Christ as much as He loved me. For this reason,*

142 *Eis tous Andriántas, ómilía 1στ', κεφ. γ', P.G.49, 165.*

143 *Υπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλίμονα Ἐπιστολήν, ómilía β', κεφ. δ', P.G.62, 714.*

144 *Ómilía στό "'Εχοντες δέ τό αὐτό πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως...," κεφ. ε', P.G.51, 294.*

145 *Υπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους Ἐπιστολήν, ómilía ν', κεφ. β', P.G.62, 57.*

*after enjoying this love, he did not condescend to think and to pursue anything else<sup>146</sup>.*

## 6. 'WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?'

**A**lso very important is what the Holy Chrysostom says in his interpretation of the following passage that is written by Saint Paul the Apostle: *'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulations, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?'* (Romans 8:35) In one particular sermon, he says:

*'Notice the emphasis of the expression of the Divine Paul. Notice the passionate divine eros that possessed him. Notice his fiery love. What is it, he says, which is visible or invisible, that will manage to separate us and remove us from our love for God?*

*Then, wanting to enumerate everything separately, to reveal clearly to all of us the unrestrained love that he had for the Lord, he added by saying: 'Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' ... Not even death, he says, that might be imposed upon us, will succeed in separating us from our love for God, because this is unachievable and utterly impossible.*

*No one else has achieved to love the Lord as much as this blessed soul. Thus, he says all this as if he had been rid of the body and had become, say, a heavenly man, who thought that he was not walking on earth. Because his passion and fiery love towards God transferred his thought from what can be sensed to the comprehensible, from the present to the future and from what can be seen to the unseen; such a thing is faith and love for God...*

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146 *Εὐεργετινός, τόμος δ', ὑπόθεσις δ', κεφ. α', β', σελ. 57.*

*. The Blessed Paul considered all sorrows and tribulations to be non-existent because he was burning with love for God, and he endured everything for Christ, Whom he loved<sup>147</sup>.*

Also characteristic is what the Holy Chrysostom says about the above passage in another homily: *'Notice the prudence of the Blessed Paul. For he did not mention what we daily fall into, namely love for money, ambition and the passion of anger. On the contrary, he mentioned the sorrows and worries, which oppress us much more than the former, and are even capable of compelling our very nature and also, without us wishing so, they can even reverse our stable and well-established way of thinking.*

*Because he might have mentioned only a few things, but every word hides countless multitudes of temptations behind it. Thus, with the word 'sorrow', he also means imprisonments, and shackles, slander, exile and all the remaining sufferings. Indeed, in one word, he includes infinite numbers of dangers, and with this word, he reveals to us all the human tribulations<sup>148</sup>.*

Of course, Saint Paul does not stop at this point. Instead, he continues even further. *'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God; which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 38-39)'*

Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite interprets the above sentence, which is difficult to understand, and he says the following: *'With his example, Saint Paul reveals how Christians ought to love God. Thus, he says that we Christians are so connected with the love of God that not only all of the world's tribulations will not be able to separate us from this love, but also, the following happens:*

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147 *Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία νε', κεφ. β'-γ', P.G. 54, 482.

148 *ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμιλία ιστ', κεφ. γ', P.G.60, 544.

*Assuming that a tyrant or king appears, who will threaten to punish us with the future and eternal death of hell, or he promises to give us an award for this future eternal life, and with all this, he attempts to separate us from God. He will succeed nothing.*

*But why do I say tyrants and kings? Not even the angels themselves, nor the battalions of the bodiless powers, nor the present things or the future things, nor height (which is all that exist in heaven and the heavenly kingdom), nor depth (which is everything that exists on earth, and underneath it, and Hades, which is the depths of the earth, and hell), not even all these, along with what is good or bad, will be able to shake us from the love of God.*

*Nevertheless, even if we assume that another creation was so great and wondrous, as much as the present visible, invisible, and comprehensible one is, even then, it would not be able to separate us from the love of God.*

*Paul mentioned the angels, not that the angels separate men from God. Of course not. But he said this hypothetically, wishing to show, even with the impossible, the immeasurable love he had for God, and also, the love that Christians ought to have for Christ.*

*Because Paul did not love Christ for what Christ has, the kingdom and the gifts of Christ, but instead, he loved the gifts of Christ for the sake of Christ.*

*He only saw towards Christ, and he feared one thing only; to fall from the love of Christ. Because for him, this was more terrible than hell itself. On the contrary, remaining in the love of Christ was more desired than the heavenly kingdom itself<sup>149</sup>.*

*‘Saint Paul,’ says the Holy Chrysostom in a different homily, ‘was so captivated by his love and desire for Christ, that even if*

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149 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ’ Ἐπιστολάς ..., τόμος α’, σελ. 213-214.*



*he had to suffer these eternal hells for Him, he would not avoid it...*

*... Even if the angels and all the heavenly powers assembled for this purpose, says the Blessed Paul, they would not succeed in separating me from this love. But what am I saying? Even if I need to forfeit the heavenly kingdom or to enter hell for the love of Christ, this would not be something terrible for me...*

*...Such is the want of lovers. They cannot bear to hide their love, but instead, they reveal their fiery love to all their friends. Also, they feel great happiness and rest in their soul as they constantly talk about their insatiable love<sup>150</sup>.*

Finally, in a different sermon, the Holy Chrysostom says that *'the divine Paul had the most incredible thing in him, which was the eros for Christ. Having this divine eros in him, he considered himself the happiest of all men. On the contrary, without it, he would not have wanted to even belong to the angelic battalions, or else, dominance, authority or power.*

*He would prefer that, with this love of his, to be even lower than the damned, than to be without this love and among the first and honoured. For him, hell was one; to be deprived of that love. For Saint Paul, this was hell; it was punishment, it was infinite evils, just as it was a pleasure to be together with this love. This was his life, his world, his angel; it was the present, the future, the kingdom, the anticipation and the infinite gifts.*

*Anything that did not lead him to the love of Christ, he considered neither unpleasant nor pleasant, but instead, he despised every worldly good as rotten greens. The tyrants and the mobs that were angry with him seemed like mosquitoes to him. Death, punishment and the countless tortures seemed like games. And, of course, he endured all for Christ<sup>151</sup>.*

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150 *Περί κατανύξεως*, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. ζ'-ν', P.G.47, 405- 406.

151 *Eis τόν Παῦλον*, ὁμιλία β', κεφ. β', P.G.50, 480.

## 7. THE REAL EROS FOR GOD

**O**f course, the real love for Christ, the original divine longing and eros, as the Holy Fathers teach, leads men even further. The divine Chrysostom says the following: *'Let us see the love of Prophet David. After he said that 'as the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul for Thee, o God', he added: 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?'* (Psalm 42: 1-2)

*He did not say that 'my soul longed for the living God' or 'my soul loved the living God.' Instead, to portray his disposition, he called his love thirst and thus, affirming both his passionate and eternal love.*

*Because, as thirst discommodes men throughout their life... in the same way, throughout their lives, the prophet and all the Saints were constantly giving themselves to the divine eros and indeed, they always increased their love...*

*... Thus, David seems to advise and thunder at all those that are attracted by the things of this world. Why do you love your flesh so much? Why do you wish glory? Why have you surrendered to the pleasures of the flesh? Nothing of all these remains or is eternal, but it disappears and is lost, and it is even pettier than a shadow, more elusive than dreams, more perishable than spring flowers. Some of the above leave the man at the end of his life. Others disappear even before its end. Their acquisition is doubtful, their enjoyment is uncertain, and their change is sudden.*

*In the case of God, though, none of all these happens. On the contrary, He lives and remains eternally, without being subject to any deterioration or change. Thus, after we scorn the temporary*

*and the ephemeral, let us love the eternal and the everlasting. Because it is not possible to discredit ourselves if we love Him, we cannot fail. It is not possible that the One we love will abandon us...*

*... This is why, after David said 'my soul thirsts for the living God,' he added 'when shall I come and appear before the face of God'? Take note how this man is aflame with thirst, how he is afire knowing that he will see God when he departs from this life. He seems unable to withstand the postponement, he cannot stand the delay but instead, he proves to have the same view with Paul. In the same way, then, he, too, sighed because of the delay of his departure from this life (2 Corinthians 5:4)<sup>152</sup>.*

In other homilies, the divine Chrysostom says the following: *'Paul, the fiery lover of Christ, was so much overcome with longing for God, that he would sigh for the postponement and tardiness of his passing away from this life. 'For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened' (2 Corinthians 5:4), he used to say.*

*At the same time, Paul longed and wished to remain in this life; always for the love of Christ. For this reason, he used to say that 'it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body' (Philippians 1:24); for your faith in Christ to progress<sup>153</sup>.*

*'And is it not shameful that you are distressed on account of death, whereas Paul groaned on account of the present life? (Romans 8: 22-23)... And he spoke thus, not as condemning the things present, but longing for the things to come.*

*'I have tasted,' says he, 'of the grace, and I do not willingly put up with the delay. I have the first fruits of the Spirit, and I press on towards the whole. I have ascended to the third heaven; I have seen that glory which is unutterable; I have beheld the*

152 *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸν μα' ψαλμόν*, κεφ. στ', P.G.55, 164-165.

153 *Περί κατανύξεως*, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. ζ', P.G.47, 404-405.

*shining palaces; I learned what joys I am deprived of, while I linger here, and therefore do I groan*<sup>154</sup>.'

The words of Saint Basil the Great are similar and clear. *'This Beauty, invisible to the eyes of the flesh, is apprehended by the mind and soul alone. Whenever it cast its light upon any of the Saints, it left them with an intolerant pain and longing, and they would say, weary of life on earth:*

*'Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged,' [Ps. 120:5] 'when shall I come and appear before the face of God?', [Ps. 42:3] and again: 'to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better'; and also: 'my soul hath thirsted after the strong living God' [Ps. 42:3] and 'Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord.'*

*Since they felt the burden of this present life as an imprisonment, they were scarcely able to contain themselves under the impulses which the touch of Divine Love had made to stir within their souls. Indeed, by reason of their insatiable eagerness to enjoy the vision of Divine Beauty, they prayed that contemplation of the joy of the Lord would last as long as the whole of eternal life*<sup>155</sup>.'

Finally, Saint Isaac of Syria says the following. *'Whoever has approached the love of God, no longer wishes to reside in the present life... The joy that comes from God is stronger than the joy of the present life and whoever tastes it, not only will he not take heed of the passions and pleasures, but also, he will not feel any desire for his present life, nor will he prefer anything sensory that is related to this joy, if this joy is true and not an illusion. The love of God is sweeter than this temporary life*<sup>156</sup>.'

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154 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ε', κεφ. β', P.G. 49, 71.

155 *Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος*, ἐρώτησις β', κεφ. α', P.G. 31, 909C- 912A.

156 *Τὰ ἀσκητικά*, λόγος λη', σελ. 200.

## 8. THE LOVE FOR GOD DURING THE HOLY EUCHARIST

**P**erhaps, the greatest expression of love towards God, its most important proof and the safest prerequisite for its preservation and increase, is the constant participation to the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. But let us examine how the above are justified.

As we have already mentioned, according to our Lord, the most important proof of our love towards Him is the complete obedience to His commandments; our full compliance with His divine will.

Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite summarises the entire teachings of the Holy Fathers, and he mentions the most essential: *'The will of God is that we act as our Lord commands, Who in turn says that 'whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life' (John 6: 54). This is not just a commandment but also, the principal of all the commandments because it is both conclusive and the component of the remaining commandments*<sup>157</sup>.

Thus, the correct and 'constant'<sup>158</sup> participation to the mystery of the Holy Eucharist is not a simple commandment but instead, a commandment of greatest importance, the foremost commandment, according to Saint Nikodemos. Because its faithful adherence is the necessary presupposition to succeed to abide, to the perfect extent, by the remaining commandments of our Lord, to acquire and perfect all the Christian virtues<sup>159</sup>.

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157 *Περί συνεχοῦς θείας μεταλήψεως*, σελ. 94-95.

158 \*Ενθ. ἀνωτ. σελ. 95, 96, 106.

159 \*Ενθ. ἀνωτ. σελ. 83, 105.

All the above lead to the following conclusion: when we obey the commandment of Christ about the constant participation in the Holy Eucharist, we express our love to Him in the best possible way.

Indeed, if the participation in the Holy Eucharist helps us to adhere to the commandments of our Lord in the best manner, and the practice of the commandments is the fundamental presupposition of our love for God, then it is a natural consequence that the participation in the Holy Eucharist is the best expression of our love for God; the most necessary prerequisite of the acquisition, the preservation and expansion of our love for God.

Therefore, we receive frequent Communion of the Sacrament of Sacraments because we love God very much and we want to be able to love Him even more through the strength that the Sacrament of the Sacraments will give us to keep all the divine commandments.

Our continuous participation in the Holy Eucharist is the best expression of our love for God. Also, it is a safe presupposition of its preservation and increase, for a further reason:

As it is well known, the Sacrament of the Eucharist is thus referred to as such because throughout its course there is a vivid representation, a sacramental revival of the Divine Economy; the whole life and especially the Passion of the Theanthropos Jesus for the salvation of the human race<sup>160</sup>. The birth of Jesus, His Presentation in the Temple, His baptism, the Proclamation, humiliation, Passion, Crucifixion, death, Resurrection, and finally, His ascension to Heaven, they are all revealed to the faithful through the symbolic acts and the words of the ecclesiastical ministers.

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160 Θεοδώρου Ἀνδίδων, *Προθεωρία... περί τῶν ἐν τῇ θεῖα Λειτουργίᾳ...*, κεφ. α', P.G.140, 417A.

According to Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, the purpose of the revival of the Divine Economy is as follows: seeing in some way, even with our physical eyes, the Divine Economy, which is the incarnation of the Divine Logos and His admirable poverty, the mockery and the passion He endured for our salvation, how much He loved us and how much He was hated, how much He was humiliated, and so much more, we then approach the Sacrament of the Sacraments with greater reverence, faith, zeal and devoutness. We trust and entrust Him with our lives, and we reignite our hearts with the flame of His love<sup>161</sup>.

Indeed, adds Saint John Chrysostom, the daily remembrance of the benevolence and, above all, of our Saviour's Passion that takes place during the Holy Eucharist, as our Lord Himself asked (Luke 22: 19), is the occasion for our perpetual thanksgiving, blessing and mainly, our sincere and great love.

The Saint continues to say that if the memory of our fellow man's benefaction results to a greater love for them, how much more then, will our love for God and the willingness to obey His commandments increase if we always keep in mind the memory of His great gifts<sup>162</sup>?

Our participation in the Divine Eucharist is the highest expression of our love and the greatest act of worship for one more reason. Usually, our love for our fellow human beings manifests in the form of a gift offering to them, which often has the nature of some form of reimbursement.

During the Divine Eucharist we are so full of gratitude for our Lord's gifts, which far surpass nature, that we too, offer to Him the most precious thing that we have in our lives. Indeed, this precious thing is not through the meagre gifts we offer, which are the Prosphoron and the Nama, nor the offering and sacrifice of

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161 *Ἑρμηνεία τῆς θείας Λειτουργίας*, κεφ. α', P.G.150, 373CD.

162 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία κε', κεφ. γ', P.G.57, 331.

ourselves, which is what these gifts symbolize. During the Divine Eucharist, not having to offer a gift worthy of the greatness of our Lord, we offer Him the bloodless sacrifice of His beloved Son, which value is genuinely immeasurable. During the Divine Liturgy, no sheep, ox, or other animal is offered and sacrificed, as was the case in the Old Testament, but the Theanthropos Jesus Himself instead; 'The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Thus, during the Divine Eucharist, we offer the ultimate in perfection in which human nature has to show; the Theanthropos Jesus. Jesus was not only a perfect God, but also a perfect Man. Only He, as a Man, pleased God by applying, to the perfect extent, all His commandments<sup>163</sup>.

Finally, the continuous participation in the Divine Eucharist is the most important and safest approach to maintaining and increasing our love for God, for the following reasons, which are also mentioned by Saint Nikodemos the Athonite:

*'If you wish to kindle the divine eros in your heart and with it, to acquire the love for Christ, and with it, to obtain all the other virtues, you should frequently partake of the Holy Communion, and you will enjoy what you desire because it is impossible not to love Christ when someone consistently receives His Holy Body and Blood, and in turn, to be loved by Christ because this is done naturally.'*

*Listen. Some wonder why parents love their children and why children love their parents back. We also say that no one ever hated himself or his body. Children, likewise, because their bodies have the existence of the bodies of their parents,... it is natural to love their parents. Also, parents love their children because their own bodies conceived them. In like manner, those who frequently*

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163 Ἀγίου Θεοφυλάκτου Βουλγαρίας, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τό κατά Λουκᾶν εὐαγγέλιον*, κεφ. ιδ', P.G.123, 936AB.



*receive the Body and Blood of our Lord will naturally rekindle their desire and love towards Him.*

*On the one hand, the more frequently this life-flowing and life-giving Body and Blood is received, the more it warms the ones who receive it towards love; even if they are the most ungrateful and stone-hearted of people. On the other hand, because the knowledge of love for God is not a foreign thing to us, but instead is naturally sown in our hearts, as soon as we are born in the flesh and as soon as we are reborn in spirit through Holy Baptism, then with little reason, these natural sparks ignite...*

*... This natural power to love God, then, is strengthened, increased and perfected by the constant Communion of the Body and Blood of our Lord.*

*For this reason, Saint Cyprian writes that, when the Martyrs would go to be tortured, they first received the Sacrament of Sacraments and in this way, were empowered from the Holy Communion, they were kindled to the love of God, and so they run to the stake like sheep to slaughter. Instead of the Body and Blood of Christ, which they received, they poured their own blood and gave their bodies to various sufferings<sup>164</sup>.*

*Saint Nikodemos wondered: 'I am amazed and I wonder how a Christian of our times can celebrate Sundays or the remaining annual feasts, and spiritually rejoice with true happiness if they do not always receive Holy Communion, which is the cause and the occasion of every feast and celebration? ... Or how is there a way to kindle in their hearts the divine love, spiritual happiness, divine peace, and the other fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit, without receiving the Body and Blood of the beloved Son of the Father<sup>165</sup>?'*

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164 *Περί συνεχοῦς θείας μεταλήψεως*, σελ. 95-96.

165 *Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ.* σελ. 106.

The Blessed Nikodemos recommended that the faithful should often receive the Sacrament of the Sacraments, as canon laws and the Divine Fathers prescribe, that is, 'at least every weekend and the remaining feasts... Why not prepare ourselves properly to receive the Divine Eucharist, if not every day, every Saturday, or Sunday, and at every feast? We should run to the Altar with great pleasure to receive our Sweetest Jesus Christ, Who is our life, our breath, and all our hope and salvation<sup>166</sup>.'

Therefore, it is undeniable that, if someone truly loves Christ and wishes to increase this love of theirs continually, they strive to continuously unite with Him through the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist. They always hasten to embrace Him tightly, just as a mother does to her child. The perpetual communion of the Sacrament of Sacraments keeps Christ in our soul and body, continually rekindling our love for Him.

## 9. THE LOVE FOR THE 'WORLD' IS HATRED TOWARDS GOD

**A**ccording to the teachings of the Gospel, it is impossible to truly love God if we love the 'world' at the same time. Of course, the meaning of 'world' does not include the love and desire for the possessions of present life because this would be wrong. Instead, it means the passionate, or else, the excessive, and contrary to the Law of God love for them.

The love of the 'world', namely the passions, is the excessive and sinful love, desire and attachment to the vain pleasures and delights of this life, which is wealth and fleeting glory. However, if the Law of God does not permit it, it imperatively removes us from the pure love for God.

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166 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. σελ. 143, 109.

Our Lord Himself presents the great contrast between God and the 'world', saying that: having love for both is utterly impossible to exist. Saint John Chrysostom says the following:

*'Remove yourselves from the world, and tear yourselves as much as possible from carnal things, for the loss which comes to you from these lies, not in common matters, but what is the chief of goods.*

*For it is not possible for the man who clings strongly to the things of the present life really to lay hold on those in heaven, but he who is earnest about the one must lose the other.*

*'You cannot', He says, 'serve God and Mammon' (Matthew 6:24), for you must hold on to the one and hate the other'.*

*This is also confirmed through man's experiences in life itself. Those, for instance, who deride the lust of money, are truly the persons who love God as they ought to. Conversely, just as those who worship earthly wealth (of Mammon), are the men who have the least and weakest love for Him<sup>167</sup>.*

*James the Apostle, the brother of God, also mentions the love of the 'world' and goes on to say that 'friendship with the world means enmity against God. Therefore, anyone that chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God' (James 4:4).*

*Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite interprets the above words and says that James the Apostle refers to the people of sin, who are 'friends of the world, or else the passions and the material and perishable life, because, according to Saint Isaac, 'world' is the name for the passions. Also, according to the Blessed Theophylactos, material life is the mother of decline. Because the love of the world, namely the passions and the perishable life, is hatred and separation from God.*

*Consequently, according to Theophylactos, two are the things with which Christians occupy themselves and which are entirely*

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167 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία ν', κεφ. β', P.G.59, 68.

opposite each other: God and the world. And thus, they acquire two opposing dispositions in their soul, in God or in the world; which is friendship or hatred.

Any Christian, then, who has friendship and love for God and towards divine and heavenly things, is called both: a friend of God and an enemy of the world. On the contrary, whoever has friendship and love for the world, and the world's vain things, is called: a friend of the world; an enemy of God<sup>168</sup>.

Saint Gregory Palamas also says that: 'Love for God is the root and the beginning of every virtue, while love for the world is the cause of every evil. This is the reason why these two loves are opposing and destroy each other, and according to James, the brother of God: 'friendship with the world means enmity against God. Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God' (James 4:4).

John, the beloved of Christ, also says that: 'If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not for them. For everything in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life- comes not from the Father but from the world' (1 John 2: 15- 16)

Let us be careful, then, brethren, lest loving the evil and sinful desires, and being arrogant and selfish to each other, we fall from the love for our Heavenly Father. For in these two sins, John the Evangelist included every passion that alienates us from God<sup>169</sup>.

Paul the Apostle is also definite: 'The mind governed by the flesh', which is the love for the 'world', 'is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please

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168 *Ερμηνεία εις τας ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 124.

169 *Ὁμιλία λγ'*, P.G.151, 416AB.

*God... Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.’ (Romans 8, 6-8, 12)*

According to Saint Basil the Great, *‘it is not right for just any person to move forward to the perfection of love and to learn how to know Him who is truly beloved, but it is about the person who has already put away the old man, which is being polluted by his deceptive passions, and has clothed himself with the new man, who is being restored that it might be perceived as an image of the Maker (Ephesians 4:22-24).*

*Also, he who loves money and is excited by the corrupt carnal beauty and thinks highly of this small glory here, due to the fact that he has spent the ability to love on what is not seemly, is very much blind with respect to the contemplation of Him who is truly beloved<sup>170</sup>.*

Also, Saint Maximus the Confessor stresses that: *‘Love is a holy state of the soul, disposing it to value knowledge of God above all created things. We cannot attain lasting possession of such love while we are still attached to anything worldly.*

*The person who loves God values knowledge of God more than anything created by God, and pursues such knowledge ardently and ceaselessly.*

*If you distract your intellect from its love for God and concentrate it, not on God, but on some sensible object, you thereby show that you value the body more than the soul and the things made by God more than God Himself.*

*All the virtues co-operate with the intellect to produce this intense longing for God, pure prayer above all. For by soaring towards God through this prayer, the intellect rises above the realm of created things.*

*Through genuine love for God, we can drive out the passions. Love for God is this: to choose Him rather than the world, and the*

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170 *Ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὸν μὲν ὡσαύτον, κεφ. β΄*, P.G.29, 392.

soul rather than the flesh, by despising the things of this world and by devoting ourselves constantly to Him through self-control, love, prayer, psalmody and so on<sup>171</sup>.

Finally, Saint Gregory Palamas says the following: *‘If you wish to see the signs of love for God within yourself, I will indicate them to you... When, while exalting your mind and your thoughts to God, nothing earthly pulls you to the opposite direction. So, if at that time, after you have forgotten everything, and after you have shed all that saddens and distracts your mind, you then enjoy your communication and prayer to God, with great pleasure, it is then that you know that you have come clearly, purely and very close, to the love for God. Also, do remember that it is then that you partake in God’s love- or rather His union- for as long as the duration of your pure prayer is extended to God*<sup>172</sup>.

