

***THE FIRST EPISTLE  
OF  
ST. PETER***

1999

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE

1. The scholars and the fathers of the Church have unanimously agreed that St. Peter was the writer.
2. **St. Ireneaus** was the first to use excerpts from the epistle mentioning St. Peter's name. However, we find similar excerpts in the writings of many fathers that followed St. Ireneaus: the epistle of **St. Barnabas**<sup>0</sup>