He who genuinely loves God tries to pray- if not *‘without ceasing’* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) as Saint Paul teaches- at least as much as possible.

The phrase *‘I pray to God only when I feel like it’*, that is, rarely and not every day, reveals that we do not love God as we should. It shows that we have a greater love for the ‘world’ than for our Creator.



171 *Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης*, έκ. α', κεφ. α'-ια', P.G.90, 961A- 964A, έκ. γ', κεφ. ν', P.G.90, 1032B.

172 *Όμιλία μδ'*, ΕΠΕ τόμος 11, σελ. 58-60.



### PART THREE

## ‘LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF’

### 1. THE MEANING OF LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOUR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**S**o far, we have analysed the characteristics of God’s love for humankind, as well as the love that man ought to show towards his God and Creator. Now we have to analyse the immensely important issue of the love that every man owes to his neighbour.

Indeed, God wishes that we love our brothers and sisters. In interpreting the words of Saint John the Evangelist, who said that, since God loved us so much that He sent His Son to be sacrificed for us, we, too, ought to love our brothers and sisters. Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says the following:

*‘If God loved us so much, we should then be just as grateful to our Lord. [He] Who loved us so much, therefore as a small reward for His infinite love for us, we should offer our love to*

*our brothers and sisters because this is what He asks of us as a reward for His love. ...*

*Apart from the debt of nature, then, God obliged us to love our brethren. This obligation is both a command and a reward of His own love. It aims to compel us further and almost forces us to love our neighbour. Thus, this is what He says:*

*You should love your brothers by your own volition, because of the sameness of nature you share. Nevertheless, because you did not want to, I give you the command to love them, and in the place of love I have shown to you, you should also show love to your brethren. I consider it as both a reward and a payment of My love to you<sup>173</sup>.*

Of course, even though many people talk about love, there are very few who know its precise meaning. Ignorance of the true meaning of love does not only exist in people that belong to religious and philosophical systems that are alien to the Orthodox faith. There are also many Orthodox Christians, who through their daily deeds, prove that they ignore the true meaning of love.

Of course, with His teaching, His example and His sacrifice, Jesus instructed us all to love our neighbour truly. He even taught us that the true love for our fellow human beings, which is put into practice, is what can help us more than anything else to achieve the purpose of our life, that is the 'by likeness'; the best possible likeness and union with God<sup>174</sup>.

When reading Jesus and His disciple's teachings on love in the New Testament, one might claim that these teachings cannot be applied; especially in the present age. While all these may be beautiful ideas, theories, and incomprehensible, superior teach-

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173 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 573.

174 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρικοστομοῦ, *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία μστ', κεφ. δ', P.G.58, 481.



ings, they do not cease to appear as ideal and impossible, versus something which is feasible and achievable.

Thus, even faithful Christians, who are attracted by the life and passion of our Lord, do not believe that everything the Lord has instructed us through His teachings and example can also be applied by us. Therefore, they simply believe in Jesus and they participate in the Divine Liturgies pedantically, since they cannot grasp the practical meanings from the life and teachings of our Lawmaker.

But let us look briefly at the basic commandments that the Theanthropos Jesus gave during His presence on Earth, regarding the true love for our brethren, which we will analyse in this study.

As the Blessed Chrysostom says: *'The beloved Son of God came out of love to the people and began living with them, and He was nourished, just like they were. Then, having abolished the fallacy of polytheism, and having proclaimed the true knowledge of God, He taught the love that people ought to share between themselves'*<sup>175</sup>.

One of the most important commandments of Jesus, which is also mentioned in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19, 18), is to *'love your neighbour as yourself'* (Matthew 22: 39). To understand how this seemingly difficult task is achieved; that is, to love our neighbour as ourselves, Jesus gave us quite a practical commandment: *'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law of the Prophets'* (Matthew 7: 12).

When we do to our brethren everything that we would have them do to us, we can effortlessly love our neighbour as ourselves. Thus, every Christian must do to his brethren what he would want them to do to him, but at the same time, not to do to others what he would not want others to do to him.

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175 *Περί τελείας αγάπης*, κεφ. α', P.G.56, 280.

Of course, the above commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves, is just the first step of the virtue of love, and not its superior level; which is perfection. Perfect love is something even greater: to love our neighbour more than ourselves. Perfect love is what Jesus Himself showed us with His sacrifice that is, how one sacrifices his will, his rights, his self, and even his life, for his brethren (John 15 12-13).

Faithfully following our Lord, Saint Paul the Apostle instructs men to love their wives, just as Christ loved His Church and His creatures and He *'gave Himself up for her [the Church].'* In other words, He sacrificed and gave Himself up to death for us (Ephesians 5: 25).

Saint Paul the Apostle offers an even more practical analysis on how the above can be achieved, as he commands that all faithful Christians do the following: *'No one should seek their own good, but the good of others' (1 Corinthians 10:24), and 'We then that are strong ought ... not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification' (Romans 15: 1-2).*

Let us then not selfishly demand what is convenient for us and what we wish for, from our fellow humans. Instead, let us all prefer the best interests, the happiness, the rest and the spiritual benefit of our neighbour. In other words, we ought not to do what is likeable to ourselves but instead, with our deeds and our behaviour, to wish to be amiable to our brethren.

Of course, the most difficult of all, and perhaps the ultimate step of the virtue of love, is Jesus' commandment of loving not only the ones that love us, but even our enemies (Matthew 5: 44). At the same time, Christians, who are the disciples of the Teacher of Love, must love their enemies. They must pray for them, and they should not be resentful.

Finally, Saint Paul, the Apostle refers to some of the distinctive features of love, this comprehensive virtue, and stresses

that the one who has genuine love is, among others, merciful, gracious, tolerant and patient. He covers the shortcomings of his neighbour and does not reprimand him for these, let alone slander him. Moreover, the man who has genuine love is not jealous. He is not envious and arrogant, proud and abusive. He does not rage against others. He does not demand that his own will is always done, and he does not think evil of his fellow humans (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7).

Is it possible that all these features be implemented, even nowadays? If we try to make them our behaviour, will it be as if we have already decided to destroy our lives?

Of course, Jesus did not teach anything impossible<sup>176</sup> when He sent His disciples to preach the Gospel and to baptise men. He commanded them to teach men *'to observe all things whatsoever'* (Matthew 28: 19-20), that is all and without exception, the moral commandments that He gave.

The seeming impossibility of Christ's commandments is solely due to our ignorance, as well as due to our proud, unwilling and misanthropic mood.

In contrast, the ones that have a pure heart and goodwill abide by all the commandments of our Lord with joy and ease.<sup>177</sup> For them, nothing is impossible. The obedience to the law of our Lord and His holy commandments is not a *'narrow and constricted way'* (Matthew 7, 14), or something burdensome (1 John 5:3), but something light and beneficial (Matthew 11: 30).

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176 Αγίου Ιωάννου του Χρυσοστόμου, *Υπόμνημα εις τον ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ. γ', P.G.57, 267.

177 Αγίου Ιωάννου του Χρυσοστόμου, *Περί παρθενίας*, κεφ. ξδ', P.G.48, 582, *Εἰς τόν πτωχόν Λάζαρον*, λόγος γ', κεφ. στ', P.G.48, 1000.

## 2. 'LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.'

**W**e already mentioned that, when one of the scribes asked the Lord, which was the first and most important commandment of God's Law, Jesus replied that the first and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart; with all the strength of our soul (Mark 12: 30).

Then, Jesus said that the second commandment, in consecutive order, which is similar and closely related to the first, is the following: *'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these'* (Mark 12: 31). As the Evangelist Matthew also says, Jesus stressed that *'on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'* (Matthew 22: 40).

Unfortunately, in our days, the mere hearing of this commandment of the Gospel causes most people much discomfort. How is it possible, they wonder, that this is the case and that we must reach such high levels of love?

Some, even imagine that they should disperse all their property, that they should not work for the benefit of their family, but the benefit of all people equally. They imagine that they should no longer have individual interests, dreams and goals and that they should sacrifice them all on the altar of self-sacrifice, offering to others, and the like. Therefore, they think that all that is taught are implausible,<sup>178</sup> that the commandments of the Gospel are not feasible, that it is not possible and in our interest, too, to love our fellow men just like ourselves.

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178 Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, *Περί εὐχαριστίας*, κεφ. ζ', PG.31, 220A.

This view, of course, is entirely incorrect because, as the Blessed Chrysostom says, neither Jesus<sup>179</sup> nor the Holy Apostles<sup>180</sup> would ever give us a commandment which we would not be able to implement.

But let us see how the Holy Fathers interpret the commandment of our Lord: to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Of course, we repeat that this commandment is the first step towards the virtue of love, and not the real goal, which is the higher level and the perfection of this virtue. On the one hand, to love our neighbours more than ourselves, and on the other hand, to also love our enemies. Nevertheless, we will deal with these two characteristics of love in the fourth and fifth parts of our study.

Let us begin with the wise words of Saint Dorotheos, who responds with clarity to our thoughts of cowardice and pettiness:

*'When you hear the commandment 'love thy neighbour as thyself', do not think how far you are from this virtue and do not start cowering and saying: 'How can I love my neighbour as myself? How can I be interested in his troubles as if they were my own, and especially concerning those that are hidden in his heart, which I neither see nor know as my own?'*

*Do not concern yourself with such thoughts and do not think that this virtue is supernatural and impossible, but start by believing in God. Show Him your intention and your interest, and you will see the help He will give you to achieve it.*

*Here is what I mean. Suppose there are two stairs, one that leads to the sky and the other which leads down to hell, and you are on earth between the two stairs. Do not attempt to think and say: 'How can I fly from the earth and get straight to the top of*

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179 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν*, ὁμιλία θ', κεφ. β', P.G.63, 142.

180 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ. α', P.G.49, 181.

*the ladder?’ It is not possible to do this, nor does God ask you to do so.*

*But fight, at least, for the time being not to take the other staircase that goes down. Do not harm your neighbour; do not hurt him, do not blame him, do not offend him, do not despise him. In this way, you slowly begin to aid your brother by relieving him with your nice words, by suffering along with him and by giving him something, if he needs it.*

*In this way, going up the stairs one step at a time, you can reach the top of the stairs with the help of God. Because by helping your neighbour little by little, you end up wishing for his best interest, as for yours, and his benefit, as for yours simultaneously. So, this is the meaning of ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’<sup>181</sup>.*

Let us also hear the enlightening answer of Saint John the Prophet to the questions someone posed to him: *‘It is our Lord’s commandment to love our neighbour like ourselves, to rejoice, but also, to be saddened next to him, as if he was our member. Thus, when we see him in poverty and ignore him, this is a violation of the commandment of love, even if we only have the essentials, so that we cannot meet our own needs. Tell me, Father, how should we show our love in this case?’*

Saint John responds as follows: *‘The love for our neighbour manifests in many ways, and not only by giving alms. For example, if you ever find yourself in a place with a brother, and you realise that you want to be honoured more than him, and you do not want your brother to be honoured just like you, this proves that you do not have your brother like yourself because Saint Paul said ‘In honour give preference to one another’ (Romans 12: 10).*

*And if you have some food, and you realise that you want to eat it yourself, out of gluttony and not of necessity, in this too, it seems that you do not regard your neighbour like yourself.*

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181 Διδασκαλία ιδ΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.88, 1780B-D.

*By understanding that if we want to apply the word of the Bible regarding charity to all the poor, then we will not be able to apply it correctly. After all, the commandment given to us does not only refer to a specific person, but on the contrary, 'neighbour' is considered every human being. So, how will you be able to fulfil this commandment, not having the ability to provide charity to all people?*

*To love your neighbour like yourself is also seen in the following example: If calamity strikes and you become aware that you are pleased that your neighbour is harmed more than you, that too, proves that you do not regard your neighbour like yourself.*

*Also, if you realise that your neighbour is being praised, and you are not happy for him because you were also not praised like him; and you do not say that your brother's praise is transferred to you as well, since your brother is part of you; in this way, it is also revealed that you do not love your neighbour like yourself. We could mention many similar examples.*

*To regard your neighbour like yourself is also proven by the following: If you hear from the Fathers the path of God and your brother asks you [of this], do not keep the benefit for yourself only out of envy. Since you know that he is your brother, tell him what you heard with fear of God, without, of course, tutoring him, because something like that does not benefit him<sup>182</sup>.*

All the above sayings of Saint John prove that the assertion of certain people that they cannot apply the 'love *they* neighbour as *thys*elf' practice because they cannot help their fellow man financially or materially, is a misguided excuse. As the Saint explains, the above commandment can be applied by all of us and in many different ways.

On the other hand, it is clear from the words of the two above Fathers that even those who gather excessive wealth and are then

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182 *Βίβλος Βαρσανουφίου καί Ἰωάννου, ἀπόκρισις τλθ', σελ. 184.*

indifferent to the needs of their fellow man, will successfully be able to love their neighbour as themselves with great difficulty.

### 3. THE EASY PATH OF LOVE

**L**et us, however, see some additional interpretations that the Holy Fathers give on this commandment of the Gospel; to love our neighbour like ourselves.

According to Saint Basil the Great, *'since we are directed to love our neighbour as ourselves, let us consider whether we have also received from the Lord the power to fulfil this commandment.*

*Who does not know that man is a civilized and gregarious animal, neither savage nor a lover of solitude? Indeed, nothing is as compatible with our nature as living in a society, having dependence upon one another and as loving our own kind.*

*Now, the Lord Himself gave to us the seeds of these qualities in anticipation of His requiring the fruits in due time, for He says: 'A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another' (John 13: 34).*

*Moreover, wishing to animate our soul to the observance of this commandment, He did not require signs or wonders as the means of recognizing His disciples (although He gave the power of utilizing the grace of the Holy Spirit), but He says: 'By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another' (John 13: 35).*

*Further, He establishes such a close a connection between the two great commandments that the benefits which are conferred upon the neighbour is transferred to Himself: 'For I was hungry,' He says, 'and you gave Me to eat' (Matthew 25: 35), and so on,*



adding: 'as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me'<sup>183</sup> (Matthew 25: 40).

The Blessed Chrysostom also says the following: 'And in referring to two kinds of love: the love for God and the love for our neighbour; pay attention to how Christ highlighted the latter'.

For after saying that the first commandment is, 'You shall love the Lord your God', He added a second; and He did not stop, but added, 'like it; you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22: 37-39).

What can be equal to this love towards man, or this gentleness? When He brings the love to us into comparison with that toward Himself, and He says that 'is like this'... Let us then love one another, since in this way we shall also love God, Who loves us. ... For He says, love though with Me, and then yourself also will I love thee more. You see the words of a vehement lover! If you love My beloved, then will I also reckon Myself to be greatly beloved of you<sup>184</sup>.

At different times, the same Saint also says: 'There is also another condition. Now, what is it? Loving thy neighbour as oneself. After all, hating is burdensome and the cause of problems, whereas loving is simple and easy.

In fact, had He said, 'Being human as you are, love wild animals,' the command would have been difficult; but if He bade us, humans as we are, to love human beings, what difficulty could there be in that, since commonality and kinship bring much influence to bear as well as encouragement from nature itself<sup>185</sup>.

In a different homily, the Blessed Chrysostom says that 'In regard to Love: only lay hold on the beginning, and at once thou

183 'Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος, ἐρώτησις γ', κεφ. α', P.G.31, 917AB.

184 'Υπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ρωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κγ', κεφ. δ', P.G.60, 619.

185 'Ὅμιλία εἰς τὸν ἐΨαλμόν, κεφ. β', P.G.55, 62.

*art guided and directed by it. 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour' (Romans 13:10); thinketh no evil (Corinthians 13: 35).'*

*Let each man consider with himself, how he is disposed towards himself.*

*He does not envy himself; he wishes all good things for himself; he prefers himself before all; he is willing to do all things for himself.*

*If then we were so disposed towards others also, all grievous things are brought to an end; there is no enmity; there is no covetousness: for who would choose to overreach himself? No man; but on the contrary we shall possess all things in common. ... For who would choose to remember injuries against himself? Who would choose to be angry with himself?*

*Do we not make allowances for ourselves most of all? If we were thus disposed towards our neighbours also, there will never be any remembrance of injuries.*

*And how is it possible (you say) that one should love his neighbour as himself? If others had not done this, you might well think it impossible: but if they have done it, it is plain that from indolence it is not done by ourselves. And besides, Christ enjoins nothing impossible, seeing that many have even gone beyond His commands.*

*Who has done this? Paul, Peter, all the company of the Saints. Nay, indeed if I say that they loved their neighbours, I say no great matter: they so loved their enemies as no man would love those who were like-minded with himself... What pardon then will there be for us, what excuse, if we shall not show towards our friends even the very smallest portion of that love which Paul showed towards his enemies<sup>186</sup>?*

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186 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ιθ', κεφ. β', P.G.63, 141-142.*

#### 4. THE GOLDEN GUIDE OF LOVE

**T**o understand how we can truly love our fellow men like ourselves, and to dissolve any ambiguity or misinterpretation regarding the concept of essential and true love, Jesus gave us a very practical mandate; a genuinely golden guide on how to acquire it. *'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7: 12).'*

Consequently, when we behave towards our fellow humans in the same way we would like them to behave towards us, it means that we genuinely love them. On the other hand, it is the duty of every Christian to do to his fellow humans what he would also wish them to do to him, and on the other hand, not to do to his fellow humans what he would also not want them to do to him. When we do not do anything evil to our brethren, but only things we would like them to do to us, then we genuinely apply the commandment of love.

Through these simple and crystal clear words, then, we can be led to the virtue of love, but at the same time, we also ought to question ourselves, whether we are men of love, or not. We ought to filter every deed, word, and thought of ours, through the specific commandment of our Lord.

If we wish to be real disciples of Jesus and to be men of love, we ought to examine ourselves, our actions, and our words, vigorously, and to wonder: how would we feel, if our neighbour did, or said, something similar to us?

If our inner voice, then, responds that we would like it and that it would give us great joy and satisfaction, then we must go ahead. If, on the contrary, our conscience indicates to us that

this would cause us sadness, resentment and disappointment, then we ought to abandon it immediately.

If all people set up their lives by this standard, there would be no need for any other legislation. Everything in people's lives would work flawlessly; justice, peace and prosperity would prevail since there would be no sadness, which would be due to the indecent and inappropriate behaviour of our fellow men. Through this genuinely golden guide, we could all, very easily become true Saints.

Let us examine the interpretation of this golden commandment of our Lord, through the golden words of the Blessed Chrysostom. *'We can all comprehend what vice is and what virtue is. Wherefore Christ, for the purpose of declaring this, and showing that He was not introducing a strange law, or one which surpassed our nature, but that which He had already deposited in our conscience beforehand, ... thus speaks; 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'*

*Many words, saith He, are not necessary, nor laws of great length, nor a diversity of instruction. Let thine own will be the law. Dost thou wish to receive kindness? Be kind to another. Dost thou wish to receive mercy? Show mercy to thy neighbour. Dost thou wish to be applauded? Applaud another. Dost thou wish to be beloved? Exercise love. Dost thou wish to enjoy the first rank? First concede that place to another. Become thyself the judge, thyself the lawgiver of thine own life.*

*And again; 'Do not to another what thou hatest' (Job 4: 16). By the latter precept, he would induce to a departure from iniquity; by the former, to the exercise of virtue. 'Do not thou to another,' he saith, 'what thou hatest.' Dost thou hate to be insulted? Do not insult another. Dost thou hate to be envied? Envy not another. Dost thou hate to be deceived? Do not deceive another. And, in*

*a word, in all things, if we hold fast these two precepts, we shall not need any other instruction<sup>187</sup>.*

At different times, the Saint says: *'What you wish people should do to you, do to them yourselves.'* Do you see how He introduced nothing new, but only what nature had anticipated Him in prescribing?

*What you yourself wish to have done to you at the hands of your neighbour, He is saying, put into practice yourself. Do you wish for commendation? Give commendation. Do you wish not to be robbed? Don't rob. Do you wish to have respect? Give respect. Do you wish to be shown mercy? Show mercy. Do you wish to be loved? Love. Do you wish to hear nothing to your detriment? Say nothing of that kind.*

Note the precision: He did not say, *'whatever you do NOT wish people to do to you, do not do yourselves,'* but *'DO what you wish'.* In other words, since there are two paths leading to virtue, one freedom from evil, the other practice of the virtues, He proposes the latter, while implying the former by means of it. This He hinted at in the saying, *'What you hate, do not do to someone else'* (Job 4: 16); He said it quite openly in the words, *'whatever you wish that people should do to you, do to them yourselves'*<sup>188</sup>.

In a different sermon, the Saint says the following: *'For whatsoever ye would that they should do unto you, do ye also unto them.'* Nothing burdensome, nothing offensive, does this law contain. *'What you would receive, that do,'* it says. The return is equal.

*And it is not said 'do not do what you would not receive, but do what is more. For that indeed is an abstinence from evil*

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187 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία ιγ', κεφ. γ', P.G.49, 140.*

188 *Ὅμιλία εἰς τὸν ἐΨαλμόν, κεφ. α', P.G.55, 62.*

*things, but this is a doing of good things, in which the other is involved.*

*He also did not say 'that do ye also wish, but do, to them'. And what is the advantage? 'This is the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22: 40).*

*Would you have mercy shown you? Then show mercy. Would you obtain forgiveness? Then grant it. Would you not be evil spoken of? Then speak not evil. Do you long to receive praise? Then bestow it. Would you not be wronged? Then do not plunder.*

*Do you see how He shows that virtue is natural, and that we need no external laws nor teachers? For in the things we wish to receive from our neighbours, we legislate unto ourselves.*

*So that if you do not wish to receive something, but you still do it, or if you wish to receive it, yet you do not work for it, you have become self-condemned and are henceforth without any excuse, on the ground of ignorance and not knowing what ought to be done<sup>189</sup>.*

Ultimately, what the Saint says in another sermon about the interpretation of the above commandment of our Lord is very important. The Blessed Chrysostom says that our Lord gave the particular commandment of love (Matthew 7: 12) immediately after His teaching on prayer, in which, He promised that He would fulfil the requests of those who pray to God with perseverance.

Jesus, the Saint continues, did not do this by chance, but wanting to teach us something essential. In other words, He connected these two commandments of prayer and love and implied the following: If you wish the heavenly Father to hear your prayers, you must, besides prayer, do deeds of love towards your fellow humans first; what you would like others to do to you.

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189 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ιζ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 522.

The above commandment of love, then, combined with our Lord's teaching on prayer, takes a new form and presents Jesus saying to us all: If you do to your fellow man what you want them to do to you too, then I will do what you ask in your prayers.

Let us see, though, what the Blessed Chrysostom says. *'For all things,'* says He, *'whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them.'* Summing up all in brief, and signifying, that virtue is compendious, and easy, and readily known of all men.

*And He did not merely say, 'All things whatsoever you would,' but, 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would.'* For this word, *'therefore,'* He did not add without its purpose, but with a concealed meaning: *'If you desire,'* says He, *'to be heard, together with what I have said, do these things also.'* What then are these? *'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.'* Do you see how He has hereby also signified that together with prayer we need exact conversation?

*And He did not say, 'whatsoever things you would to be done unto you of God, those do unto your neighbour;'* lest you say, *'But how is it possible? He is God and I am man:'* but, *'whatsoever you would to be done unto you of your fellow servant, these things do thou also yourself show forth towards your neighbour.'* What is less burdensome than this? What fairer<sup>190</sup>?

At this point, we should make another fundamental observation. We have seen above that the measure and guiding principle for loving our neighbour are ourselves. Thus, if we want to ascend to the first stage of Christian love, we should love our neighbour as ourselves, and at the same time, to offer what we would like others to offer to us.

The following question arises, though. As it is well known, our desires are something subjective. For instance, someone may

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190 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον ..., ὁμιλία κγ', κεφ. ε', P.G.57, 314.

rejoice when others offer drugs to him. By providing drugs to others, then, does he apply correctly the commandments that say love thy neighbour as thyself, and, do unto others as you would have them to do unto you?

The answer to this is simple. In the same way that, ourselves and our wishes are the law and guiding principle in the matter of our love for our neighbour, in the case of ourselves, too, our love for God is the law and guiding principle for our love towards ourselves, and the choice of our wishes.

Therefore, we love our neighbour, not just as if we do to him what we both like, but if we do to him what is pleasing to him and ourselves, but at the same time, to God.

This is the reason why God put the commandments of love in order, placing the commandment of love for God as first and foremost, before the commandment of love for our neighbour. Love and worship of God, and he absolute obedience to His Law, forms the regulatory factor for our lives, interests and desires, as well as for the love we will offer to our neighbour when we love them as ourselves. At the same time, though, we will also love him according to God's Law.

## 5. THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S LAW

**O**ften, we see our brethren grumbling and complaining that, despite giving love to others, they do not get the equivalent love in return from their fellow man. Sometimes, they even show regret for any good they have done in their lives because no one reciprocated with something proportionate to what they have offered to their fellow man.

Of course, the Holy Fathers reject such a way of thinking, since they believe that this is not appropriate for Christians. In fact, when interpreting the words of Saint Paul the Apostle,



according to whom, our Saints say that the one who loves his neighbour as himself has already succeeded in abiding by the Law of God to the fullest (Romans 13: 8-10). Our Saints say the following:

If the one who loves his neighbour as himself manages to fulfil the whole law through this love of his, then, in reality, he must see his neighbour as a great benefactor. Our neighbour becomes our greatest benefactor, as he becomes the cause for us to abide by the entire Law of God and in other words, to achieve holiness and, as a result, to become worthy of receiving the crowns of virtue by our Lord, Who is our bestowal Giver.

If our love for our neighbour becomes the reason to achieve holiness and to receive praise from God, then, is it not entirely inappropriate to grumble because our neighbour did not reciprocate with some insignificant presents, in return of the works of love we have already offered them?

We must, therefore, love our neighbour as we love ourselves, because only in this way will we achieve the purpose of our lives, which is full obedience to the Law of God, virtue and holiness. Our offer of love to our neighbour is a debt, a responsibility, and the primary duty of our life.

Let us see the views of Saint John Chrysostom on this matter, though. When interpreting Saint Paul's phrase '*owe no one anything except to love one another*. (Romans 13:8)' The Saint says the following characteristic words:

*Again, the holy Apostle Paul resorts to the virtue of love, which is 'the mother of good deeds, and the reason for every virtue. The holy Apostle says that is a debt, not, however as the tribute of custom, such as taxes or other obligatory contributions, but a continuous one. For he does not wish it ever to be paid off, or rather, he would have it always being rendered, yet never fully so, but to always be owed. For this is the character of the debt, that one always keeps giving and owing.*

*Having said then how we ought to love, he also shows the gain of it, saying, 'for he that loves another has fulfilled the Law' (Romans 13:8). Therefore do not consider even this a favour; for this too, is a debt. For you owe love to your brother, through your spiritual relationship. And not for this only, but also because 'we are members of one another. (1 Corinthians 12: 20)' And if love leaves us, the whole body is broken down into pieces and destroyed.*

*Therefore love your brother. For if from his friendship you gain so much as to fulfil the whole Law, you owe him love as being benefited by him. 'For this, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, and any other commandment, is briefly comprehended in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Romans 13:9). He does not merely say it is fulfilled, but 'it is briefly comprehended,' that is, the whole work of the commandments is concisely and in a few words completed.*

*After all, the beginning and the end of virtue is love. This it has as its root, as its groundwork, and as its summit. If then it be both beginning and fulfilment, what is there equal to it?*

*But he does not merely seek love, but intense love. For he does not say merely 'love your neighbour,' but, 'as yourself.' Hence also Christ said that 'the Law and the Prophets hung upon' it<sup>191</sup>. (Matthew 22: 40).*

*Similar are the views of Saint Dorotheos, who maintains that the works of love towards our neighbour 'must not be mean-spirited, reluctant or negligent but instead, with all our might and all our heart. Thus, when we offer something to our neighbour, let us consider that we are the ones to receive, when we benefit him, let us believe that we are the ones who receive benevolence. This*

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191 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κγ', κεφ. γ'-δ', P.G.60, 618-619.

*is the way we succeed to fulfil God's will to the perfect degree*<sup>192</sup>. (Romans 12:2)

*For nothing is good,' says the Blessed Chrysostom in another sermon, 'which is not done through love. This then let us 'confirm' towards each other. 'For love is the fulfilling of the Law' (Romans 13: 10). We have no need of labouring or of sweating if we love one another. It is a pathway leading itself towards virtue. For as on the highway, if any man finds the beginning, he is guided by it, and has no need for one to take him by the hand; as such it is also in regard to love: only lay hold on the beginning, and at once you are guided and directed by it*<sup>193</sup>.

At different times the Saint says the following: *'He that loves his neighbour as he ought, declines not to be servant to him more humbly than any servant. Just as fire when brought into contact with wax, easily softens it, so does the warmth of love dissolve all arrogance and presumption more powerfully than fire. Wherefore Saint Paul says not, 'love one another,' merely, but, 'be servants to one another (Galatians 5:13)', thus signifying the intensity of the affection. ... Paul adds; 'For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; You shall love your neighbour as yourself'*<sup>194</sup>(Galatians 5: 14).

Adherence to the commandment of love makes a Christian the observer of all the other commandments. At the same time, and in precisely the same way, not observing the commandment of love makes the Christian a transgressor of all the remaining commandments of God.

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192 Διδασκαλία ιδ', κεφ. ε', P.G.88, 1784A.

193 Έρμηνεία εις την προς Έβραίους Έπιστολήν, όμιλία ιθ', κεφ. β', P.G.63, 142.

194 Υπόμνημα εις την προς Γαλάτας Έπιστολήν, όμιλία ε' κεφ. δ', P.G.61, 670.

Let us see, though, what Saint Nikodemos the Athonite says about this matter, when interpreting the phrase of Saint James the Apostle, the Brother of the Lord, *'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all'* (James 2:10).

*'For whoever keeps the law, that is, all the commandments of the law, but violates a single commandment, and thus not having perfect love for all, he has become a transgressor of all the commandments. Since love is the head of all commandments, whoever does not have the head, then in vain and needlessly does he have the rest of the body. ...*

*... James refers to love, in particular, here ... because if we say that whoever violates any other commandment he becomes a transgressor of all the remaining commandments, too, then no man will be saved by being imperfect and incomplete in all the commandments*<sup>195</sup>.

*But then, the Blessed Nikodemos presents the somewhat different interpretation, which Saint Basil the Great also gives in the above phrase of Saint James the Apostle. Saint Basil the Great teaches that he who is guilty of God's entire Law and a transgressor of all the commandments, can be considered, not just the one who transgresses the commandment of love but also, the transgressor of even one commandment, whichever this might be. Because all commandments are interlinked and consequently, the transgressor of one commandment is also presented and judged as a transgressor of the other commandments.*

After the interpretation of Saint Basil the Great, the Blessed Nikodemos concludes: *'The partial transgression of a commandment is punished, let alone the violation of the universal and comprehensive commandment of love.*

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195 *Ερμηνεία εις τας επτά Καθολικας Επιστολās...*, σελ. 85-86.

*And I say the love for our neighbour because it also contains and fulfils our love to God, and as the Blessed Paul rightly said: 'For the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'*

*Because the one who loves his neighbour as himself, will not kill, commit adultery, steal, defame, break an oath, bear false witness, or anything else that is prohibited by the law, but he will uphold all the commandments instead. The one who keeps all the commandments indeed loves God with all his heart, soul, and power, which is also the first commandment.*

*Do you see now, that whoever keeps the commandment of love for his neighbour, also keeps all the commandments? The one who transgresses it transgresses them all<sup>196</sup>.*

## 6. GOD'S 'DEBT'

**L**ove,' says Saint John Chrysostom in another particularly important sermon, *'presents your neighbour like yourself and teaches you to be happy for his happiness and at the same time, to tolerate his flaws, just like yours. Love renders many people into one body, and at the same time, it renders their souls into the vessels of the Holy Spirit. After all, the Spirit of peace does not rest on those who are divided among themselves. Instead, the Spirit rests on those who are spiritually united. ... Even though the lyre's strings are many, they result in a harmonious symphony, and they create a delightful melody. Precisely so are those who have amity and solidarity between them; they create a beautiful melody of love.*

*For this reason Saint Paul the Apostle advises us to have compassion, consistency and unity between us (Philippians 3:16) and*

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196 <sup>196</sup> 'Ενθ' ἀνωτ. σελ. 87-88.

*to consider everyone else as our superior (Philippians 5: 13-14), so that love is not lost because of ambition and rivalry. Instead, he advises us to honour one another and thus live in unity.*

*Saint Paul also says: 'Serve one another humbly in love. For the entire Law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself (Galatians 5: 13-14).*

*The one who loves, then, does not only want to give orders but also, to receive orders, and he is more pleased when receiving orders than when giving orders.*

*He who loves prefers to give gifts to others than to receive gifts himself because he would rather his friend owed something to him, and he would rather not owe anything to his friend.*

*He who loves wants to give gifts to a loved one, but at the same time, he does not wish to appear to be giving gifts. He wants to be the benefactor of his neighbour first, but he does not wish to appear offering the benefaction himself first<sup>197</sup>.*

Perhaps, because some could not comprehend the exact meaning of these last words of the Holy Father, the Saint himself hastened to explain them immediately. The sacred Chrysostom's explanation was impressive and deeply theological. He says the following:

In contrast to all of us, who not only hinder our fellow humans, but instead, we constantly complain because we think that others do not behave appropriately to us, that they do not appreciate us, give us gifts, respond to our love, or so much more. Our Lord and our God, says the Blessed Chrysostom, did something impressive. He benefited us without even wishing to appear as a benefactor but instead, as a 'debtor'.

Specifically, not only did our Lord become our Benefactor because of His infinite love for the human race, in a way that surpasses nature, and of course, without us deserving it because

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197 *Περί τελείας αγάπης*, κεφ. β', P.G.56, 281.

we had defected from Him, but He also did something else in addition to this. Because He truly loved us, He did not wish to boast and to present Himself as a saviour and benefactor. Instead, He hastened to offer us such an incredible and insurmountable gift; His Only Begotten Son Who would be sacrificed for our salvation.

Before sacrificing His Son, continues the Blessed Chrysostom, our Lord first asked the patriarch Abraham to sacrifice his son. Thus, when He would send His Own Son to be sacrificed for our sins, this sacrifice of His Son that surpasses nature, would not be presented as an enormous gift and benevolence to humankind. On the contrary, it would appear as a natural fulfilment of a debt that Our Lord and Creator supposedly owed us<sup>198</sup>.

In such a way, concludes the Blessed Chrysostom, we, too, ought to act, and think, as if we want to have real, genuine love for our neighbour and not just as a title. Not only should we not complain if our neighbour does not reciprocate our honours and gifts, but instead hasten to be his benefactor first, even if he does not deserve it.

Even during the very moment of our benevolence, though, we should not have any great ideas about ourselves. Instead, we should consider the love, the gifts and the benefactions we offer to our neighbour as acts we owe to him and as works that we are obliged to do.




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198 'Ενθ' ἀνωτ. P.G.56, 281-282.

## 7. 'REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE'

**A** key characteristic of true love, which proves that we love our neighbour as ourselves, is what Saint Paul recommends: *'To rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. (Romans 12:15). And indeed, as we will see, according to the Blessed Chrysostom, joy for the success and happiness of our fellow human beings is something particularly challenging; and it is even more difficult than our participation in their mourning:*

*'Let us show an earnestness worthy the gift. And show it we shall, if we keep with earnestness charity, the mother of good deeds. Now charity is not bare words, or mere ways of speaking to men, but a taking care of them, and putting forth of itself by works, as, for instance, by relieving poverty, lending one's aid to the sick, rescuing one from dangers, to stand by them in difficulties, to weep with those who weep, and to rejoice with those who rejoice.*

*For even this is a part of charity. And yet this seems a little thing, to be rejoicing with those who rejoice: nevertheless it is exceedingly great, and requires the spirit of true wisdom.*

*And we might find many that perform the more irksome part, and yet want vigour for this. For many weep with those who weep, but still do not rejoice, but instead are in tears when others rejoice; now this comes of resentment and envy.*

*The good deed then of rejoicing when our brother rejoices is no small one, but even greater than the other: and haply not only greater than weeping with them that weep, but even than standing by them that are in danger. There are many, at all events, that*



*have shared danger with men in danger, but were cut to the heart when they came into honour*<sup>199</sup>.

In a different sermon, the Blessed Chrysostom says: *'And if you do no other thing, but only hast pleasure in what is done, even thus you share in no common degree, for you have contributed love, the sum of all good things.*

*For if they that weep seem to share in the grief of those in sorrow, and gratify them mightily, and remove the excess of their woe, much more do they also that rejoice with others, making their pleasure greater ...*

*... Wherefore Paul also says, 'Rejoice with them that rejoice; and weep with them that weep'. Increase their pleasure. If you see your brother in good esteem, say not, 'the esteem is his, why should I rejoice'. These words are not of a brother, but of an enemy. If you be so minded, it is not his, but yours. You have the power of making it greater, if you be not downcast, but pleased, if you be cheerful, if joyous...*

*... See ye not in the case of athletes, how the one is crowned, the other is not crowned; but the grief and the joy among the favourers and disfavourers, these that they leap, they that caper?*

*See how great a thing is not envying. The toil is another's, the pleasure is yours; another wears the crown, and you caper, you are gay. For tell me, seeing it is another that has conquered, why do you leap? But they also know well, that what has been done is common*<sup>200</sup>.

The above words of the Blessed Chrysostom are wise indeed. The holy Elder presents the sports team fans' great joy for the successes of the athletes and urges all of us to imitate this action.

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199 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ. ε', P.G.60, 447.

200 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κολλοσσαεῖς Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ια', κεφ. γ', P.G.62, 378.

In other words, like the crowds of fans who are in a stadium and rejoice and celebrate the victory of the team's athletes, this is how we, too, should rejoice and celebrate in the happiness and success of our fellow man. Our joy for our neighbour's welfare must resemble the joy that a fan has for the victory of his team.

Let us close this chapter with the wise words of the Blessed Chrysostom: *'Indeed, we cannot experience true joy, if first, we do not consider the joy and welfare of our fellow humans as ours, and also if we do not consider other people's blessings as ours. All these cannot happen to us from any other cause, except if, the desire for love floods within us. Love is the root, the source and the mother of all blessings'*<sup>201</sup>.

## 8. SLANDER IS DUE TO LACK OF LOVE

One of the greatest sins, according to the Holy Fathers, is the habit of slandering our fellow humans. This terrible passion, they say, is due to lack of true love, and of course, because we do not love our neighbour as ourselves.

Saint Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain interprets a quote from Saint James, the Brother of our Lord (James 4: 11), and says the following vital words: *'Whoever detracts and condemns his brother, detracts and condemns the very Law of God. By saying 'Law of God,' he either means the commandment of the Law that says 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22: 39),' or the one that says 'judge not, that you not be judged (Matthew 7: 1).'*...

*... Here, Saint James reflects and says the following: You, that slander your brother, you slander the Law of God that commands you to love your brother as yourself. Nevertheless, If you slander*

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201 *Eis tήn άγιάν Πεντηκοστήν, όμιλία β', κεφ. γ', PG.50, 468.*

*the Law of God, you are not an enforcer of the law but a judge instead, which means that now, you do not have the command to keep the Law but to judge it instead.*

*Because since the Law commands you to love your brother as yourself, by hating him, not only do you not love him as yourself but also, you detract and slander him at the same time. It is evident, then, that you do not keep the Law, but instead, you judge the law and accuse it of unreasonably prescribing the commandment of love. Nevertheless, if you slander the Law, it is evident that, at the same time, you slander the lawmaker God for not appointing the law well and not for our benefit.*

*Do you see, Christian, to what wickedness you come to by slandering your brother? Because by slandering your brother, you slander the commandment of the Law. By judging the commandments of the Law, you judge the Law. And by judging the Law, you judge the Lawmaker Himself<sup>202</sup>.*

*Let us also examine the views of Saint Dorotheos, though: 'And we poor people judge harshly, we hate indiscriminately and think little of people if we see something or hear something, or even only suspect something. And what is worse, we do not let it ease from harming ourselves, but we go and seek another brother and say, 'Here is what occurred.' We hurt him and put sin into his heart as well...*

*... How are we able to deal with these things unless it is on account of us not having true love? If we have genuine love through our caring and patient labour, we will not go about examining our neighbour's failings. As was said before, 'Love covers a multitude of sins.' And also, 'Love thinks no evil, it hides everything.'*

*As I said, if we have genuine love, that love should cover every flaw, as the Saints did when they beheld the failings of men. Were they blind? By no means. But they would not let their eyes*

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202 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 137-140.

*rest on sin. Who despised sin more than the Saints? But they did not hate the sinners, nor judge them, nor turn from them, but they endured with them, admonished them, cared for them, gave them treatments as sick members, and did all they were capable of doing to cure them...*

*... The holy Fathers, who with long-suffering and love, reel in the brother and do not admonish him nor are they unfriendly to him, but as a mother who has a disobedient son who does not hate or turn from him but governs him with sweetness and at times does things to please him. So holy Fathers always guard him and keep him in order that they gain a hold on him so that with time they can remedy the errant brother and prevent him from harming others, and by doing so they greatly progress toward the love of Christ ...*

*... May we then, work to gain this love in ourselves. May we gain this tenderness toward our neighbour so that we might protect ourselves from speaking evil of our neighbour and from judging and hating him. May we help each other, so that we are members of each other. Which of us, having a wound on his hand or foot, or any other part of the body, would not want to remove it, even if it became toxic? Instead, would he not rather wash it to take away the poison, wrap it, make the sign of the cross over it, apply a holy water, pray and beseech the Saints to pray for its remedy, as Abbot Zosimus used to tell us, to put it plainly, not to turn aside or flee from our own appendage, even those of ill repute, but to do everything in our power to heal the disease.*

*By this means we should carry each other's burdens, to aid each other and be helped by others who are mightier than us, to think of all things and to do all things that can aid ourselves and others, because we are all members of each other, as the Apostle*

*tells us. If we are one body, each is a member of the other. If one part suffers then all the others suffer with it*<sup>203</sup>.'

In the same sermon, Saint Nikodemos refers to the following descriptive and useful example: *'Let us suppose that [the] circle is the world and that God is the centre. The straight line drawn from the edge to the middle is the lives of people.*

*To the degree that the Saints are moved by spiritual things they want to draw near to God, and in proportion to their advancement in spiritual things, they do indeed draw closer to God and to their neighbour. The closer they come to God, the closer they come to each other and the closer they are to each other, the closer they come to God.*

*Now consider in the same context the question of separation, because when they stand far from God and turn to eternal things, it is clear that the more they draw back and become far from God, the more they become far from each other.*

*See, this is the true nature of love. The more we are turned away from and do not love God, the greater the distance that we are separated from our neighbour.*

*If we were to love God more, we should be closer to God, and by love in Him we would be more joined in love to our neighbour. And the more we are joined to our neighbour the more we are joined to God*<sup>204</sup>.'



203 Διδασκαλία στ', κεφ. στ'-ν', P.G.88, 1692C-1696A.

204 'Ενθ' ἀνωτ. κεφ. ν'-θ', P.G.88, 1696B-D.





## PART FOUR

# LOVE AS A SELF-SACRIFICE

## 1. THE NEW COMMANDMENT

**A**s stated in the third part of our study, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, which seems to be particularly difficult or even impossible to some people, is simply the first step of love. It is not the real objective, then, which in turn is the perfection of virtue that those who want to be real Christians must succeed, to be called true disciples of Christ.

Indeed, at one time, Christ told His disciples that He came to teach something new, something different and unusual; *'a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another* (John 13: 34).'

It is understandable, conclude the Holy Fathers of our Church, that when Jesus spoke of a new commandment of love, He did not mean to love our neighbours as ourselves. This was a former commandment that was the commandment which was previously given to the people of the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). How is

it possible, ask the Holy Fathers, for Jesus to call a commandment that already existed in the Old Testament a new one?

Indeed, the new commandment that Jesus gives to us is no longer to love our neighbour as we love ourselves but instead something superior. The new commandment of Christ to all Christians differs in two main points; first, in the magnitude of love, and secondly, in the concept of the word 'neighbour'.

Concerning the first point, that is, the magnitude of love, the Lord explains to us that He requires from all us Christians, not only to love our neighbour like ourselves but much more. Thus, our Lord says the following: *'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13: 34).'*

Jesus says, "During the period of grace at the era of the New Testament, I want you to reach even higher; even further. For this reason, I now give you a new commandment; I am not just asking you to love your neighbour as yourselves since this commandment was given to the people of the Old Testament. Instead, you, who have now been strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you ought to do something far greater and aim for perfection. You ought to love your fellow human beings, then, just as I loved you. You ought to love your neighbour more than yourselves, then, and to be ready to be sacrificed for them. If you want to be called My disciples, you have to sacrifice your will, your rights, your rest, joy, and even your life for your brother's sake."

Regarding the second point, the concept of 'neighbour', whom we ought to love, our Lord proclaimed that for true Christians, a neighbour should be considered every human, even our enemy, and not just our friend, a familiar person, or our relative.

It is worth noting that, the Hebrews considered as 'neighbours' only those *'with whom they were connected with ties of kinship,*



*religion, or nationality*<sup>205</sup>.’ Thus, when an arrogant Pharisee<sup>206</sup> asked Jesus, ‘*And who is my neighbour*, (Luke 10:29); or else, who am I to regard a neighbour to love him as myself, or rather, who is so virtuous, wise and strong as me, to deserve that I love him like myself<sup>207</sup>, Jesus replied as follows:

Jesus mentioned the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-5); of the man that found a Hebrew who was left half-dead after an attack by robbers. Despite the hostility that existed between Samaritans and Hebrews, the Good Samaritan did his best to care for the unfortunate fellow man.

With this parable, then, Jesus showed the arrogant Pharisee, and the people of all eras, something essential. Within the meaning of ‘neighbour’, whom we ought to love, we must include every human being, even our enemy, and not only those who are close to us because of nationality, religion, kinship, friendship, social status, rank, wisdom, or virtue.

In a different, characteristic point of His teaching, our Lord has clearly emphasised the following: ‘*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies.* (Matthew 5: 43-44)’

In the next and final part of this study, we will refer to the concept of ‘neighbour, and its new meaning, as well as the commandment of love for our enemies.

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205 Ἀρχιμανδρίου Σεραφεῖμ Παπακώστα, *Αἱ παραβολαὶ τοῦ Κυρίου*, σελ. 241.

206 Θεοφυλάκτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τό κατά Λουκᾶν εὐαγγέλιον*, κεφ. ι´, P.G.123, 848A.

207 Ἀγίου Κυρίλλου Ἀλεξανδρείας, *Ἐξήγησις εἰς τό κατά Λουκᾶν εὐαγγέλιον*, κεφ. ι´, P.G.72, 680A-C.

## 2. OVERCOMING THE OLD LAW

**T**he commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves was given to the people of the Old Testament, who had an '*infantile*<sup>208</sup>' spiritual wisdom, which means that they were in a particularly low spiritual state and for that reason, it was impossible for them to achieve perfection.

The disciples of Christ, unlike the pre-Christian people, have a duty to achieve perfection; to reach particularly high spiritual measures. They must imitate their Lord Christ, Who did not teach them the new commandment of true love from on high as a Lawmaker but instead, He taught by His example, making haste, Himself, to apply it before we do.

Let us examine the characteristic views of the holy Fathers. They proclaim unanimously that the new commandment of love in the New Testament is different from the commandment of the Old Testament because it now teaches us to love our neighbour as Christ loved us, that is, more than ourselves.

Saint Isidor of Pelusium teaches us that, initially, *'Our Lord and God initially introduced the commandment 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' But then, during His incarnate presence on earth, He added something else; 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.'*

*Therefore, to love our neighbour is also a commandment that is found in the Old Testament. To love our neighbour as our Lord loved us, though, is something He added in the New Testament,*

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208 Θεοφυλάκτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας, ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. P.G.123, 845B.

*and for this reason, He described the specific commandment as a 'new commandment.' Because loving your neighbour as yourself is different from overlooking what is yours to help your neighbour.*

*Just like our Lord humbled Himself, then, for the sake of all people, and accepted to take the form of a slave to lead the slaves to divine adoption, in the same way, He gave us the commandment not to look to our personal gain, but to see to the benefit of our fellow human beings.*

*If, of course, one thinks that he will be wronged by agreeing to accept such a condescension, then he should know that this condescension raises him to the greatest honour and glory<sup>209</sup>.*

*Saint Cyril of Alexandria also says: 'How then cometh a new commandment by Christ, although the very same had been declared by the ancient laws? But notice, I pray you, the justifying clause; look at the illustration used. He does more than say: A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; He plainly signifies the novelty involved in His command, and the extent by which the love that He enjoins surpasses that old idea of mutual love, by straightway adding the words 'Even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another'...*

*... For whereas the Law enjoined the necessity of loving our brethren as ourselves, our Lord Jesus the Christ, on the other hand, loved us more than He loved Himself ...*

*... Marvellous then indeed was the extent of His love. So also He would have us be minded, keeping ever our love to our brethren as superior to all other motives, such as reputation or riches; not hesitating to descend if need be even to death in the Flesh<sup>210</sup>.*

*The views of Saint John Chrysostom are similar. He wonders: 'But how calls He that a new commandment which is contained*

209 *Ἐπιστολή ι', βιβλίο γ', P.G.78, 1044A-C.*

210 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τό κατά Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον, κεφ. ιγ', P.G.74, 161C-164A.*

also in the Old Covenant? He made it new Himself by the manner; therefore He added, 'As I have loved you'<sup>211</sup>.

In a different sermon, the same Saint stresses that 'This do thou also in your brother's case (for this is the end of His saying 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye so love one another as I have loved you'<sup>212</sup>).

Also, the Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria maintains that, while the law of the Old Testament teaches us to love our brothers as ourselves, the Lord demands the perfect love from us; to love our brothers more than ourselves by even sacrificing our life for them<sup>213</sup>.

Saint Basil the Great, too, emphasises that a true Christian ought to exceed 'the measure of the old love' and reach the new measures and limits of love that our Lord sets in the teaching of the New Testament<sup>214</sup>.

Finally, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, adds the following: 'The old law asks from the Christian to have intense and exceeding love, that is, to love his brother as himself; 'Love your neighbour as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)'

In the Gospel, the Lord calls for something even more significant; He asks that a Christian loves his brother more than himself because He teaches that, if the need arises, to give his soul, that is his life, to death for his friend and brother. Since our Lord Himself loved us more than Himself by sacrificing His life

211 'Υπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία οβ', κεφ. γ', P.G.59, 394.

212 'Υπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ. ζ', P.G.60, 450.

213 Τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Παύλου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς ἐξήγησις, κεφ. ιγ', P.G.124, 517D.

214 Περί βαπτίσματος, λόγος β', P.G.31, 1608.

*for our love. This is the reason He called it a new commandment; because it is not taught in such a way by the Old Law*<sup>215</sup>.

When interpreting a passage from Saint James the Brother of our Lord (James 2:8), Saint Nikodemos also says the following. *'Saint James calls 'love your neighbour as yourself' a royal law, not only because God, The absolute King gave it, but also, because this law is like a royal path.*

*The royal way, then, is walked by all people because it is straight, equal for all, midstream, without leading right or left, cliffs or uneven ground. In the same way, the law that commands one to love their neighbour as themselves is a midstream and straight disposition that does not lead right or left, that is, neither to excess or shortcomings or what is above or heedless of our nature. Instead, it is almost natural to humans. For this reason, it must be kept by all who have the same and alike human nature ...*

*... But to love our neighbour more than ourselves is superior of this royal commandment, and above nature, too. The New Testament teaches it as more perfect, and it is superior to the previous [commandment].*

*To hate our neighbour, though, is inferior to that royal commandment and unnatural. The commandment of loving our neighbour as ourselves is amid these two commandments*<sup>216</sup>.

To love our fellow humans, then, which seems impossible for many, is not an extreme and unsustainable commandment, but something natural. The Christians, who received the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, though, are called to a life that surpasses nature. They are called to participate in the true love of Christ, the true virtue of love, which cannot be understood beyond the limits of self-sacrifice and the severance of our will for the sake of our brothers.

215 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', σελ. 303.

216 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ. 84-85.

At this point, we ought to reflect and to make some sincere self-criticism. Why should there be so much ignorance about the concept of true love? Why is it that we consider not only the perfection of love as impossible, but also what is considered as being simple, natural, and a small token of love as impossible, according to the Gospel? How is it possible to talk and philosophise about love, from the moment that we do not embrace the spirit of self-sacrifice for our fellow human beings, and even our relatives, but instead we additionally do not love them as ourselves.

### 3. SACRIFICING OUR SELF

**P**erfect love, then, is the one that Jesus showed us through His example, which was to sacrifice one's will, self, or even one's life for their brothers' sake; to favour the interest, happiness, benefit and comfort of their fellow humans rather than their own. The true Christian must imitate Christ, Who sacrificed Himself for His creatures. Also, the true Christian must be willing to sacrifice his self daily for the sake of his fellow human beings.

Indeed, our Lord asked that we love our neighbour as He also loved us: *'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13: 34)' And at different times: 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15: 12-13)'*

The Holy Apostles move with precision in the context of the above commandments of our Lord. As Saint Paul, the Apostle goes on to say, *'To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. (1 Peter 2:21)'* Therefore, our Lord sacrificed Himself for us, giving us all an exemplar model of true love and self-sacrifice, so that we follow His steps.

Saint John the Theologian adds that the true Christian *'ought himself also to walk, even as He walked. (1 John 2:6)'*

At different times he also says that *'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)'*

When interpreting the above passage, Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite says the following: *'John, the disciple of love, says: My dear brothers we know very well, and we understand that love is quite a beneficial virtue, from the great benefactions that we received from Christ, through this love. Because He Who is the supreme Lord of all things, and for our love, He gave His own life to death and in this way, He rendered us partakers of His divine glory and beatitude.*

*Consequently, in the example and imitation of our Lord Christ, we ought to give our lives for the sake of our brethren. ... For the love of our friends and those who love us dearly. Because this is the highest sign, which distinguishes true love<sup>217</sup>.*

To avoid some people's claim that Saint John might be teaching unfeasible things since it is particularly challenging to sacrifice one's life for the sake of his brethren, in the next sentence (1 John 3:17) Saint Nikodemos explains how in everyday life each one of us can sacrifice himself for our brethren. In this way, we show our love and fellowship in practice; to not ignore a brother who is in need and is suffering<sup>218</sup>.

In his interpretation of the wondrous words of Saint John the Evangelist on love, Saint Nikodemos advocates that the Christian who has true and perfect love sacrifices himself daily. Because he *'ignores the flaws of his brother,'* even if his brother behaves

217 *Ερμηνεία εις τὰς ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, σελ.542-543.

218 *Ἐνθ. ἄνωτ.* σελ. 544-545.

in an abusive or ugly way. *'He endures everything calmly out of love for his brother'*<sup>219</sup>.

Saint Paul the Apostle also points out the following: *'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 sweet smelling savour'* (Ephesians 5:2).

When interpreting the above sentence, Saint Nikodemos says: *'This is the supposition and reason for everything good: love. Saint Paul, too, teaches the reason we became children of God; by virtue of love. Consequently, we ought to preserve love since it became the ambassador of our divine adoption.'*

*Since when we are ill and then healed by taking medicine, we then honour the name of the medicine itself because it was beneficial to us, in the same way, we ought to honour and preserve love, by which [love] our Lord Christ was driven when He surrendered Himself for our sake'*<sup>220</sup>.

Because of His great love, which even led Him to His sacrifice on the cross, Christ has given us the health of soul and salvation. We, too, ought to honour and preserve this lifesaving medicine called love. Of course, we honour and keep love if we also proceed in our lives as Christ did, that is, with a disposition of sacrifice for the sake of our neighbour.

When referring to the spirit of self-sacrifice and meekness, Saint Paul the Apostle also says: *'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. (Ephesians 5:25)'* Thus, he urges men to love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church, His creatures, and 'gave Himself up for her,' that is, He delivered Himself to death for our sake.

In various Epistles, Saint Paul the Apostle offers further practical advice about how all the above can be accomplished. He

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219 Ἐνθ' ἀνωτ. σελ. 484.

220 Ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς..., τόμος β', σελ. 455-456.



urges all the faithful to follow these truly astonishing attributes of love: *'We who are strong ought to bear the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please Himself. (Romans 15: 1-3)'*

He goes on to say that, we, who are spiritually stronger, ought to bear, that is to tolerate, to endure and heal the weaknesses and passions of our brethren. We must give ground to the demands, desires, and wishes, even to the recalcitrance of our neighbour, preferring to do what he likes, and not what we want.

In the same way that Christ suffered a lot for our salvation and endured so much of what He did not like, we too, who are His genuine disciples, ought to bear a lot of things we do not like. We ought to relent many times by severing our will and in this way, help our brethren spiritually.

In other words, a proper Christian always bears the insecurities of his brethren, much more, the insecurities of his wife, or her husband's. They always relent to their partner, without even imagining to upset, degrade, or insult them.

A good Christian, and especially a good spouse, will often realise that they live a life that they do not like; a life they never dreamt of. Nevertheless, they know very well that this is the only way with which they will succeed in saving their brethren and especially, their spouse.

A good Christian knows that true love is to live as our partner wishes, and not to try to impose upon them what we wish stubbornly.

True love is the desire to become likeable to our partner through our actions and behaviour, and not to demand the fulfilment of our wishes.

True love is to prefer the convenience, happiness, comfort, and spiritual benefit of our brethren, and not to selfishly demand from them that our wishes and desires be fulfilled.

True love is the sacrifice of our self, our demands, and of our rights. It is our complaisance and the alleviation of our selfishness in our everyday lives.

That a true Christian ought to always relent and sever their own will by wishing that the will of their partner is fulfilled, that they feel happy, and that they have benefited when the benefit, happiness and interest of their brethren comes first, also appears in other parts of Saint Paul's Epistles. In these passages, he says the following:

*'No one should seek his own welfare, but rather his neighbour's. (Corinthians 10:24)'*

*'Just as I myself try to please everybody in every way. I don't look for my own benefit, but rather for the benefit of many people. (1 Corinthians 10:33)'*

*'Do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4)'*

*After all, Saint Paul again says, love 'Never thinks just of herself. (1 Corinthians 13:5)'* The one who loves does not demand that his own will be done. He offers his love generously to his brethren without demanding reciprocation.



#### 4. OUR BENEFIT WITHIN THE BENEFIT OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

**S**ome will argue, of course, that all the above is excessive and unreal, and it is impossible to implement in today's society. In other words, one will question the truths of the Gospel, believing that Jesus Christ taught us impossible things; things that cannot be done.

Nevertheless, instead of rushing foolhardily to disdain and invalidate the commandments of Christ, it would be preferable to think differently. We should ask ourselves, then, how many times did we not apply the commandments of God when we could have? How many times throughout our everyday lives can all of the above be accomplished, if we wish so of course, by severing our will and by relenting, for the sake of our brethren, family, work, and friendships?

We ought to do some sincere self-reflection and to ask ourselves why we often do not behave lovingly towards our brethren. Instead, we act with selfishness and arrogance, by promoting our interests, and by sacrificing peace and amity with our brethren.

Let us see, though, Saint John Chrysostom's wise exposition on the subject of love and self-sacrifice, in successive sermons: *'Are you spiritually powerful? Render a return to God for making you so. But render it you will if you set the weakness of the sickly right. As, for instance, if any be passionate, or insolent, or has any such like failing, bear with him.'*

*And how is this to be? Listen to what comes next. For after saying 'we ought to bear,' Saint Paul adds, 'and not to please ourselves.' 'Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. (Romans 15:1,2)'*

*But what he says is this. Are you powerful? Let the weak have trial of your power. Let him come to know your strength; please him <sup>221</sup>.*

*'Neither the participation in dinner parties, nor plain salutations, nor flattering words show real love. It is instead shown when we correct our brethren and care for their interest; when we correct the sinner, when we help the fallen who is indifferent to his salvation, and when we seek the benefaction of our brethren instead of ours. This is a real sign of love because the one who has love does not seek his profit. Before seeking for his own profit, he instead attends to the comfort of his brethren, and in this way also seeks his own profit <sup>222</sup>.*

*'Justly then said the Blessed Paul, 'Love does not behave itself unseemly (1 Corinthians 13:5)' 'Seeks not its own, it is not provoked. Thus having said, 'does not behave unseemly,' he shows also the temper of mind, on account of which does not behave herself unseemly. And what is that temper? That she 'seeks not her own.' For the beloved she esteems to be all ... Since this is friendship, that the lover and the beloved should no longer be two persons divided, but in a manner, one single person.*

*This can only be achieved through love and nothing else. Seek not therefore your own, that you may find your own. For he that seeks his own, finds not his own.*

*Wherefore also Paul said, 'Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good. (1 Corinthians 10:24)' For your own profit lies in the profit of your neighbour, and his in yours.*

*Just as if a person who has his gold buried his neighbour's house, will never recover it if he does not attempt to seek it and go dig it up, it is the same in our circumstance. He who does not*

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221 'Υπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κη', κεφ. β', P.G.60, 645.

222 *Eis tήν Γένεσιν*, λόγος θ', κεφ. β', P.G.54, 623.

*seek his own benefit through the good-fortune of his neighbour, will not attain unto the crowns of true love. After all, that is exactly why God Himself so disposed of it, so that we should be mutually bound together<sup>223</sup>.*

*'Thus in this way shall you find your own profit, if you seek that of your neighbour's. Wherefore when you are unwilling to care for your brother, consider that you cannot be saved in any other way. Therefore, at least for your own sake, stand up for him and his interests ...*

*... Conceive of a fire breaking out anywhere within a house, and then some of the neighbours in keeping to their own interests, refuse to confront the danger and instead shut themselves up and remain at home out of fear, lest someone find his way in and steal some part of the household goods; what great punishment will they endure? Since eventually the fire will likewise come and burn down theirs. This, all due to the fact that they did not look after their neighbour's interests. They therefore, in turn, lose even their own property.*

*For God, willing to bind us all to each other, has imposed such a necessity, that the profit of one neighbour to that of the other is bound up; and the whole world is thus constituted ...*

*... For since men would no otherwise make up their mind to seek the things of their neighbour, besides that they are reduced to this necessity; therefore God has thus joined things together and does not allow them to arrive at their own profit except if they first look after the benefit of others.*

*This, therefore, is the humane reason to concern ourselves with another's well-being. It is actually truly beneficial, however, not to do this for this reason, but because we strive to follow the laws of God. For it is not possible to be saved if you do not keep*

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223 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία λγ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 279-280.

*this. On the contrary, even if you poses the greatest of virtues, yet you still are indifferent to the plight of others, then frankly, there is no hope of obtaining closeness to God<sup>224</sup>.*

## 5. THE LABOUR OF LOVE

**L**et us see the wise answers of Saint Basil the Great on the concept of true love; of love as self-sacrifice. *'What kind of love ought we to have with one another? The one which our Lord showed to us with His life and which He taught us by saying: 'This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. No one shows greater love than when he lays down his life for his friends. (John 15: 12-13)'*

*If one ought to even give his life for his neighbour, then, how much more necessary is it to show a disposition of self-sacrifice in the more trivial matters; not so much aspiring to perform his duty as a human being, but to please God<sup>225</sup>.'*

*'Which is the distinctive characteristic of love for our neighbour? To not wish for one's will to be done but instead, for what the one we love wishes; always guided by both their spiritual and material gain<sup>226</sup>.*

Let us examine the words of Saint Dorotheos, with which, he explains that love means denying our will and egotism: our selfishness. *'I never used to hold my desires above those of my brothers<sup>227</sup>.* *'Do not demand love from your neighbour because when one demands something, he is upset if he does not receive. Rather, you should show your love to your neighbour and give*

224 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία κε', κεφ. ε', P.G.61, 210-211.

225 Ὅροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν, ἐρώτησις ρξβ', P.G.31, 1188BC.

226 Ἠθικά, κεφ. κβ', P.G.31, 868D.

227 Διδασκαλία, δ', κεφ. θ', P.G.88, 1669B.

*him rest, and in this way, you will get him to the point of loving you...*

*... Anyone who does not detest every material thing, has self-glory, physical ease and even his own personal rights, who cannot sever his will, or rid himself of wrath and sorrow, or give his neighbour comfort ...*

*... Whoever does not have a will and always gets his own way. Because if he does not have a will, whatever might happen gives him ease and in this way, it is always as if he gets his own way because he does not wish for things to happen the way he wants them to but instead, he accepts them the way they happen<sup>228</sup>.*

*'Be tough on yourself in everything and sever your will. In this way, when, with the grace of God, you become accustomed to severing it, it is then that it will be done without your grieving; as if you always get your own way. Because you do not wish for things to be done as you want, but as they do and in this way, you live in peace with everyone<sup>229</sup>.*

The above words of Saint Dorotheos are inspiring. A genuinely happy person is only the one that has real love; it is only the one who can sacrifice his will for the sake of his partner. This person rejoices and rests with whatever is happening around him since he has achieved, due to the love he has, to immobilize his selfishness and personal will completely.

The views of Saint Barsanuphius are similar: *'To sacrifice, in every circumstance, all will for the sake of our neighbour generates ataraxia [equanimity] and serenity in our hearts, and makes our face more joyful and cheerful<sup>230</sup>.* *'To renounce one's*

228 *Ρήματα διάφορα*, P.G.88, 1804AB.

229 *Επιστολή β'*, P.G.88, 1804AB.

230 *Βίβλος Βαρσανουφίου καί Ἰωάννου*, ἀπόκρισις 156, σελ. 103.

*will is a sacrifice of blood. It means that one has reached the point of labouring unto death and of ignoring their own will*<sup>231</sup>.'

Saint Poemen also teaches particularly practical ways of self-sacrifice: *'The one who loves, sacrifices his self for his neighbour. For instance, if someone is saddened by the words of his brother and even though he could speak of his brother, but instead strives not to; or if he is wronged by his brother, but endures and does not return evil, this is sacrifice for another*<sup>232</sup>.'

Finally, the following words of the Blessed Chrysostom in various sermons are also characteristic. In these sermons, he says that he who has genuine love does not hesitate to suffer in any way, for the sake of the one he loves. Only then does he feel happy and that he has profited; when he is sacrificed for his partner:

*'But it is customary with those who love, to glory more in the things which they suffer for those who are beloved, than in the benefits they receive from them*<sup>233</sup>.' *'For such is the law of those who love. They think that they are receiving favours, when they are suffering wrong for the sake of their beloved*<sup>234</sup>.'

*'Who is weak,' [Paul] says, 'and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? (2 Corinthians 11:29)'*

*These words let us imitate, and let us cast ourselves upon dangers for our brethren's sake. Whether it be fire, or the sword, cast yourself on it, beloved, that you may rescue [him that is] your member: cast yourself, be not afraid. You are a disciple of Christ, Who laid down His life for His brethren*<sup>235</sup>.'

231 \*Ενθ. ἀνωτ. ἀπόκρισις 254, σελ. 155.

232 Εὐεργετινός, τόμος γ', ὑπόθεσις λη', κεφ. κθ', σελ. 499.

233 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ιστ', κεφ. γ', P.G.49, 165.

234 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλίμονα Ἐπιστολὴν*, ὁμιλία β', κεφ. δ', P.G.62, 714.

235 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὰς Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων*, ὁμιλία μγ', κεφ. β'-γ', P.G.60, 305-306.



*‘Even if we have to endure danger for the spiritual salvation of our brethren, let us not avoid it. Because this danger becomes the cause of salvation for all, and it gives us boldness towards God<sup>236</sup>.’*

*‘And although it should be necessary to die, do not shrink from chastising a brother. This is your martyrdom. ... And make me not this cold reply. ‘What matters it to me? I have nothing in common with him.’*

*With the devil alone we have nothing in common, but with all men we have many things in common; for they partake of the same nature with us; they inhabit the same earth, and they are nourished with the same food; they have the same Lord; they have received the same laws, and are invited to the same blessings as us.*

*Let us not say then, that we have nothing in common with them; for this is satanic speech; a diabolical inhumanity. Therefore let us not give utterance to such words, but exhibit such tender care as becomes brethren<sup>237</sup>!’*

*‘Remembering without ceasing,’ [Paul] says, ‘your work of faith and labour of love. (1 Thessalonians 1:3)’ Merely to love is no labour at all. But to love genuinely is great labour<sup>238</sup>.’*

According to the Blessed Chrysostom, and the Fathers of our Church, it is evident that love that does not have the qualities of self-sacrifice, of severing our will, along with the joy and satisfaction, when the interest and wishes of our neighbour are preferred, this is not real love.

At this point, of course, we must point out the tremendous contribution of the Spiritual Father. He helps the faithful to as-

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236 *Eis tήn Γένεσιν*, όμιλία μγ΄, κεφ. ε΄, P.G.54, 401.

237 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, όμιλία α΄, κεφ. ιβ΄, P.G.49, 33-34.

238 *Υπόμνημα εις τήν πρός Θεσσαλονικεῖς καί Ἐπιστολήν πρώτην*, όμιλία α΄, κεφ. α΄, P.G.62, 394.

cend the stairs of this great staircase, slowly and steadily, without going into extremes and without exceeding their personal strength in the matter of self-sacrifice and resilience.

## 6. TEMPTING OUR BROTHER

**S**aint John Chrysostom offers a particularly important interpretation on Saint Paul's phrase: *'If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.* (1 Corinthians 8:13)'.

In the above interpretation, the Holy Father stresses that a true Christian, a person that has true love in their soul, will never deign to do something that could sadden, tempt, or spiritually harm their brother.

Of course, continues the Saint, when talking about acts that tempt and sadden our neighbour, we do not only mean the apparent evil and sinful acts (injustice, strife, adultery, slander), that obviously and fairly tempt and sadden. They are a bad example and an obstacle to the salvation of our brethren.

Instead, based on the phrase mentioned above by Saint Paul, the true Christian and man of love avoids doing what can sadden or hurt his brethren and that which does not contribute to their spiritual benefit, regardless of whether it is lawful, we are entitled to it, or it is permitted<sup>239</sup>.

Moreover, the Blessed Chrysostom<sup>240</sup> points out, Saint Paul is also quite clear at another point of his Epistles: *'I have the right to do anything,' you say- but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'- but not everything is constructive.* (1

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239 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κ', κεφ. ε', P.G.61, 167.

240 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία κδ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 202.

Corinthians 10:23)' A lot of what I have the right to do, then, is not beneficial because my neighbour does not like it. Also, it does not contribute to his spiritual benefit.

Consequently, whoever loves their neighbour, and especially their spouse, not only avoid these evident deeds that unquestionably tempt their neighbour, but they also avoid everything that their neighbour does not like. Also, they avoid what is not spiritually constructive for their neighbour.

For example, a husband would prefer never to do anything that saddens his wife, whether this sadness is justified or not. He will choose the peace of his family and he will not insist on enjoying some things, even though he may be entitled to, because at the same time, they might collide with the weakness or recalcitrance of his wife.

Citing additional quotes from Saint Paul the Apostle, the Blessed Chrysostom also condemns the sentence that is often heard: 'I will do whatever I like and want, not caring if the other person is tempted, hurt, harmed, or saddened' as totally unacceptable.<sup>241</sup>

Thus, according to Saint Paul, whoever is indifferent to the temptation and the sadness of their weak brethren, they show that they are '*no longer walking in love.*' (Romans 14: 15)

Our indifference for our brethren and their weaknesses, and the perpetration of some deeds that tempt them, and which according to Saint Paul 'wound their weak conscience' (1 Corinthians 8:12), are great sins. Because, for an unimportant reason, we hurt and sadden our fellow human beings, for whom our Lord even sacrificed His life.

Consequently, as Saint Paul emphasises, the one who is indifferent to the temptation and sadness of his weak brother, not

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241 "Ενθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία κ', κεφ. ε', P.G.61, 168.

only sins against his brother but also, sins against Christ, Who was sacrificed for our brother.

When interpreting the above words of Saint Paul, the Blessed Chrysostom adds that saddening our brother and stubbornly persisting in our will and our rights, is a sin, not only against our brother but also, against our Lord, for three main reasons<sup>242</sup>:

Firstly, because we hurt and harm the spirit of our brother, whom Christ saved with His Holy Blood.

Secondly, because when we hurt our brother, it is as if we hurt Christ Himself and His Body since our brother is a member of the Body of Christ; a member of our Church.

Thirdly, because Jesus believes that all the good or evil deeds we do against our neighbour, is as if we do to Him<sup>243</sup>. This is evident in our Lord's reference to the Second Coming and the Last Judgement, in which, He will reward people according to their behaviour towards their fellow human beings. All acts of charity, or the opposite, towards our brother, says Jesus, are as if they were done to Him; '*you did it to Me*' (Matthew 25: 31-46).

Christ died for your brother's sake, says Saint John Chrysostom, as such do you not accept to do everything to avoid tempting your brother? Should you not as well sever your will for the sake of your brother<sup>244</sup>? Is it not worth even being sacrificed for him, by following the example of our Lord if necessary? Why do you despise and sadden your brother, whom our Lord so loved and honoured with His sacrifice<sup>245</sup>?

242 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. P.G.61, 167.

243 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία λ', κεφ. γ', P.G.61, 610.

244 Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ. β', P.G.53, 63.

245 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κστ', κεφ. α', P.G.60, 638.

For all the above reasons, Saint Anthony the Great also stresses that *‘Our (spiritual) life and our (spiritual) death depend on our behaviour towards our brethren. If we win our brother over with our love, at the same time, we earn God’s favour. If, on the contrary, we tempt and harm our brethren, then it is as if we sin against God Himself’*<sup>246</sup>.

## 7. MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT OF LOVE

**T**he institution of marriage is an area in which the virtue of love is tested and emphasised. Unfortunately, in today’s society, this institution is undergoing a great crisis. The breakdown of families is now commonplace, even though the problems between spouses are not particularly serious. Also, many couples who do not choose to divorce, live conventionally thus, without experiencing proper communication, mutual help and happiness in their marital life.

As Father Georgios Kapsanis says in a study titled ‘Marriage as a sacrament of love,’ many young people today- even some who have religious marriages- commit a grave mistake. They perceive their marriage merely as a physical, biological, social, or economic event.

Nevertheless, it is not right for marriage to be considered just as a union of two people who are united because of the physical attraction and needs of both sexes, of childbirth, or other social and economic criteria and reasons.

On the contrary, spouses ought to perceive and consciously experience their marriage as a Sacrament of the Church. What does this mean? It means that in the marriage, which is celebrated with full awareness in the Church as a Sacrament, we

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246 *Εὐεργετινός*, τόμος γ’, ὑπόθεσις λστ’, κεφ. δ’, σελ. 471.

do not merely have a union among two persons but mainly, the union of these two persons with Christ. After all, such a union is achieved in all Sacraments of our Church. At the same time, Christ also unites both these persons with each other.

Father Georgios says that *'the spouses are united with Christ, and through Christ, together. In the Sacrament of marriage, not only are both groom and bride united but also, Christ is united with them. Or rather, they are both united in Christ, Who in this way makes this union holy, perfect, healthy, and theanthropic. In the new home, neither man nor woman reigns, but Christ instead, because they both want to do the will of Christ and not their own'*<sup>247</sup>.

At this point, on the one hand, lies the difference between cohabitation, engagement, civil wedding, and even of a religious marriage that is not consciously celebrated with the full awareness of its spiritual implications and on the other hand, the religious wedding that takes place with a full understanding of the participation in a vital Church Sacrament; a *'theanthropical union'*. Therefore, what unites spouses *'is not only the physical attraction between the two sexes, the social interest, etc. but above all, Christ.'*<sup>248</sup> Thus, with great faith in Christ, the spouses accept the obedience to the law of Christ; they accept the love that Christ teaches, and they are united based on this love. The spouses are bound by promises of love, which is not of a superficial character, that is, the character of reciprocation and of a transaction (I love you as long as you love me and I respect you as long as you respect me), but of the character and meaning of the true love that only Christ teaches.

Of course, as we have explained in detail, this true love is unthinkable beyond the limits of self-sacrifice, complaisance, the

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247 *Θέματα ἐκκλησιολογίας καί ποιμαντικῆς*, σελ. 165-166.

248 Ὑνθ. ἀνωτ.

fight against self-love and egoism. True love is only construed as the imitation of the practical example of the self-sacrifice of Jesus.

During the wedding ceremony, the newlyweds accept the above reality. In the apostolic reading, which is read at the time of the divine Sacrament, the following words of Saint Paul are mentioned:

*'Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her [the Church] to make her [the Church] holy, cleansing her[the Church]... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the Church' (Ephesians 5: 25-26, 28-29).*

## 8. SELF-SACRIFICE IN MARRIAGE

**L**et us see, however, the wise interpretations of the Blessed Chrysostom, on Saint Paul's words which were mentioned above, and in general, on his teaching about true love and the self-sacrifice of spouses within a marriage.

*'Hear also the measure of love. Would you have your wife obedient unto you, as the Church is to Christ? Take then yourself the same provident care of her, as Christ takes for the Church. Yea, even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her, yea, and to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, yea, and to endure and undergo any suffering whatever- refuse it not.*

*Thou you should undergo all this, yet will you not, no, not even then, have done anything like Christ. For thou indeed are doing it for one to whom you are already knit; but He for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him.*

*In the same way then as He laid at His feet her who turned her back on Him, not by menaces, nor by violence, nor by terror,*

*nor by anything else of the kind, but by His unwearied affection; so also do thou behave yourself toward your wife.*

*Yea, though thou see her looking down upon you, and disdain, and scorning you, yet by your great thoughtfulness for her, by affection, by kindness, you will be able to lay her at your feet. For there is nothing more powerful to sway than these bonds, and especially for husband and wife.*

*A servant, indeed, one will be able, perhaps, to bind down by fear; nay not even him, for he will soon start away and be gone. But the partner of one's life, the mother of one's children, and the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper. For what sort of union is that, where the wife trembles at her husband? And what sort of pleasure will the husband himself enjoy, if he dwells with his wife as with a slave, and not as with a free-woman?*

*Yea, though you should suffer anything on her account, do not upbraid her; for neither did Christ do this. 'And He gave Himself up,' he says, 'for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it.' So then she was unclean! So then she had blemishes, so then she was unsightly, so then she was worthless! Whatsoever kind of wife you shall take, yet shall you never take such a bride as the Church, when Christ took her, nor one so far removed from you as the Church was from Christ. And yet for all that, He did not abhor her, nor loathe her for her surpassing deformity...*

*... Tell me not that such things are so. Do you see not that we have in our own flesh itself many defects? For one man, for instance, is lame, another has his feet distorted, another his hands withered, another some other member weak; and yet nevertheless he does not grieve about it, nor cut it off, but often times prefers it even to the other. Naturally enough; for it is part of himself. As*



*great love as each entertains towards himself, so great He would have us entertain towards a wife.<sup>249</sup>*

*'I urge and advise those who are about to marry, to resort to Saint Paul and to read the particular commands on marriage, which can be found in his letters.*

*Thus, having first learnt what he commands them to do when the woman is full of malice and an insidious, drunken, insolent fool, or have any such defect, then they should discuss marriage. If, then, you see that he gives you the right, when you find any of these flaws in your wife, to divorce her and take another, then fear not because you are free from any danger.*

*If he does not allow it, though, and instead, he commands that all the flaws that she has, besides adultery, you must endure and keep her at home, then prepare and strengthen yourself because in the future you will have to bear all the malice of your wife...*

*...We ought to love our wife very much then, just as Saint Paul commanded us. Because after he said 'husbands, love your wives,' he did not just stop here, but he also gave us the measure of love by saying 'just as Christ also loved the Church.' And tell me, how did Christ love the Church? 'He gave Himself for her.'*

*Even if you have to die for your wife, then, do not refuse. For if our Lord so loved His servant that He gave Himself for her [the Church], you ought to love your wife in the same way even more so. ...*

*... Christ did not abhor the ugliness of His servant then. Instead, He changed her. He transformed her. He corrected her. He forgave her sins. Imitate Him, too. Even if your spouse commits countless sins against you, overlook them all and forgive her. Even if you marry a cantankerous woman, lead her to repentance*

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249 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμίλια κ', κεφ. β', δ', P.G.62, 137, 140.

*with your kindness and gentleness; just as Christ corrected His Church. ...*

*As when an illness afflicts our bodies, we do not cut off the sick body part, but we fight the disease instead, in the same way, let us do the same with a cantankerous wife. If your wife behaves in a bad manner, do not divorce her but correct her vice instead. After all, it is possible to correct our wives, but we cannot always cure a crippled part of our bodies. ...*

*... But if you say that your wife is incurable and that despite your great care she still has the same behaviour, even then, you should not repel her because neither the ailing part of our body that suffers from an incurable illness is cut off. After all, she, too, is your member because as the Bible says, 'they shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). In the case of a member of our body, we will have no benefit trying to heal it when it becomes incurable by an illness.*

*Nevertheless, even if our wife remains irremediable, there is a promise of a great reward for us in the future, if we instruct and educate her. Even if she does not gain anything from our instruction, we will receive a great reward from God for our forbearance because through deep respect and fear in Him, we have shown so much patience, suffered her wickedness with gentleness and thus kept our member. Because our wives are essential parts of our bodies and we must love them dearly.<sup>250</sup>*

*'Let the woman have nothing more precious than her husband, and the husband nothing more desirable than his wife. The harmony between man and woman is what holds together the life of all of us. It holds the whole world together. Just as when the foundations are shaken, the entire building is destroyed, likewise, when couples are divided, our entire life is overturned. ...*

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250 Ἐγκώμιον εἰς Μάξιμον, κεφ. β'-γ', P.G.51, 227-228.

*... But what if, one might say, my wife, is malicious, profligate and high-spending and has countless other flaws? Bravely suffer all her flaws and do not divorce her because of them, but correct them instead. .. If God sees that you endure the sins of your wife patiently, by being obedient in Him, He will help you in your effort to lead your wife to virtue. He will grant you the reward of patience.*

*After all, as Saint Paul says, ‘for how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (I Corinthians 7:16) Do not tire, says Saint Paul, nor despair, for your wife may be saved. If she remains incorrigible, though, you will not lose the reward for your patience.’<sup>251</sup>*

## 9. THE TRUE MARITAL LOVE

**L**et us see some other views on marriage from the Blessed Chrysostom. ‘When I am discoursing with your husband, advising him to love and cherish you, I allow him not to bring forward the law that is appointed for the woman, but I require of him that which is written for himself.

*And do thou therefore busy yourself with those things only which belong to you, and show yourself tractable to your consort. And accordingly if it be really for God’s sake that you obey your husband, tell me not of the things which ought to be done by him, but for what things you have been made responsible by the lawgiver; those perform with exactness. For this is especially to obey God, not to transgress the law even when suffering things contrary to it.*

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251 *Περί τοῦ μὴ ἀπογοιγνώσκειν...*, κεφ. στ’-ζ’, P.G.51, 369-370.

*And by the same rule, he that being beloved loves, is not reckoned to do any great thing. But he that waits upon a person who hates him, this above all is the man to receive a crown. In the same manner then do thou also reckon that if your husband give you disgust, and thou endure it, you shall receive a glorious crown; but if he be gentle and mild, what will there be for God to reward in you?*

*And these things I say, not bidding the husbands be harsh; but persuading the wives to bear even the harshness in their husbands. Since when each is careful to fulfil his own duty, his neighbour's part also will quickly follow.*

*As when the wife is prepared to bear even with rough behaviour in the husband, and the husband refrains from abusing her in her angry mood; then all is calm and a harbour free from waves. ...*

*Let not then the wife tarry the virtue of the husband and then show her own, for this is nothing great; nor, on the other hand, the husband, for the obedience of the wife and then exercise self-command; for neither would this anymore be his own well-doing; but let each, as I said, furnish his own share first. ...*

*... If she be in the wrong console her and do not aggravate the discomfort. For even if you should lose all, nothing is more grievous than to have a wife without good-will sharing your abode.*

*And whatever offence you can mention, you will tell me of nothing so very painful as being at strife with her. So what if it were only for such reasons as these, let her love be more precious than all things. For if one another's burdens are to be borne (Galatians 6:2), much more our own wife's.*

*Though she be poor do not upbraid her: though she be foolish, do not trample on her, but train her rather: because she is a member of you, and you have become one flesh. 'But she is trifling and drunken and passionate.' You ought then to grieve over these things, not to be angry; and to beseech God, and exhort her and*

*give her advice, and do everything to remove the evil. But if you strike her though dost aggravate the disease: for fierceness is removed by moderation, not by rival fierceness.*

*With these things bear in mind also the reward from God: that when it is permitted for you to cut her off, and you do not so for the fear of God, but bearest with so great defects, fearing the law appointed in such matters which forbids to put away a wife whatsoever disease she might have: you shall receive an unspeakable reward. Yea, and before the reward you shall be a very great gainer, both rendering her more obedient and becoming yourself more gentle thereby.*

*It is said, for instance, that one of the heathen philosophers, who had a bad wife, a trifler and a brawler (Socrates and Xanthippe), when asked 'why, having such an one, he endured her;' made reply, 'That he might have in his house a school and training-place of philosophy. For I shall be to all the rest meeker,' says he, 'being here disciplined every day.'*

*Did you utter a great shout? Why, I at this moment am greatly mourning, when heathens prove better lovers of wisdom than we; we who are commanded to imitate angels, nay rather who are commanded to follow God Himself in respect of gentleness.*

*But to proceed: it is said that for this reason the philosopher having a bad wife, cast her not out; and some say that this very thing was the reason of his marrying her.<sup>252</sup>*

The words of the Blessed Chrysostom about marital fidelity are very important: 'Saint Paul says: 'Let the husband pay the wife the honour due to her: in like manner the wife the husband' (1 Corinthians 7:3). Now what is the meaning of due honour? Did he mean that the husband should maintain the wages of a woman, or something else? I do not ask for such a thing, says the

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252 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κστ', κεφ. στ'-ν', P.G.61, 220-224.

*Blessed Paul, but instead, I mean prudence, marital faith and modesty. The husband's body does not belong to him anymore but to his wife. Thus, let him keep this possession of hers, his body, incorruptible and let him not humiliate or dishonour it.*

*Of course, the fact that this is what Saint Paul means is proven by the following. After he said, 'let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her,' he added, 'the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.' (1 Corinthians 7:4)*

*When therefore you see a harlot tempting you, say 'my body is not mine, but my wife's.' The same also let the woman say. Because in this matter there is great equality.*

*In the case of discretion, modesty, and marital faith, a husband has nothing more than his wife. But he, too, is punished the same, just like her, for having violated the laws of marriage. This is perfectly natural because your wife did not come to you to be dishonoured; she did not leave her father and mother and her whole family to be offended.*

*Let us then not offer our souls to Satan with this sin. Because from adultery indeed come the countless ruined families and the infinite conflicts. Because of infidelity, love is slowly lost, and both desire and interest for the wife weaken. Because it is impossible for the wise and prudent man to disregard and despise his wife, in the same way it is impossible for the lewd and immoral man to love his wife, even if she is the most beautiful. Because from prudence and marital faith arises love, and from love, the infinite gifts. Therefore, look upon other women as if made of stone.*

*Repeat the words mentioned above of Saint Paul every day to yourself. And if you find yourself wishing for another woman, and that your wife seems boring and ugly, because of that, go to*

*your room and, after you open the Gospel and read Saint Paul the Apostle, extinguish the fire entirely by repeating his words.*

*Thus, your wife will be more desirable to you again, since no lust will undermine your desire for her. In this way, not only will your wife be more desirable to you, but you, too, will find that you are more modest and free because there is indeed nothing more abominable than the one who commits adultery after marriage.<sup>253</sup>*

*'If a man love(s) his own wife as he ought to love, even though he be never so much inclined to wantonness, he will not endure to look upon another woman, on account of his affection for her. So from no other source does wanton behaviour arise than from want of love.'<sup>254</sup>*

## 10. THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY

**C**harity is a virtue that springs from love and shows that love is not just a theory that is limited to empty words, but is instead a true virtue and self-sacrifice.

Our Lord extolled the virtue of charity extensively in several parts of His teachings, especially stressing that all acts of charity to our brethren, or the opposite, are just as if it is being done to our Lord Himself: *'you did it to Me'* (Matthew 25:40).

In particular, our Lord praised the charity that is beyond our powers (Luke 21:4), that is, to deprive ourselves of some necessary goods for the sake of our neighbour, preferring their own rest rather than ours.

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253 *Εἰς τό ἀποστολικόν ρητόν ...*, κεφ. δ', P.G.51, 214-215.

254 *Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμιλία λγ', κεφ. στ', P.G.61, 286.

Therefore, no Christian should ever neglect this great virtue. If, of course, he finds it difficult to give charity that is above his ability, let him at the very least, devote part of his existence to those in need throughout his lifetime; whether that is money or other goods.

In other words, the opposite behaviour which is accumulating wealth without caring about the needs of our fellow humans or give little in comparison to what we can offer, has often been decried by our Lord in His teachings while on earth.

Several volumes would be necessary to explain the value and rewards of this virtue. In this study, we will limit ourselves to a few brief references to successive homilies of the Blessed Chrysostom.

*‘Let us put charity into great practice because this is the queen of virtues. Charity will support us with courage on the Day of Judgement and will deliver us from hell and punishment, and no one will resist the one who enters paradise with her.’<sup>255</sup>*

*‘Although virginity, fasting and strict discipline require more effort than charity; none of them, however, is strong and powerful enough to extinguish the fire of our sins as this one. Charity is superior to all, and she brings her lovers close to the King of Heaven Himself.’<sup>256</sup>*

*‘Do not think that charity is an expense, but an income instead. It is not an expense but a profitable trade since you receive more than you give. You give bread, and you receive eternal life. You give clothes, and you receive an imperishable garment. You host people in your house, and in return, you receive the King-*

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255 *Eis τό “μή φοβοῦ ὅταν πλουτήσῃ ἄνθρωπος”... , ὁμιλία β΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.55, 518.*

256 *Υπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Τίτον Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία στ΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.62, 698.*



*dom of Heaven. You offer material goods that perish, and you receive other gifts that remain eternal.<sup>257</sup>*

*'Christ does not only keep with precision what you give to Him through charity, but He also returns it, and greatly increased. Thus, let us not think that our wealth decreases when we give alms because it does not decrease but increases instead; it is not spent, but it is superfluous instead.*

*What happens is a kind of trade and sowing. Even better, it is more profitable and safe than both. Because the movement of goods is exposed to the winds and the sea waves and the danger of shipwreck, while sowing is exposed to droughts, floods and other weather changes.*

*On the contrary, the money we put into Christ's hands is free from any harm. No one can seize it from the hand of the One who received it, but it remains and ensures plenty and indescribable fruit.<sup>258</sup>*

*'Let us use the abundance of money for the benefit of our souls, and let us spend what is left over for those in need. But tell me, why do you let silver and gold be destroyed by the moth when you should empty it in the belly of the poor, and In this way, by depositing them in a safe fund, you will be able to enjoy its help at the right time, when you will need its support? On the day of judgement, the ones you feed will open to you the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven and receive you in their eternal dwellings.*

*We should not even allow our clothes to be destroyed by the moth and to rot unnecessarily in the boxes when there are so many people that need them and who are naked.*

*Let us, therefore, prefer the naked Christ to the moth, and to clothe the One Who walked naked for us and our salvation, so that after we are honoured to clothe our Lord, in the Day of*

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257 *Περί Όμοουσίου*, λόγος η', κεφ. β', P.G.48, 770.

258 *Eis τό χήρα καταλεγέθω*, κεφ. στ', P.G.51, 337-338.

*Judgement, He may say to us: 'I was naked, and you clothed Me'<sup>259</sup>(Matthew 25:36).*

*'Let us do everything so that we are not poor in our heavenly homeland. For what is the benefit of leaving a lot of wealth in a foreign land, and not have the essential in our homeland? So let us fight, please, while there is still time, and let us move our wealth from the foreign land to the heavenly homeland. For although the distance is great, transport is easy. The carriers, the poor, are ready and safely marching to that place to deposit in a secure treasury, what we will already be able to send through them. For the hand of the poor deposit in the heavenly treasures what we give them.*

*When, then, convenience and security are so great, why do we hesitate and are reluctant to make that transfer so quickly and to find our wealth where we will mainly need it?'<sup>260</sup>*

*'The size of the charity is not judged by the amount of money but instead, the willingness of those who give. That is why the one who only gave a glass of cold water was accepted (Matthew 10:42), as was the widow who put two mites in the temple's treasury (Luke 21: 2-4); for us to learn that the Lord of the universe always asks for goodwill.*

*It is often possible then, for someone to only have a little and to show great generosity in charity when they have great zeal. On the contrary, it is also possible for someone to have plenty but to appear to have less than the poor, because of his petty disposition.*

*I implore you then, let us disperse with generous disposition the gifts that the Lord has bestowed us, to those in need. Thus, let us give back to Him, again, what He has given to us so that they become ours again, and far more increased indeed.*

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259 *Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία λε΄, κεφ. η΄, P.G.53, 331-332.*

260 *Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία μη΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.54, 436.*

*Let us give alms to the poor, then, as if putting them precisely in the hand of God. And let us know that God's hand, not only will repay us what we have given to Him, but He will also multiply it.<sup>261</sup>*

*'Why did God say that 'he who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord' (Proverbs 19:17)? Because He knows, as I have said before, that our greed wants increasingly more and that under no circumstances does anyone with money want to lend without guarantee. For the one who lends requires either a mortgage, or a pawn, or a guarantor.*

*Therefore, God knows that no one lends, unless these requirements are met, nor does he engage in charity but only aims for profit instead. He also knows that a poor person has none of the above, having no mortgage since he has nothing of his own, and no pawns to show because he is naked, and no guarantor to present since no one will believe him because of his poverty.*

*Since God saw that the poor man is at risk because of his poverty, and the one with money because of his ruthlessness, He placed Himself among them as a guarantor for the poor person, and as a pawn for the lender. Do you not have confidence in him, He says, because he is poor? Believe Me, that I am rich.<sup>262</sup>*

*'Let us set to work all the different kinds of almsgiving. Can you do alms by money? Do not hesitate. Can you protect someone? Do not say, since I have no money, this is nothing because this too is a crucial point: look upon it as if you had given gold.*

*Can you assist through therapy? Do this also. For instance, if you are a physician, practice your skill and treat the ill: for this also is a great matter.*

*Can you provide counsel? This (service) is much greater than all, or rather, the greatest alm because it brings the most gain.*

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261 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία νε', κεφ. δ', P.G.54, 484.

262 Περὶ Μετανοίας, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ. ζ', P.G.49, 333.

*For in so doing you redeem not starvation, but a grievous death of one's soul.<sup>263</sup>*

Finally, let us see the corresponding views of Saint Dorotheos regarding almsgiving. *'So then, we should give alms in this way, because it is a noble thing to do, having compassion on each other as if looking after our own dealings and so treating each other as we are treated by Him, giving to others as we receive.*

*No one can say, 'I am poor and so I have no money for alms-giving.' Because even if you cannot provide like the rich, who give their gifts into the temple treasury, you can give two pennies as the poor widow did, and from you God will suppose it to be a greater gift than all the gifts of the rich.*

*Should you not have as much as two pennies, you still have the ability to give alms. You can have mercy on the ill and do charity by serving them. And if you cannot do even this, you can comfort your brother with your words. Show your pity for him in your speech, and take care of the one who said, 'A good word is better than the finest gifts (Wisdom of Sirach 18:16).*

*Suppose you are unable to help him with words, you can still do so, even when he is upset with you, by taking pity on him and bearing him in the time of his anger seeing that he is being dealt with shamelessly by the common foe and rather than making a harsh commend and adding to his anger keep quiet and have mercy on him and his soul, thus pulling him away from the foe.*

*Even if he troubles you, you can be merciful to him and forgive his insult toward you, so that you might receive forgiveness from God. Because it says, 'Forgive and it will be forgiven of you' (Matthew 6:14). And you will be found to have mercy on your brother's soul by excusing his insult against you. God gave us a*

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263 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὰς Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, ὁμιλία κε', κεφ. δ', P.G.60, 196.

*gift, if we want to use it, of being able to forgive each other's sins which they commit against us.*

*So, if we don't have the means of helping their bodies, we may help their souls. And what act of mercy is as great as having mercy on a soul? Since the soul is more dignified than the body, doing a charitable deed for the soul is better than charity of the body.*

*So you see no one is able to say he does not have the authority to do charitable deeds. Everyone through his ability and the state of his soul has the ability to be merciful.<sup>264</sup>*



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264 *Διδασκαλία* ιδ', κεφ. στ', P.G.88, 1785B-1788A.





## PART FIVE

# TO LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

## 1. THE MOST WONDROUS TEACHING

**S**o far, we have seen that the first step towards the virtue of love, is to love our neighbour as ourselves and to treat them in the same way we would want to be treated.

We then emphasized in the New Testament, the commandment of love that our Lord gave us, is superior to the form mentioned above since it differs in two essential points: First, in the magnitude of love, and second in the meaning of 'neighbour'.

A true Christian then ought to love his neighbour, not just as himself, but instead, even more than himself. He ought to love his neighbour just as Christ loved all of us, by sacrificing Himself for us. Consequently, he must be ready to sacrifice his wishes for the sake of his partner every day, preferring the convenience and happiness of his neighbour rather than his own.

Nevertheless, the perfect form of love that Christ has now taught us differs in an additional point; that is the meaning of

'neighbour'. The people that we ought to love are not just our friends, familiar people, and relatives but also our enemies.

Indeed, Christ emphasizes in His commandments that whoever wants to acquire the virtue of love must also love, pray, and even be charitable towards his enemies. At the same time, he must have no malice, which means that he should forgive those who are unkind and hostile to him. Consequently, doing everything possible to reconcile with them.

Many consider even the first step of love unattainable as loving our neighbour as ourselves in inconceivable.

Many more, regard it utterly impossible that we must sacrifice ourselves for our fellow humans and that we should prefer the interest and happiness of our neighbour, rather than our personal interest and happiness.

However, almost everyone considers the commandment of love and forgiveness of our enemies, which our Lord gave us, though, almost as a utopia. Nowadays, nearly no one believes that all these can be accomplished, and in this way, they negligently override the specific commandments that are at the heart of the teachings of Jesus.

Love for our enemies, though, is the most wonderful thing that our faith has to show. It is the most beautiful evangelism and moral teaching that humanity has ever heard. It is so wrong to reject something that our Lord, not only taught with His words but mainly, by His example, so easily.

We should not forget either, that Christ was sacrificed and crucified for us: we who had defected and become enemies of our Benefactor. Or that He was sacrificed for all men, even for those who crucified Him. Or that even on the Cross, He forgave those who crucified Him, saying '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*' (Luke 23:34).



It is also worth saying that, if the specific commandment was impossible to apply, our Lord would neither have given it to people nor promise such awards upon its achievement.

But let us take a look at the distinguished words with which Jesus commands us to love our enemies.

*'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*

*For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.*

*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more have than others? Do not even the publicans so?*

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'* (Matthew 5: 44-48).

Let us also look at the reasons why Jesus commands us to forgive our enemies. As we all know, the commandment of forgiveness lies within the most essential prayer, our Lord's Prayer, since our Lord taught us to say the following at the time of our prayer: *'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors'* (Matthew 6:12). We ask Jesus to forgive our sins, then, since we also do something similar for our fellow humans.

Then, our Lord becomes even more emphatic. *'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses'* (Matthew 6:14-15).

Before proceeding to analyse the above commandments, concentrating the essential views of this highest moral teaching of our faith, we should say that a true Christian ought to treat all those that are hostile against him with a lot of love and without malice, because of the following fundamental reasons:

First, this virtue makes us as similar, as possible for us humans, with God. It leads us to the attainment of the essential purpose in the life of every human being, which is no other than the 'in likeness', *Theosis*, divinity and perfection.

Second, love, lack of malice, and forgiveness towards those who are hostile towards us results in the forgiveness of our own sins

Third, the greater the hatred of our fellow humans against us, the more rewards we receive from our Lord. And the more we treat them with love and forgiveness, the more of our sins are forgiven.

Fourth, we have to regard our enemies as weak people, who have been carried away and have succumbed to their weaknesses or the devil. Consequently, because they are weak, we must do everything to help them with our love, our good behaviour, forgiveness, patience and, of course, with our warm prayers.

Fifth, our enemies must be regarded as the real benefactors. Not only because they give us reason to practice forbearance and forgiveness, as we have said, and in this way to receive abundant crowns and the forgiveness of our sins from God, but also, because with this cruel treatment they point out our mistakes. Unfortunately, this is something that the ones who love us do not do.

We should also note that love and forgiveness towards our enemies can often be applied even to our relatives because one can face hostile and inappropriate behaviour even from brothers, cousins, uncles, children, or parents.

It should also be emphasised that the Gospel does not prevent us from defending ourselves against the hostile behaviour of our fellow humans, from guarding ourselves against their treachery, from defending ourselves against their betrayal and asserting our rights.

The Gospel, though, prohibits us from not having love towards and harbouring good feelings for our enemies. Instead, it urges us to forgive, to do everything possible to reconcile with them, to win them over with our good behaviour, to sympathize at their spiritual weakness, to pray for them, to give them aid, and never slander them.

## 2. THE LIKENESS WITH GOD

**T**he virtue of love for our enemies, then, enables us to become as similar as humanly possible to our God and Father, and to attain the main purpose of our lives, which is holiness and perfection.

Let us look at the Blessed Chrysostom's views, which are given in successive homilies, regarding the outstanding award; this enormous prize that those who strive to achieve the virtue of love for their enemies become worthy to receive.

The Blessed Chrysostom says that our Lord promised us our likeness with Him as a reward, but only when He spoke of the virtue of love for our enemies<sup>265</sup>: *'For there is nothing that brings us so near to God, and makes us so like Him, as this well-doing.'*<sup>266</sup> In other words, the virtue of love for our enemies is the one that helps us, more than any other virtue, to achieve the purpose of our lives; the *'In His likeness,'* holiness, and perfection. Thus, the Saint says:

*'What sort of excuse can we offer of whom more is required-not simply commanded to abstain from that, but even obliged to love our enemies and be kind to them? And why do I say 'be*

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265 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ. δ', P.G.57, 269.

266 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ιθ', κεφ. η', P.G.60, 594.

kind'? Also to pray for them, and beseech the Lord and implore His providence on their behalf.

After all, this will be our recommendation on that fearful day and our best insurance against our sins if we are disposed in this way towards our enemies.

I mean, even if the commandment is exceedingly rigorous, provided you keep in mind the prize laid up for those who do right, it will seem nothing at all, even though it is in fact very rigorous.

Why is that? Scripture says: 'if you do this, you will be like My Father in heaven.' To make the point clearer to us, it added: 'Because He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good'; that is, it is saying, you are imitating God as far as humans can.

I mean, just as He makes the sun rise not only on the just but also on those who do evil, and provides rain and seasonal storms not only to the good but also to the evil; you also should love not only those who love you but also those badly disposed to you, for only then are you imitating your Lord as far as you can.

Do you see how He has elevated to the highest pinnacle the person capable of achieving this virtue? Don't, however, think only of the difficulty of the matter, dearly beloved, but consider first of all in your heart the great dignity you would stand to gain; and let the opportunity for dignity make light for you what is heavy and burdensome.

Should you not, after all, recognize the grace given you in finding an opportunity through your kindness to your enemy of having opened for you the doors to a confident approach to God and of making atonement for your sins?<sup>267</sup>

'Love therefore your enemy: for you are doing good not to him, but to yourself. How? You are becoming like God. He, if he be beloved of you, has not great gain, for he is beloved by a fellow-slave; but thou, if you love your fellow-slave, hast gained

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267 *Eis τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία δ', κεφ. ζ', P.G.53, 46.*

*much, for you are becoming like God. Do you see that you are doing a kindness not to him but to yourself? For He appoints the prize not for him, but for you.*

*What then if he be evil (you say)? So much the greater is the reward. Even for his wickedness, you ought to feel grateful to him: even should he be evil, your reward would not have been exceedingly increased.*

*So that the reason you assign, for not loving him, the saying that he is evil, is the very reason for loving him. Take away the contestant, and you take away the opportunity for the crowns.*

*Do you see not the athletes, how they exercise when they have filled the bags with sand? But there is no need for you to practice this. Life is full of things that exercise you and make you strong. Do you see not the trees too, the more they are shaken by the winds, so much the more do they become stronger and firmer?<sup>268</sup>*

*‘Consider, dearly beloved, how important this virtuous behaviour is by judging from the rewards promised by the God of all things to those who practice it. Do you see whom that person resembles- as far as humanly possible- who not only takes no vengeance on those who harm him, but even shows zeal in praying for them?’*

*Accordingly, let us not deprive ourselves through indifference of such gifts and rewards surpassing all description, but rather evince enthusiasm for this kind of virtue by every means and, by disciplining our thinking, respond to God’s command.<sup>269</sup>*

*‘Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you. That ye may become like your Father which is in Heaven.’ For He too, so far from hating,’ so He speaks, ‘even pours benefits on those that insult Him.’ Yet surely in no respect is the case*

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268 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ιθ΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.63, 142.*

269 *Eis τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία κζ΄, κεφ. ν΄, P.G.53, 250-251.*

*parallel, not only of the surpassing nature of His benefits, but also by reason of the excellence of His dignity.*

*For thou indeed art despised by our fellow-slave, but He by His slave, who has also received ten thousand benefits from Him: and thou indeed givest words, in praying for him, but He, deeds, very great and marvellous, kindling the sun, and giving the annual showers. 'Nevertheless, even so I grant you to be mine equal, in such wise as it is possible for a man to be.'*

*Hate not the man that does you wrong, who is procuring you such good things, and bringing you to such great honour. Curse not him that uses you spitefully, for so have you undergone the labour, but art deprived of the fruit; you will bear the loss, but lose the reward; which is of the utmost folly, having borne the more grievous, not to bear what is less than it.*

*'But how,' says one, 'it is possible for this to take place?' Having seen God become man, descend so far and suffer so much for your sake, why do you still inquire and doubt? How is it possible to forgive your fellow-servants their injuriousness?*

*But have you been greatly wronged? Nay, what have you endured like your Lord, bound, beaten with whips, with rods, spit upon by servants, enduring death, and that death, which is of all deaths the most shameful, after ten thousand favours shown?*

*And even if you have been greatly wronged, for this very cause most of all do thou good to him, that you may both make your own crown more glorious, and set your brother free from the worst infirmity.<sup>270</sup>*

*'But see, even now, it is said, we love one another. For one man has two friends, and another three. But this is not to love for God's sake, but for the sake of being beloved. But to love for God's sake has not this as its principle of love; but such as one*

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270 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ. δ', P.G.57, 269-270.

*will be disposed towards all men as towards brethren. Herein we shall be like God if we love men, even our enemies; not, if we work miracles.*

*For we regard even God with admiration when He works wonders, yet much more, when He shows love towards man, when He is long-suffering.*

*If then even in God this is worthy of much admiration, much more in men is it evident that this renders us admirable.*

*This then let us zealously seek after: and we shall be no way inferior to Paul and Peter and those who have raised innumerable dead, though we may not be able to drive away a fever.*

*But without this [love]; though we should work greater miracles even than the Apostles themselves, though we should expose ourselves to innumerable dangers for the faith: there will be to us no profit from any.*

*...no one is more venerable and glorious than those who raise the dead; with reason. For that indeed is wholly of God's grace, but this, of your own earnestness also.*

*This is of one who is a Christian indeed; this shows the disciple of Christ, the crucified, the man that has nothing common with earth. Without this, not even martyrdom can profit.<sup>271</sup> 'For love, even without martyrdom, makes us disciples of Christ, while this cannot be done from martyrdom without love.'<sup>272</sup>*



271 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία γ', κεφ. στ', P.G.63, 36.*

272 *Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν ἅγιον μάρτυρα Ῥωμανόν, κεφ. α', P.G.50, 608.*

### 3. WE ARE THE JUDGES OF OURSELVES

**A**s a necessary prerequisite for the forgiveness of our sins, we saw that our Lord has set the forgiveness of our fellow humans. This means that the forgiveness of our sins will depend on our attitude towards our fellow man. Our Lord's commandments are crystal clear and cannot be misinterpreted.

Indeed, in the Lord's Prayer, our Lord taught us to say, 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6:12). Then, He teaches us with emphasis that *'if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses'* (Matthew 6: 14-15).

But let us also see Saint John Chrysostom's interpretation, in successive homilies, regarding the above commandments of our Lord on the forgiveness of our enemies.

*'When we come into church let us come in a way fitting for God, not bearing grudges in our heart, lest praying we pray against ourselves when we say: 'Forgive us, as we forgive those who are in debt to us' (Matthew 6:12).*

*It is a fearful utterance; one might say that people are crying out to God when they say: 'I have forgiven, Master, forgive me; I have released someone, release me; I have been merciful, be merciful to me.*

*If I have been overbearing with somebody, then be overbearing with me. If I have been not forgiving my neighbours their sins,*



*then don't forgive mine. Whatever measure I have given to others, let it be given to me.<sup>273</sup>*

*'He makes mention of no other commandment than this, saying thus: 'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' (Matthew 6:14). So that the beginning is ours, and we ourselves have control over the judgement that is to be passed upon us. On you, who art to give account, He causes the sentence to depend.*

*'In whatever way you have judged for yourself, in the same,' says He, 'do I judge you.' And if you forgive your fellow servant, you shall obtain the same favour from me; though indeed the one be not equal to the other. For you forgive in your need, but God, having need of none: thou, your fellow slave; God His slave: though liable to unnumbered charges; God, being without sin.*

*But yet even thus does He show forth His loving kindness towards man. Since He might indeed, even without this, forgive you all your offences; but He wills you hereby also to receive a benefit; affording you on all sides innumerable occasions of gentleness and love to man, casting out what is brutish in you, and quenching wrath and in all ways cementing you to him who is your own member.<sup>274</sup>*

*'But if we consider that by so doing we do a kindness not to him who has grieved us but to ourselves, we shall soon let go the venom of our wrath. When therefore we forgive not others, we forgive not ourselves. And so let us not merely say to God, 'remember not our offences'; but let each also say to himself, 'let us not remember the offences of our fellow-servants done against us.' For you first give judgement on your own sins, and*

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273 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία γ', κεφ. στ', P.G.63, 36.*

274 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιθ', κεφ. στ', P.G.57, 281.*

*God judges after; you propose the law concerning remission and punishment, you declare your decision on these matters, and therefore whether God shall or shall not remember, rests with you.*

*And if any good thing has been done to us by him that has grieved us, let us only reckon that; but if anything grievous and hard to bear, let us cast it forth and blot it out, so that not even a vestige of it remain. And if no good has been done us by him, so much the greater recompense and higher credit will be ours if we forgive.*

*Others by watching, by making the earth their bed, by ten thousand hardships, wipe away their sins, but thou by an easier way, I mean by not remembering wrongs, may cause all your trespasses to disappear. Why then do you thrust the sword against yourself, as do mad and frantic men, and banishest yourself from the life which is to come, when you ought to use every means to attain unto it'<sup>275</sup>?*

*'So let us not think when we do this that it is to someone else we are doing a good turn or bestowing a great favour on them. It is we ourselves, after all, who reap the benefit of our good deed, and accord great gain to ourselves from the action, just as, if we fail to do it, we likewise do not manage to wrong them but lay up for ourselves the unspeakable torment of hell fire.*

*Consequently, I beseech you, let us keep this in mind and no longer bear to hold a grudge against those who have done us an injury or otherwise wronged us in some way, nor be badly disposed towards them; instead, let us consider of how much kindness and confidence they provide to us from the Lord and before all else the fact that reconciliation with those who injure us turns out to be a discharge of our sins.*

*Thus let us show all enthusiasm and effort, and out of consideration of the gain accruing from this, let us display as much*

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275 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία λθ', κεφ. ε', P.G.59, 227.

*care of those who injure us as if they were really our benefactors. In other words, if we look at things in the cold light of reason, those kindly disposed towards us and those anxious to serve our every need will not succeed in benefiting us service as those others, which will render us deserving of favour from above and will lighten the load of our sins.<sup>276</sup>*

At this point, it is also worth mentioning the Blessed Chrysostom's wise interpretation of the following phrase of Christ: *'For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged'* (Matthew 7:2).

*'It is not the other,' says Christ, 'that you condemn, but yourself, and you are making the judgment-seat to yourself, and the account strict.'*

*As then in the forgiveness of our sins the beginnings are from us, so also in this judgment, it is by ourselves that the measures of our condemnation are laid down.<sup>277</sup>*

Thus, Saint John Chrysostom means that not only God will not forgive our sins on the Day of Judgement if we do not forgive our neighbour, but also, that He will judge us with strictness if we, too, are strict judges of our fellow human beings.

On the contrary, if we forgive our brothers and we judge their mistakes with mercy, then God will also forgive and judge us mercifully on Judgement Day; in this terrible court.

At different times, Saint John Chrysostom says the following. *'If then we have so many things to answer for, we ought with all alacrity to forgive those who injure us, who defraud us, and not to bear malice. For there is a way to the forgiveness of our sins that need no labour, nor expense of wealth, nor anything else, but merely our own choice. We have no need to set out upon our*

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276 *Eis τὴν Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία κζ', P.G.53, 250.

277 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἄγιον Ματθαῖον*, ὁμιλία κγ', κεφ. α', P.G.57, 309.

*travels, nor go beyond the boundaries of our country, nor submit to dangers and toils, but only to will.*

*What excuse, tell me, shall we have in things that appear difficult, when we do not do even a light thing, attended too with so much gain and so much benefit, and no trouble? Can you not despise wealth? Can you not spend your substance on the needy? Can you not will anything that is good? Can you not forgive him that has injured you?*

*For if you had not so many things to answer for, and God had only commanded you to forgive, ought you not to do it? But now having so many things to answer for, do you not forgive?*

*Hath someone grieved you, and insulted you, and mocked you? But consider, how often you have done such things to others, and even to the Lord Himself; and forbear, and forgive him it. Consider that you say, 'forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6:13).*

*Consider, that if you dost not forgive, you will not be able to say this with confidence: but if you forgive, you demand the matter as a debt, not by reason of the nature of the thing, but on account of the loving kindness of Him that has granted it.*

*And wherein is it equal, that one who forgives his fellow-servants should receive remission of the sins committed against the Lord? But nevertheless we do receive such great loving-kindness, because He is rich in mercy and pity.*

*And that I may show that even without these things, and without the remission, you are a gainer by forgiving, consider how many friends such a person has, how the praises of such an one are everywhere sounded by men who go about saying, 'This is a good man, he is easily reconciled, he knows not to bear malice, he is no sooner stricken than he is healed.'*

*When one falls into any misfortune, who will not pity him? When he has offended, who will not pardon him? When he asks a favour of others, who will not grant it to him? Who will not*

*be willing to be the friend and servant of so good a soul? Yea, I entreat you, let us do all things for Him, not to our friends, not to our relations only, but even to our domestics.*<sup>278</sup>

Finally, the Blessed Chrysostom interprets the words of Christ to Saint Paul the Apostle, that we ought to always forgive our fellow humans not only occasionally, and goes on to say the following:

*'Do not think, dear beloved, that this commandment is difficult. Because, if you forgive the one who sinned once, twice and thrice a day, even if he who saddened you is as hard as a stone or more savage than the demons, he will not be so unfeeling as to fall back on the same sins. Instead, by the so many times you will forgive him, he will come to his senses, and he will behave in a better manner, and with kindness.*

*On the other hand, since you, too, will be prepared to despise so many times the sins committed against you, having practised first, second and third forgiveness, such virtue will not challenge you, since your brother's sins will not hurt you after such frequent forgiveness.*<sup>279</sup>




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278 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλήμονα Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ. β΄-γ΄, P.G.62, 706-708.*

279 *Eis τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ τὰ μύρια τάλαντα..., κεφ. γ΄, P.G.51, 21.*

#### 4. ON GENEROUSLY FORGIVING

**L**et us now look at the Blessed Chrysostom's impressive interpretation of the commandment of forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer. The Blessed Father does not merely interpret the '*forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors*' (Matthew 6:12) as 'Forgive us our debts since we, too, forgive the sins of our neighbour'. Instead, he interprets it in the following, truly sagely manner: 'Forgive us as many debts as we have forgiven of our neighbour'.

In that sense, we should not be overcome with pettiness and sadness, but instead, we should feel happy when our brother or sister does not treat us well or when they wrong us. Indeed, the more wrongs we endure, the more we should rejoice. Because the more injustices we endure, the more injustices we will have the opportunity to forgive, and therefore, the greater the forgiveness of sins we will receive from God. In other words, the more someone hates and hurts us, the more he benefits us.

Let us see then the crystal clear advice which the Blessed Chrysostom gives to the truly brave and patient souls, in various sermons.

*'For this reason we are commanded to say, 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6:12). What can be more mild, what more merciful, than this precept! He has made you a judge of the pardon of your own offences!'*

*If you forgive few things, He forgives you few! If you forgive many things, He forgives you many! If you pardon from the heart, and sincerely, God in like manner also pardons you! If besides pardoning him you account him a friend, God will also thus deal with you.*

*The more he has sinned, so much the more is it necessary that we should hasten to a reconciliation; since it becomes a cause of greater offences being forgiven us.<sup>280</sup>*

*'Let us not reproach our enemies or harm them but instead, let us benefit them as much as we can because in this way we do more good to ourselves than to them. After all, our Lord has said that 'if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' (Matthew 6:14). Forgive them the sins of the other servants to receive forgiveness of your sins from our heavenly Father.*

*If in fact, someone has wronged you a lot, do know that the more you forgive sins, the more you will receive forgiveness from the Lord. This is why in our Lord's Prayer, we were taught to say, 'Forgive us, as we forgive'; to learn that the measure of the forgiveness of our sins mainly depends on us. Consequently, the greater the evils your enemy causes to you, the more he benefits you.<sup>281</sup>*

*'He who overlooks the sins of his brother diminishes the responsibility for his own sins in the future Judgement. The greater the forgiveness of sins then, the greater the forgiveness that we will be worthy of as well. The difference, of course, lies not only in the magnitude of the forgiveness but also, in the fact that, while we are charitable towards a servant, we receive charity from our Lord Christ.*

*Do not tell me then that one sinned in one or another way against you. Because the more terrible the mistakes, the more necessary will it be for you to forgive him because you will secure for yourself a much more benevolent treatment from God in the future Judgement.<sup>282</sup>*

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280 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία κ', κεφ. στ', P.G.49, 206.*

281 *Πρὸς τοὺς μὴ ἀπαντήσαντας, κεφ. ζ', P.G.51, 185.*

282 *Ἐπιστολή ριζ', P.G.52, 672-673.*

*'God does not want us to be vengeful against those who wrong us, but with the forgiveness that we will offer them, we will offer forgiveness to ourselves, and we will determine the measure of divine charity to ourselves. Because we seek to receive as much as we offer to our fellow humans, and we become worthy of receiving as much forgiveness as we give to our debtors.'*<sup>283</sup>

## 5. THE REMISSION OF THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS

**O**f particular importance is what the Blessed Chrysostom mentions in his interpretation of the Parable of the Talents. In this parable, Christ says that a king forgave one of his servants a great debt (ten thousand talents) because the latter could not repay it. But then, this slave was ruthless to one of his brothers, who owed him a small and insignificant debt. As soon as the king found out that the servant did not forgive the little debt of his brother, even though he had forgiven this great debt of the ten thousand talents, he was angered. He then punished this servant quite harshly by demanding the payment of the debt of the ten thousand talents in full.

At the end of the parable, Christ emphasised that *'So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one [of] his brother[s] their trespasses'* (Matthew 18:35). Obviously, *'if ye forgive not men their trespasses (a small debt towards you), neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (the great debt towards Him)'* (Matthew 6:15).

The Blessed Chrysostom stresses that the denial of forgiveness towards our brother, that is, resentment, was the reason for the withdrawal of the forgiveness of this great debt. He goes on to

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<sup>283</sup> *Περί τοῦ κατὰ Θεόν πολιτεύεσθαι*, κεφ. ε', P.G.51, 47.



say that *'resentment is worse than any other sin. Because all the remaining sins were forgiven, while this sin, not only was unable to obtain forgiveness but instead, it brought back the remaining ones that had been forgiven once and for all.*

*Resentment is double an evil then because it cannot be justified in front of God and also because even if the rest of our sins are forgiven, He restores and turns them against us. In this case, too, this is what resentment caused. Because there is nothing that God hates and detests more, as much as the man who is resentful and who holds grudge and enmity...*

*... Knowing all this very well, and after we engrave in our hearts this parable, when we think of what our fellow humans have done to us, let us first consider what we too have done to our Lord.*

*Thus, with the fear of our sins, we will be able to dispel our anger towards other people's offences. Because if we have to remember any sins, these should only be ours. If we remember our sins, then, we will never think of other people's sins, while if we forget our sins, other people's sins will easily come to our thoughts...*

*...Therefore, with this parable, Christ revealed that resentment is worse than any other sin. Because if resentment was not worse than the countless sins, or else a thousand talents, God would not have for this reason withdrawn the forgiveness of the sins of those who had been forgiven.*

*Let us then strive for nothing else so much, as to be free of wrath against our neighbour and to reconcile ourselves with the ones that are unhappy with us. For neither prayer or almsgiving or fasting or receiving the Holy Communion or anything similar will help us on the Day of Judgement if we are resentful and we do not forgive our neighbour<sup>284</sup>.*

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284 *Εἰς τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ τᾶ μύρια τάλαντα...*, κεφ. ζ', P.G.51, 29-30.

Therefore, from the above words of our Lord, and from the interpretation of the sacred Chrysostom, we learn a vital thing: our sins, this enormous debt to God, will not be forgiven if we do not forgive the sins of our brethren, that is, their small debt to us.

As the Blessed Chrysostom said, if we are resentful and do not forgive our brothers, this sin is so severe that it can even render unforgivable the sins for which we have already repented. Saint John Chrysostom says that resentment *'restores the other sins that were forgiven once and for all... Our remaining sins, even if they are forgiven, are restored and turned against us... Because of our resentfulness, God withdraws the forgiveness of those sins that had already been forgiven'*<sup>285</sup>.

In the light of the above parable, as well as other passages of the Bible, Saint John Chrysostom reaches the following fundamental and admirable conclusion:

*'God forgives much more easily the sins with which we offend Him than the sins with which we offend our fellow humans'*<sup>286</sup>. *'God often forgives the sins with which we offend Him, while He punishes with great severity the sins with which we offend our fellow men'*<sup>287</sup>

The above happens because *'God cares a lot about our own repose'*<sup>288</sup> and for this reason, *'He often sets aside His demands and instead, He seeks our benefit'*<sup>289</sup>, *'preferring and favouring our matters than His'*<sup>290</sup>.

285 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ.

286 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ. P.G.51, 28.

287 *Eis tήn Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία κστ', κεφ. β', P.G.53, 231.

288 *ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμιλία ιθ', κεφ. β', P.G.61, 154.

289 *ὑπόμνημα εἰς τήν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολήν*, ὁμιλία λ', P.G.61, 609

290 *Eis tήν παραβολήν τοῦ τὰ μύρια τάλαντα...*, κεφ. ζ', P.G.51, 28.

## 6. RECONCILIATION WITH OUR ENEMIES

**I**t is not enough for a proper Christian to only forgive his enemy, but he must also try to find reconciliation with him by dissolving every form of hatred. But let us see what Saint John Chrysostom teaches us in some of his beautiful sermons on the subject of reconciliation with our enemies and also, with our friends that treat us in a hostile manner.

*For what is easier, I ask, than to get rid of resentment against the injurer? Is there any long journey to be undertaken? Is there any expenditure of money? Is the aid of others to be invoked? It suffices only to resolve, and the good deed at once reaches the goal.*

*What punishment, then, must we not deserve, if on account of worldly affairs we stoop to slavish occupations... and do and say all manner of things, so that we may perfectly attain the end we have in view; and yet cannot endure, for the sake of God's laws, to entreat a brother who has injured us, but consider it a disgrace to be the first to make advances.*

*Tell me, are you ashamed when you run to be the first to get the prize? Rather, on the contrary, you ought to be ashamed of persisting in this passion; and waiting until the person who has committed the injury comes to you to be reconciled; for this is a disgrace, and a reproach, and the greatest loss. For he who comes in first, is the one who reaps all the fruit.*

*And when at the entreaty of another you lay aside your anger, the good work is to be accounted his; for you have discharged the law as doing a favour to him, not as obeying God.*

*But if, when no one entreats, when not even the man who has done the injury approaches, or solicits you, you yourself*

*dismissing from your thoughts all shame, and all delay, run forward freely to the injurer, and quell anger entirely, the good deed becomes wholly your own, and you shall receive all the reward.*

*If I say, 'Practise fasting,' your plea, perchance, is bodily weakness. If I say, 'Give to the poor,' it is poverty, and bringing up children. If I say, 'Make time for the assembl[y] of the Church,' it is worldly cares...*

*...But suppose I say, 'Dismiss your anger,' which of these will you allege? For neither infirmity of body, nor poverty, nor lack of culture, nor want of leisure, nor any other thing of that kind have you to advance; but this sin is above all other the most inexcusable.*

*How will you be able to stretch your hands toward heaven, or move your tongue, or ask for pardon? For although God be desirous to pardon your sins, you yourself dost not suffer Him, while you retain that of your fellow-servant!*

*But suppose that he is cruel, fierce, savage, and greedy of revenge and retaliation? Why, it is especially for this reason you ought to grant forgiveness. Have you been wronged much, and robbed, and slandered, and injured in matters of the first importance; and do you wish to see your enemy punished?*

*Yet even for this, it will be of use to you to pardon him. For suppose that you yourself take vengeance, and prosecutest it, either by words, by deeds, or imprecation against the adversary; then God will not afterwards prosecute it too, inasmuch as you have taken your revenge; and not only will He not prosecute the matter for you, but will also demand a penalty of you as a despiser of Himself...*

*For there are many, who when I reproach them because after being told to reconcile with their enemies are not persuaded to do it, think it fit to offer this apology, which is nothing less than a cloak for their iniquity.*

*'I am unwilling,' says one, 'to be reconciled, lest I should make the man worse, more ill-tempered, and more disposed to treat me contemptuously hereafter.' Besides this, they also make this plea: 'Many people,' they say, 'think it is weakness in me to be the first to seek reconciliation, and to entreat my enemy.'*

*All these things are foolish; for [God's] Eye that slumbers not, has seen your good intention; wherefore, it behooves you to make no account of the opinion of your fellow-servants, when you have gained the opinion of the Judge, Who is about to try your cause.*

*But if your concern be, lest your enemy become worse by your clemency learn this: that is not the manner in which he is made worse; but rather if you remain unreconciled. For although he were the vilest of men; although he might neither confess nor publish it openly; he will silently approve of your Christian wisdom, and his own conscience will respect your gentleness...*

*....What do you say? Tell me. Do you believe he is worse because of your attention? This is, in fact, blaming him, while praising yourself. Your praise, while seeing him therefore misbehaving, thou did not desist from doing God's will in conciliating him. But to him it is blame, because he has not been made better by your clemency.*

*In any case, even the Holy Apostle Saint Paul states that 'it is far more desirable that others should be blamed because of us, than we because of them.*

*Make me not this frigid reply, of saying, 'I am afraid of being thought that I made an overture to him out of fear; and that he will therefore despise me the more.' Such a reply indicates a childish and foolish mind, agitated about human approbation.*

*Let him suppose, that it is out of fear you made the first advance towards him; your reward will be so much the greater; since, being aware of this beforehand, you still consented to endure all for the fear of God.*

*For he who seeks reconciliation from his enemy for the purpose of gaining praise from man, curtails the recompense of reward; but he who is quite sure of the fact, that many will vilify and ridicule him, and yet still does not desist from the attempt at reconciliation, will have a twofold, yea, a threefold crown. This is indeed the man who does it for the sake of God.*

*Nor tell me, that the man has wronged you in this, or in that particular; for if he has displayed, in his conduct towards you, every kind of iniquity that is in man, yet even so God has enjoined you to forgive him all!"<sup>291</sup>*

*'Let us then, bearing in mind all the things which have been said, show forth great love even towards our enemies; and let us cast away that ridiculous custom, to which many of the more thoughtless give way to, of waiting for those who they are in conflict with to address them first. For they prefer to do what is ridiculous, rather than that which will follow with great reward afterwards.*

*Wherefore why do you now not address him first? 'Because he is waiting for this,' is the reply. Nay, for this very reason most of all you should have sprung forward to him, that you might win the crown.*

*'No,' says he, 'since this was his object.' And what can be worse than this folly? That is, 'Because this,' says he, 'was his object- to become procurer of a reward for me- I will not put my hand to what he has thus suggested.'*

*Now if he first addresses you, you gain nothing, even though you accost him. But if you are the first to spring forward and speak to him, you have made yourself profit from his pride, and therefore gathered in a manner abundant fruit from his obstinacy.*

*What is it then but the utmost folly, when we are to reap so large a benefit from bare words, to give up the gain; and by con-*

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291 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία κ', κεφ. γ-δ', P.G.49, 201-204.*

*demning him, to stumble the very same way? For if you blame him for this, that he first waits to be addressed by another, you therefore emulate that same thing which you accuse him of. That which you said was evil, why do you imitate that as good? Do you see how nothing is more senseless than a man who associates with wickedness?*

*Wherefore, I entreat, let us flee this evil and ridiculous practice. Yea, for ten thousand friendships has this pestilence overthrown, many enmities has it wrought. For this cause then let us anticipate them. Since we who are commanded to take blows, and be compelled to journey, and to be stripped by enemies, and to bear it; what kind of indulgence should we deserve, exhibiting so great contentiousness in a mere formal address?*

*'Why,' says one, 'we are despised and spit upon, the moment we have given in to this.' And in order that this man not despise you, you offend God? And in order that this frenzied fellow servant may not despise you, you despise the Lord, Who has bestowed nothing but great benefits on you?'*<sup>292</sup>

*'Thou who are to depart hence with such hopes, shrinkest, and art slow to act; at a time which needs reaction, this you endure not to do before the time for God's law, but it is as if you allow this passion to be quenched without reward, rather than for a reward? For neither, since this should have been dealt with in time, you would not have had any advantage, but rather great will be the punishment, because, time has affected, this law of God, which you chose not to do.*

*But if you say that you burn with the memory of the insult; call to mind if any good has been done to you by him that has offended you, and how many ills you have occasioned to others.*

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292 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ. στ', P.G.57, 272-274.

*Hath he spoken ill of you and disgraced you? Consider also that you have spoken thus of others. How then will you obtain pardon, which you bestow not on others? But have you spoken ill of no one? But you have heard men so speaking, and allowed it. Neither is this guiltless...*

*...But do not therefore wait for the other to come, since thus you have lost all. For to this intent most especially does He appoint unto you an unspeakable reward, that you may prevent the other, since, if you are reconciled by his entreaties, the amity is no longer the result of the divine command, but of the other party's diligence. Wherefore also you go away uncrowned, while he receives the rewards...*

*...Do you not know how great the pleasure is after reconciling? For what, though in our enmity it appear not great? For that it is sweeter to love him that does us wrong than to hate him, after the enmity is done away you shall be able to learn full well'<sup>293</sup>.*

## 7. RECONCILIATION WITH THOSE WHO ARE UNJUSTLY HOSTILE TOWARDS US

**A**t this point, we need to make a necessary clarification. When we say that we have a duty to love, to forgive, to benefit, and to try to reconcile with our enemies, we mean that we must do so, to those who, without cause, treat us with hostility, and without us having given them a reason to do so, or without us having saddened or wronged them first.

If, on the contrary, we have wronged them and for this reason, they are saddened with us, then we have a far bigger reason and obligation to apologise immediately and reconcile with them; dispelling the hatred and dislike, that we have caused.

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<sup>293</sup> "Ενθ. ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία οθ', κεφ.δ', P.G.58, 722-723.



Indeed, our Lord is quite explicit at this point, and He gives a very strict commandment to all of us. *‘Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift’* (Matthew 5:23-24).

In other words, Christ teaches that if we are to offer a gift or a sacrifice to God, such as the gifts we offer at the Divine Liturgy (Proskorion and Nama), and if we are to receive from God His counteroffer, which is the Communion of His Body and Blood, if at that moment we remember that we have wronged one of our brothers, who is consequently saddened and has distanced himself from us, we have to do the following: Before offering our gift and receiving the Holy Communion, we should go and ask for forgiveness and talk to our brother who has something against us, only then, should we receive Holy Communion.

Thus, when we receive Holy Communion, when we pray, when we give alms, when we fast or are physically abstinent, all these being forms of worship and sacrifice that are pleasing to God, we must first be certain that we have not saddened any of our brothers.

If this is the case, though, where our bad behaviour has saddened some people, where there is antipathy and hostility against us, then we should know that Christ does not accept our offerings mentioned above unless we have done everything beforehand for reconciliation.

Let us see, though, Saint John Chrysostom’s distinctive interpretation of the above commandment of our Lord. *‘Let My Service,’ says He, ‘be interrupted, that your love may continue; since this also is a sacrifice, your being reconciled to your brother.’* Yea, for this cause He said not, *‘after the offering,’* or *‘before the offering;’* but, *while the very gift lies there, and when the sacrifice is already beginning, He sends you to be reconciled to*

*your brother; and neither after removing that which lies before us, nor before presenting the gift, but while it lies in the midst, He bids you hasten there. With what motive then does He command so to do, and wherefore? These two ends, as it appears to me, He is hereby shadowing out and providing for.*

*First, as I have said, His will is to point out that He highly values charity, and considers it to be the greatest sacrifice: and that without it He does not receive even that other; next, He is imposing such a necessity of reconciliation, as admits of no excuse.*

*For whoever has been told not to offer before he is reconciled, will hasten, if not for love of his neighbour, yet, that this may not lie unaccepted by God and will run unto him who has been grieved, and do away with the enmity.*

*For this is the reason Christ expressed it all most significantly, so as to alarm and thoroughly awaken him. Thus, when He had said, 'Leave your gift,' He did not end there but added, 'before the altar'-causing him to shudder= 'and go away.'*

*And He did not merely say, 'Go away,' but He added, 'first, and then come and offer your gift.' By all these things making it manifest, that this table receives not them that are at enmity with each other...*

*...So that if it be but a prayer, which you are offering in such a frame of mind, it were better to leave your prayer, and become reconciled to your brother, and then to offer your prayer.*

*For to this end were all things done: to this end even God became man, and took order for all those works, that He might set us at one.*

*And whereas in this place He is sending the wrong-doer to the sufferer, in His prayer He leads the sufferer to the wrong-doer, and reconciles them.*

*For as there He says, 'Forgive men their debts;' so here, 'if he has anything against you, go your way unto him.'*<sup>294</sup>

Particularly important and deserves great attention, though, are the following words of the Blessed Chrysostom: *'Even here too He seems to me to be sending the injured person: and for some such reason He said not, 'Reconcile yourself to your brother,' but, 'Be reconciled.'*

*And while the saying seems to pertain to the aggressor, the whole of it really pertains to him that is aggrieved.*

*Thus, 'If you are reconciled to him,' says Christ, 'through your love to him you will have me also propitious, and will be able to offer your sacrifice with great confidence.*

*But if you are still irritated, consider that even I readily command that which is mine to be lightly esteemed, that you may become friends; and let these thoughts be soothing to your anger.*

*And He said not, When you have suffered any of the greater wrongs, then be reconciled; but, 'Though it be some trifle that he has against you.' And He added not, 'Whether justly or unjustly;' but merely, 'If he has anything against you.'*

*For though even if you are in the right, and in other words he is treating you unjustly, not even in that case should you protract the enmity; since Christ also was justly angered with us, yet nevertheless, He gave Himself to be slain for us, 'not imputing those trespasses'*<sup>295</sup>. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

These last words of Saint John Chrysostom are truly amazing. Thus, based on the above interpretation of the Blessed Father, a true Christian must do the following: Before praying, not only must he do everything in his power to reconcile with those who

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294 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιστ', κεφ. θ', P.G.57, 250-251.

295 Ἐνθ. ἀνωτ.

he has saddened but he also has to try to reconcile with those who hate him unjustly.

On the one hand then, a true Christian considers it inconceivable to have saddened or wronged his fellow humans. On the other hand, however, if he has sometimes erred as a human being (that he is), he must correct these mistakes and dispel any remoteness or hatred between him and his brothers because of his careless behaviour prior to receiving Holy Communion with a clear conscience.

A true Christian, though, does something extra. Because of his obedience to Christ's commandments on the virtue of love, before he receives Holy Communion, he tries to do his best to love even the people who are hostile and hate him and are unjustly hostile. He even tries to come to terms with those who are resentful, envious and accuse him unjustly and without reason; although he has never hurt them.

Desiring to have a clear conscience, a true Christian even strives to attract those unkind brothers that, either by their weaknesses and passions or by the influence of the devil, behave mercilessly and malevolently.

Is it possible to succeed in doing this and reconcile with people who are hostile and hate us? With some people, it is possible, but with others that have succumbed to several passions, it is not. However, our Lord commands that the effort for reconciliation should be made anyway, regardless of the outcome. With this matter, though, we will deal in the next chapter.

Let us now see two more references by the Blessed Chrysostom, regarding the issue of reconciliation with those who are unjustly hostile against us. Saint John Chrysostom says: *'Let us hasten and let us not delay reconciliation with those who have saddened us, whether they are hostile unjustly or justly. Because if*

*you are reconciled in this life, you are freed from judgement in the next life*<sup>296</sup>.

*Let us endure and suffer everything, and also, to do everything to free our enemies of the hatred they have for us. Let us not consider whether we are hated and abhorred justly or unjustly but only to seek that they have no more hatred against us.*

*Besides, the physician also seeks to relieve his patient of his illness, and not whether the cause of the illness is just or unjust.*

*You, as well, are the physician of the one that has saddened you with his hostile behaviour. Pursue one thing only; how to eliminate his illness*<sup>297</sup>.

We consider that the above words of the Blessed Chrysostom are particularly important. Every physician, he says, tries to heal all people, even those who, with their carelessness- such as smoking- have harmed their physical health. He does not cure only those that did not harm their health with various indulgences, but all of them individually. A physician never turns away a patient, saying he must suffer because of his lifelong carelessness, but instead, he cares for him and heals him, showing the same care to all patients.

Likewise, a true Christian seeks to heal spiritual illness, that is, the hostility and malice of his fellow humans. Thus, he seeks to heal the weakness, not only of those who are justly hostile to him, but also, of those who resent him entirely without reason. Thus, he strives to reconcile himself with those who he has saddened by some carelessness, but also, with those who hate him unjustly.

Consequently, he does not refrain from befriending and loving, even those who he has never hurt. Instead, he spares no effort to relieve them of their hatred and illness.

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296 Προς τοὺς μὴ ἀπαντήσαντας, κεφ. ζ', P.G.51, 185.

297 *Eis tá katá tón Dauid kaí tón Saoul...*, ὁμιλία α', κεφ. δ', P.G.54.

A good Christian does not separate good from evil people. He strives to be loved by all and to be in amity with all.

## 8. SPEED AND PERSEVERANCE IN RECONCILIATION

**H**ow awful is it really to be at odds with our brothers, our relatives, our friends and our neighbours? How many times has selfishness prevented us from hastening to talk and reconcile with those who are hostile and belligerent against us? How many times does pettiness not allow us to make a simple move and put an end to all enmity; to erase a foolish misunderstanding and an irrational hatred? How many of us wrongly expect from others to make the first move towards reconciliation?

But let us look at some further excerpts from various homilies of Saint John Chrysostom, in which he urges us to seek immediate reconciliation with those who treat us with hostility and how to show great perseverance in achieving it.

*But you were treated most unjustly and you cannot bear to put aside your anger. Why, then, do you do even greater wrong and more serious harm to yourself? Whatever your enemy may do to you, he will not treat you as badly as you treat yourself if you refuse to be reconciled to him and if you keep trampling underfoot the laws of God.*

*Did your foe outrage you? Tell me, is that why you outrage God? To refuse to be reconciled to the enemy who has caused you pain is not the act of a man who is taking revenge on his foe. It is the act of a man who is outraging God, who gave us these laws.*

*Therefore, do not look back on the foe who is your fellow servant; do not look back on how deeply he has harmed you. Rather, put God before your mind and the fear of him which you should feel. Force yourself to be reconciled to the enemy whose*

*countless evil acts have caused you pain. Then, consider that the greater the violence you will endure in your own soul, the greater will be the honour you will enjoy from God, Who gave these commandments.*

*Just as you receive him here with great honour, so will He receive you in heaven with great glory. He will give you an infinitely richer reward because you obeyed His laws<sup>298</sup>.*

*‘While there is still time each of us should exert ourselves, in the event of there being someone at enmity with him, to reconcile him by means of assiduous attention.*

*Let no one tell me that he has made overtures once and a second time but his enemy has not come round: if we approach this with unmixed motives, we will not give up before we prevail through intense supplication, and thus win him over and turn him from his hostility to us.*

*I mean, surely it is not he who is the recipient of gifts from us? It is to us that benefits come: we win favour from God, we secure remission of sins for ourselves, and gain from this great confidence with the Lord...*

*...Accordingly, let each of us in leaving here perform this good work, show enthusiasm for it as if for the most wonderful treasure and not delay in the slightest. Even if we have to labour, even if we have to search, even if we have to go on a long journey, even if there are certain difficulties, let us dispose of all these problems. Let us make it our concern how we may put into practice the command of the Lord, and thus gain the reward of obedience.*

*After all, surely I am not ignorant that it seems a difficult and burdensome duty to make approaches to the person who nourished grievances and enmity against you, and to stand and converse with him? If, however, you consider the dignity of the promise and the greatness of the reward and the fact that the*

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298 *Περί ἀκαταλήπτου, λόγος α΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.48, 756.*

*effect of kindly behaviour reaches not only the beneficiary but also you yourself, everything will seem to you light and easy*<sup>299</sup>.

*‘That He might reconcile you to the Father, He refused not to be sacrificed, and to shed His blood! And are you unwilling to utter a word, or to make the first advance, that you may be reconciled to your fellow-servant?’*

*Hear what the Lord says, concerning those who are in this disposition; ‘If you bring your gift to the altar, and there rememberest that your brother has anything against you;- He does not say, ‘wait for him to come to you,’ nor ‘speak with another as mediator,’ nor ‘entreat some other,’ but ‘do you yourself make the advance towards him.’ For the exhortation is, ‘Go your way, first be reconciled to your brother.’*

*O transcendent wonder! Does He Himself account it no dishonour, that the gift should be left unoffered, and do you think it a mark of disgrace to go first and be reconciled? And how can such a case, I ask, be deemed worthy of pardon?’*

*Were you to see a member of yours cut off, would you not use every exertion so that it might be reunited to the body? This do with regard to your brethren; when you see them cut off from your friendship, make all haste to recover them! Do not wait for them to make the first advance, but press onward, that you may be foremost to receive the prize.*

*We are commanded to have only one enemy, the devil. With him be thou never reconciled! But with a brother, never be at enmity in your heart. And if there should be any narrowness of soul, let it be only an ephemeral thing, and never last beyond a day’s space. For, ‘let the not the sun,’ He says, ‘go down upon your wrath.’ For if, before evening, you are reconciled, you will obtain some pardon from God. But if you remain longer at enmity, that enmity is no longer the result of your being suddenly carried*

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299 *Eis τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία κζ΄, κεφ. ν΄, PG.53, 251.*



*away by anger and resentment, but of wickedness, and of a foul spirit, and one which makes a practice of malice!*

*And this is not the only terrible thing, that you deprive yourself of pardon, but that the right course becomes still more difficult. For when one day is past, the shame becomes greater; and when the second has arrived, it is still further increased; and if it reach a third, and a fourth day, it will add a fifth. Thus the five become ten; the ten, twenty; the twenty an hundred; and thenceforth the wound will become incurable; for as time goes on, the breach becomes wider.*

*But do thou, O man, give way to none of these irrational passions; nor be ashamed, nor blush, nor say within yourself, 'A short time ago we called each other such names, and said a vast number of things fit or not fit to be spoken; and shall I now hurry at once to a reconciliation? Who then will not blame my excessive easiness?' I answer, no one who has sense will blame your easiness; but when you remain implacable, then, all persons will deride you...*

*Knowing all these things then, make the first advance to a brother; lay hold of him before he has entirely shrunk away from you; and should it be necessary, to run through the whole city on the same day; should it be necessary to go beyond the walls, or to make a long journey; still leaving all other things that may be in hand, attend only to this one work of reconciling your brother...*

*...Do not tell me, 'I have besought him many times, I have entreated, I have supplicated, but I have not effected a reconciliation.' Never desist till you have reconciled him.*

*For He said not, 'Leave your gift, and go your way.' Entreat your brother. But, 'Go your way. Be reconciled.' So that, although you may have made many entreaties, yet you must not desist until you have persuaded.*

*God entreats us every day, and we do not hear; and yet He does not cease entreating. And do you then disdain to entreat*

*your fellow-servant? How is it then possible for you ever to be saved?*

*Suppose that you have often pleaded and been repulsed; for this, however, you will obtain a larger reward. For in proportion as he is contentious, and you persevere in entreating, so much the more is your recompense increased. In proportion as the good work is accomplished with greater difficulty, and the reconciliation is one of much labour, so much the greater will be the judgement on him, and so much the brighter will be the crowns of victory for your forbearance.*

*Let us not merely applaud all this, but exemplify it too in our deeds; and never recede from the work, until we are restored to our former state of friendship. For it is not enough merely to avoid grieving an enemy, or doing him an injury, or being in our minds unkindly disposed towards him; but it is necessary that we should prepare him to be kindly affected towards ourselves.*

*For I hear many saying, 'I have no hostility; I am not annoyed; neither have I anything to do with him.' But this is not what God commands, that you should have nothing to do with him; but that you should have much to do with him. For this reason he is your 'brother.'*

*For this reason He said not, Forgive your brother what you have against him. But what then? 'Go your way. First be reconciled to him;' and should he have 'anything against you,' you desist not, before you have reunited the member in friendly concord'<sup>300</sup>.*

We believe that the above words of the Blessed Chrysostom should be of particular concern to us. The Blessed Elder seems to disagree with the fact that many people rest on having no hatred in their heart or that they do not wish, or do harm to their fellow humans. At the same time, though, they act as follows:

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300 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία κ', κεφ. ε'-ζ', PG.49, 204-207.*

They distance themselves from these people, who may even be friends or relatives, and avoid contact with them because they may have once quarrelled with them, or they were saddened by a certain behaviour, or they are not compatible.

It is evident that their behaviour is not correct because, at times, it causes great sorrow to the relatives and friends, who can sense this contempt, distance, and disruption of the previous good relationships.

Such an act of distancing ourselves from our loved ones is only justified if, for any reason, association with these people, causes significant psychological damage. Even in this case, though, and in spite of the necessary limitation of the relationship with them, when they are in need, we should demonstrate friendly feelings towards them, a kind disposition and polite behaviour.

## 9. WHAT IS WITHIN OUR POWER

**I**n the previous chapters, we mentioned that we must strive for reconciliation and good relationships, even with those who are hostile towards us. In fact, we emphasised that first, we must reconcile with those who we have wronged or saddened and then, as much as it is possible, to extend friendship towards those who are unjustly hostile to us. That is to say; we must strive to entice to our love, even towards those who hate us and detest us unjustly.

At this point, we should emphasise that we ought to do everything that is in our power, but this does not mean that the said person will necessarily accept our effort and make peace with us.

Even this attitude of theirs, though, benefits us greatly for two reasons. Firstly, because as already mentioned, this is an opportunity for us to practice even further, more patience and forbearance. Secondly, because in essence, this an opportunity

for us to be humble. It brings great humility to us, when we know that someone accuses us, demonstratively avoids us, derides us, and is hostile towards us, even though we have done a lot to pacify them.

We should know, then, that the hostility of the ones that hate us, either justly because we have mistreated them, or unjustly because they suffer from the passion of envy and do not want to accept our efforts for reconciliation, is an occasion for spiritual progress for us. At the same time, it is a powerful medicine and an essential cure for our, perhaps, proud soul.

Of course, what we should carefully examine with great attention and sincere reflection is, whether we have indeed done everything physically possible to reconcile with our brother.

Unfortunately, more often than not, our brother's hostile attitude may not be due to his obstinacy, but to the fact that, although we think we have done everything to appease him, and feel that we have a clear conscience, we, in fact, have done little, because our secret selfishness has not allowed us to do anything more meaningful and kind.

Our apology, for instance, may not have been humble and sincere. Our willingness to reconcile may have been cold and sluggish; our effort may have been insignificant; our behaviour may have been arrogant, hypocritical, or self-serving.

The words of Saint Maximus the Confessor on this issue are sage: *‘Examine your conscience scrupulously, in case it is your fault that your brother is still hostile. Do not cheat your conscience, for it knows your secrets, and at the hour of your death, it will accuse you, and in time of prayer, it will be a stumbling-block to you’*<sup>301</sup>.

Saint Maximus points out that, in general, we have to be careful because often, our brother's hostility may not be due to his

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301 *Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης*, έκ.ατ. δ', κεφ. λγ', P.G.90, 1056A.

malice but instead, due to our evil and unkind behaviour: *‘Watch yourself, lest the vice which separates you from your brother lies not in him but in yourself. Be reconciled with him without delay, so that you do not lapse from the commandment of love’*<sup>302</sup>.

*Let us see the views of Saint John Chrysostom on this matter. ‘This was not Christ’s command, either, not to have enemies- this, after all, being beyond our control- but not to bear hatred. This, you see, is within our control, whereas the former is not completely so. On the other hand, being hated without cause is not a decision of ours but of those who bear the hatred. The wicked, you see, are in the habit of hating without reason or cause. Christ too, remember, they hated for no good reason, as he says, ‘They hated Me without cause’ (John 15:25). The apostles had the false apostles as enemies, and the prophets the false prophets.*

*In other words, this must be our concern, not how to avoid having enemies, but how to avoid giving them justification and reason, and how to avoid bearing hatred or revulsion even if we are hated time and time again. That is what enmity is, after all, bearing hatred and revulsion.*

*So when I am hated and bear no hatred, those people have me as enemy, not vice versa. When I pray for them and wish to do them a kindness, how can I have such people as enemies? Hence Paul said, ‘As far as it is possible for you, be at peace with everyone’ (Romans 12:18).*

*Let us therefore offer what is ours to offer, and by that very fact we will have sufficient praise. What is it that is ours? Such, for example, as this: does someone bear you great hatred and opposition? For your part love them and treat them kindly. Does someone insult you and abuse you? For your part commend and praise them.*

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302 \*Ενθ. ἀνωτ. Κεφ. ιθ΄, P.G.1052C.

*Yet even so they do not relax their enmity? Well, then, they are paying you a greater tribute. Wicked people, you see, provide us with more conspicuous recompense the more trouble they take not to forsake their opposition, and they undermine themselves the more*<sup>303</sup>.

## 10. OUR ENEMIES ARE SPIRITUALLY ILL PEOPLE

**L**et us also examine some teachings of the holy Elders, in which they urge us to love our enemies because their hatred against us is not as a result of their choice, but instead, it is because they have been led astray by the devil or their passions.

Thus, we should consider the ones that mistreat us and are hostile against us as spiritually ill or weak people who have succumbed to their weaknesses and to the devil, who in turn exploits their weaknesses. Consequently, we, in turn, should empathise with them; we should support and help them. Weak people need a great deal of attentiveness and care, rather than contempt and revenge. With our good behaviour, our patience and prayer, we ought to be able to win them over and relieve them of their malice and weakness.

In the same way in which we do not banish our children from home, or hate them, when they are led astray by bad associations and when they make mistakes, but instead, we make every effort to lead them back to the right path, so must we act in the case of our enemies as well.

The words of Saint Maximus the Confessor are distinctive: *'Has someone vilified you? Do not hate him; hate the vilification and the demon which induced him to utter it. If you hate the vilifier, you have hated a man and so broken the commandment.*

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303 *Eis ton ζ' ψαλμόν*, κεφ. ε'-στ', P.G.55, 88.

*What he has done in word you do in action. To keep the commandment, show the qualities of love and help him in any way you can, so that you may deliver him from evil*<sup>304</sup>

Besides, Saint John Chrysostom says in successive homilies: *'Nothing so much makes God propitious as loving our enemies, and doing good to those who spitefully use us. When a man insults you, look not to him, but to the devil who moves him, and against him empty all your wrath, but pity the man who is moved by him. For if lying is from the devil, to be angry without a cause is much more so.*

*When you see someone ridiculing another person, consider that it is the devil who moves him, for mockery does not belong to Christians. For he who... insults, and jests, and is excited, demands not reproach from us, but sorrow*<sup>305</sup>.

*'And even if you have been greatly wronged, for this very cause most of all, do thou do him good, that you may both make your own crown more glorious, and set your brother free from the worst infirmity.*

*For so too the physicians, when they are kicked, and shamefully handled by the insane, then most of all pity them, and take measures for their perfect cure, knowing that insult comes of the extremity of their disease.*

*Now I bid you to have the same mind touching them that are plotting against you, and do thou so treat them that are injuring you. For it is they above all that are diseased, it is they who are undergoing the violence. Deliver him then from this grievous contumely, and grant him to let go his anger, and set him free from the grievous demon, wrath...*

*...Nor let him go, until he put from him all the bitterness. And then shall he feel toward you the greatest thankfulness; and he*

304 *Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης*, έκ.κατ. δ', κεφ. πγ', P.G.90, 1068D.

305 *Υπόμνημα εις τόν άγιον Ιωάννην...*, όμιλία πδ', κεφ. γ', P.G.59, 458.

*is at rest, then he will know clearly from how great trouble you have released him.*

*But why do I speak of the thanks from him? For God will straightway crown you, and will requite you ten thousand honours, because you have freed your brother from a grievous disease; and that brother too will honour you as a master, ever reverencing your forbearance'*<sup>306</sup>.

*'And were a man minded to break with you, do not thou break also. Nor give utterance to that cold saying, 'Him I love that loves me; if my right eye does not love me, I tear it out.'* For these are satanical sayings, and fit for publicans, and the small spirited Gentiles. But thou that art called to a greater citizenship, and are enrolled in the books of Heaven, art liable to greater laws.

*Do not speak in this way, but when he is not minded to love you, then display more love, that you may draw him to you. For he is a member; and when by any force a member is sundered from the body, we do everything to unite it again, and they pay more attention to it.*

*For the reward is the greater then, when one draws to one a person not minded to love. Now he that is loved and loves, does pay you a recompense. But he that is loved and loves not, has made God a debtor to you in his own room.*

*And besides, when he loves you he needs not much pains; but when he loves you not, then he stands in need of your assistance. Make not then the cause for painstaking a cause for listlessness; and say not because he is sick, that is the reason I take no care of him (for a sickness indeed the dulling of love is), but do thou warm again that which has become chilled.*

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306 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιη', κεφ.δ'-ε', P.G.57, 270.



*But suppose he will not be warmed, 'what then?' is the question. Continue to do your own part...Consider how great loving one that hates us must be.*

*For your Master loved those that hated Him, and called them to Him; and the weaker they were, the greater care He showed them; and He cried and said, 'They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. (Matthew 9:12). And He deemed publicans and sinners worthy of the same table with Him. And as great as was the dishonour wherewith the Jewish people treated Him, so great was the honour and concern He showed for them, yea, and much greater.*

*Him do thou also emulate: for this good work is no light one, but one without which not even he that is a martyr can please God much, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 13:3).*

*Say not then, I get hated, and that is why I do not love. For this is why you ought to love most. And besides, it is not in the nature of things for a man who loves to be soon hated, but brute as a person may be, he loves them that love him. For this He says the heathens and the publicans do (Matthew 5:46).*

*But if everyone loves those that love him, who is there that would not love those who love while they are hated?*

*Display then this conduct, and cease not to use this word, 'hate me as much as you may, I will not leave off loving you,' and then you will humble his quarrelsomeness, and cast out all coldness'<sup>307</sup>.*

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307 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κη', κεφ.δ', P.G.60, 647-648.

## 11. HOW OUR ENEMIES BENEFIT US

**F**inally, we would like to mention some further representative excerpts from the teachings of the holy Elders, which portray the great benefits we gain from our enemies.

Our enemies, according to the Elders, often benefit us by pointing out our flaws, something that, unfortunately, our loved ones do not do.

The Blessed Chrysostom says: *‘Many people think that being slandered by their enemies and consequently, their reputation being damaged, is more intolerable than all kinds of death. Let us examine this, then.*

*Did anyone accuse you of being an adulterer and a fornicator? If what he says is true, correct yourself. If these are lies, mock them. If you acknowledge that you are guilty of what has been said, become more prudent. If you do not acknowledge the accusations, though, despise them, or rather, not only ridicule and scorn them, but also, leap for joy, according to our Lord, Who commands us to rejoice at the unjust accusations...*

*...Of course, even if what one says about you is true, but you remain patient and do not return his cursing and slander, but instead, you sigh bitterly and accuse yourself of having erred, your reward will not be smaller than the previous one.*

*I will try to prove this to you through the Scriptures so that you understand that the benefit, which our friends do not give us because they praise us and disregard our mistakes, is mostly given to us by our enemies, who accuse us, even if what they say is true.*

*Our friends often flatter us to ingratiate themselves with us, while our enemies reveal our sins to us. Thus, because we do not*

*see our transgressions since our love for ourselves is excessive, our enemies, often because of their hatred for us, when they perceived our mistakes more clearly than us and then accused us, they force us to correct them.*

*Thus, their hatred becomes a cause of great benefit for us, not only because their revelation forces us to perceive our sins, and also, in this way, we receive forgiveness. Because if the enemy accuses you of sin, for which you are responsible, and hearing the accusation, you do not curse him, but instead, you sigh bitterly and ask God for forgiveness, your sin is erased and forgiven instantly.*

*What then could be more blessed and good than this? What could be an easier acquittal from our sins?’<sup>308</sup>*

Saint Isidorus of Pelusium expresses similar views and goes on to say the following: *‘It is impossible for the one who loves virtue, in my opinion, not to have enemies; but it is possible to use hatred for their benefit.*

*Because, if out of love for virtue, they do not commit sins, they benefit themselves and also, they shield themselves from their enemies.*

*But if they commit sins, then they benefit from their enemies. Because, often, an accusation made against us, healed a passion of our soul, which we didn’t know we had or had neglected to heal.*

*Great men, then, must have either true friends or fiery enemies. Because, the first with their counsel and the second with their accusations, prevent them from sin.*

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308 *Eis tá κατά τόν Δαυίδ καί τόν Σαούλ...*, ὁμιλία γ’, κεφ.δ’, P.G.54, 700.

*But since friendship has nowadays become slender-voiced, or rather, mute, we need to hear the truth from our enemies and thus correct ourselves*<sup>309</sup>.

Another very important benefit we receive from our enemies is that, through their bad behaviour, they *'bring out our evil self'*. As we respond to their attacks with spite, we understand that we suffer from the passions of anger, selfishness, hatred, and so on.

In this way, our enemies become great benefactors and physicians of our ill souls, since they become the reason for us to become aware of our passions, which we probably do not know we have, and if we wish to do so, we can correct.

The hostile behaviour of our neighbour, then, becomes the reason for us to repent and to strive to obtain the virtues we do not have, such as innocence, humility, forbearance, and true and guileless love.

Let us see, though, the distinctive views of Saint Zosimus. *'If someone has bad thoughts against the one that mistreats him, he conspires against his own soul, just like the demons. But why do I say bad thoughts? If he does not think of him as a physician, he is, in fact, unfair to himself. You say you are suffering, but he cleanses you, and you have to treat him as a physician who is sent by Christ... You ought to be grateful to your brother. Because of him you now know your illness, and you should accept his actions as healing medicine that is sent by Jesus. But, if not only you are not thankful, but on the contrary, you have evil thoughts against him, you are essentially saying to Jesus: 'I do not want to be healed by You. I do not want to accept your medicine. I would rather my wounds get rotten'...*

*...He who wants the true and straight path, when someone upsets him, he scolds himself with vehemence, he reproves himself and says: 'Why are you furious my soul? Why are you troubled,*

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309 *Ἐπιστολή στ', βιβλίο γ', PG.78, 956D-957A.*

*like those who foam at the mouth? It just proves that you are ill. Because if you weren't ill, you wouldn't be suffering. Why do you abandon self-doubt, and blame your brother instead, who showed you your true illness?'<sup>310</sup>*

Finally, in a different speech, the Blessed Chrysostom mentions the various benefits we derive from the hostile attitude and behaviour of our fellow humans. *'Paul also as he goes on in his journey, after the one places the other, and says, 'Bless them that persecute you'(Romans 12:14). He did not say, be not spiteful or revengeful, but required something far better. For that a man that was wise might do, but this is quite an angel's part.*

*And after saying 'bless', he proceeds, 'and curse not,' lest we should do both the one and the other, and not the former only.*

*For they that persecute us are purveyors of our reward. But if you are sober-minded, there will be another reward after that one, which you will gain yourself. For he will yield you that for persecution, but you will yield yourself the one from the blessing of another, in that you bring forth very great sign of love to Christ.*

*For as he that curses his persecutor, shows that he is not much pleased at suffering this for Christ, thus he that blesses shows the greatness of his love.*

*Do not then abuse him, that you yourself may gain the greater reward, and may teach him that the thing is a matter of inclination, not of necessity, of holiday and feast, not of calamity or dejection.*

*For this cause Christ Himself said, 'Rejoice when men speak all manner of evil against you falsely.' (Matthew 5:11) Hence too it was that the Apostles returned with joy not from having been evil spoken of only, but also at having been scourged.*

*For besides what I have mentioned, there will be another gain, and that no small one, that you will make, both the abashing of*

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310 *Διαλογισμοί*, κεφ. γ', ε', P.G.78, 1684CD, 1688C.

*your adversaries hereby, and instructing of them by your actions that you are travelling to another life; for if he see you joyous, and elevated, from suffering ill, he will see clearly from the actions that you have other hopes greater than those of this life. So that if you dost not so, but weepst and lamentest, how is he to be able to learn from that that you are tarrying for any other life?*

*And besides this, you will compass yet another thing. For provided he see you not vexed at the affronts done you, but even blessing him, he will leave harassing you.*

*See then how much that is good comes from this, both a greater reward for yourself and less temptation, and he will forbear persecuting you, and God too will be glorified; and to him that is in error your endurance will be instruction in godliness.*

*For this reason it was not those that insult us only, but even those that persecute us and deal spitefully with us, that he bade us requite with the contrary. And now he orders them to bless, but as he goes on, he exhorts them to do them good in deeds also'<sup>311</sup>.*




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311 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κβ', κεφ. α', P.G.60, 609.

## 12. SAINT MAXIMUS ON LOVE

**L**et us see the gems of wisdom regarding love, and especially the love for our enemies that one of the greatest Saints and confessors of our Church, Saint Maximus the Confessor goes on to give us.

*The person who loves God cannot help loving every man as himself, even though he is grieved by the passions of those who are not yet purified. But when they amend their lives, his delight is indescribable and knows no bounds.*

*The state of love may be recognized in the giving of money, and still more in the giving of spiritual counsel and in looking after people in their physical needs.*

*If we detect any trace of hatred in our hearts against any man whatsoever for committing any fault, we are utterly estranged from love for God, since love for God absolutely precludes us from hating any man.*

*Why did He command this? To free you from hatred, irritation, anger and rancor, and to make you worthy of the supreme gift of perfect love. And you cannot attain such love if you do not imitate God and love all men equally. For God loves all men equally and wishes them 'to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4).*

*You have not yet acquired perfect love if your regard for people is still swayed by their characters- for example, if, for some particular reason, you love one person and hate another, or if for the same reason you sometimes love and sometimes hate the same person.*

*Perfect love does not split up the single human nature, common to all, according to the diverse characteristics of individ-*

*uals; but, fixing attention always on this single nature, it loves all men equally.*

*He loves the good as friends and the bad as enemies, helping them, exercising forbearance, patiently accepting whatever they do.*

*He does not take the evil into account at all but even suffers on their behalf if the opportunity offers, so that, if possible they too become friends. If he cannot achieve this, he does not change its own attitude; he continues to show the fruits of love to all men alike.*

*It was on account of this that our Lord and God Jesus Christ, showing His love for us, suffered for the whole of mankind and gave to all men an equal hope of resurrection, although each man determines his own fitness for glory or punishment.*

*If there are some men you hate and some you neither love nor hate, and others you love strongly and others again you love but moderately, recognise from this inequality that you are far from perfect love. For perfect love presupposes that you love all men equally.*

*If love is long-suffering (1 Corinthians 13:4), a man who is contentious and malicious clearly alienates himself from love.*

*Has a brother been the occasion of some trial for you and has your resentment led you to hatred? Do not let yourself be overcome by this hatred, but conquer it with love. You will succeed in this by praying to God sincerely for your brother and by accepting his apology: or else by conciliating him with an apology yourself, by regarding yourself as responsible for the trial and by patiently waiting until the cloud has passed.*

*Because today an assault of the devil has aroused some hatred in you, do not judge as base and wicked a brother whom yesterday you regarded as spiritual and virtuous: but with long-suffering love dwell on the goodness you perceived yesterday and expel today's prayer from your soul.*



*Because today an assault of the devil has aroused some hatred in you, do not judge as base and wicked a brother whom yesterday you regarded as spiritual and virtuous: but with long-suffering love dwell on the goodness you perceived yesterday and expel today's hatred from your soul.*

*Do not condemn today as base and wicked the man whom yesterday you praised as good and commended as virtuous, changing from love to hatred, because he has criticized you; but even though you are still full of resentment, commend him as before, and you will soon recover the same saving love.*

*When talking with other brethren, do not adulterate your usual praise of a brother by surreptitiously introducing censure into the conversation because you still harbour some hidden resentment against him. On the contrary, in the company of others give unmixed praise and pray for him sincerely as if you were praying for yourself; then you will soon be delivered from this destructive hatred. Do not say, 'I do not hate my brother', when you simply efface the thought of him from your mind.*

*If a brother happens to be tempted and persists in insulting you, do not be driven out of your state of love, even though the same evil demon troubles your mind. You will not be driven out of that state if, when abused, you bless: when slandered, you praise; and when tricked, you maintain your affection. This is the way of Christ's philosophy: if you do not follow it you do not share His company.*

*Do not think that those who bring you reports which fill you with resentment and make you hate your brother are affectionately disposed towards you, even if they seem to speak the truth. On the contrary, turn away from them as if they were poisonous snakes, so that you may both prevent them from uttering slanders and deliver your own soul from wickedness.*

*Do not irritate your brother by speaking to him equivocally; otherwise you may receive the same treatment from him and so*

*drive out both your love and his. Rather, rebuke him frankly and affectionately, thus removing the grounds for resentment and freeing both him and yourself from your irritation and distress.*

*In times of peaceful relationships do not recall what was said by a brother when there was bad feeling between you, even if offensive things were said to your face, or to another person about you and you subsequently heard of them. Otherwise you will harbour thoughts of rancour and revert to your destructive hatred of your brother.*

*The deiform soul cannot nurse hatred against a man and yet be at peace with God, the giver of the commandments. 'For', He says, 'If you do not forgive men their faults, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your faults' (Matthew 6:14-15). If your brother does not wish to live peaceably with you, nevertheless guard yourself against hatred, praying for him sincerely and not abusing him to anybody.*

*The man who still loves empty fame, or is attached to some material object, is naturally vexed with people on account of transitory things, or harbours rancour or hatred against them, or is a slave to shameful thoughts. Such things are quite foreign to the soul that loves God.*

*Strive as hard as you can to love every man. If you cannot yet do this, at least do not hate anybody. But even this is beyond your power unless you scorn worldly things.*

*When the demons see that we scorn the things of this world in order not to hate men on account of such things, and so to fall away from love, then they incite slanders against us. In this way they hope that, unable to contain our resentment, we will be provoked into hating those who slander us.*

*Nothing pains the soul more than slander, whether directed against one's faith or one's manner of life. No one can be indifferent to it except those who like Susanna have their eyes firmly fixed on God.*

*To the extent that you pray with all your soul for the person who slanders you, God will make the truth known to those who have been scandalised by the slander.*

*If when some trial occurs you cannot overlook a friend's fault, whether real or apparent, you have not yet attained dispassion.*

*Friends are many, but in times of prosperity. In times of adversity you will have difficulty in finding even one.*

*Many have said much about love, but you will find love itself only if you seek it among the disciples of Christ. For only they have true Love as love's teacher. 'Though I have the gift of prophecy', says St Paul, 'and know all mysteries and all knowledge... and have no love, it profits me nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:2-3). He who possesses love possesses God Himself, for 'God is love'<sup>312</sup> (1 John 4:8).*




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312 *Κεφάλαια περί ἀγάπης*, ἐκατ. α', κεφ. ιγ', κστ', λε', ξα', ο', οα', ἐκατ. β', κεφ. ι', ἐκατ. δ', κεφ. ιη', κβ', κστ', κζ', κη', κθ', λ', λα', λβ', λδ', λε', μα', πβ', πζ', πη', ρβ', ρδ', ρ'.

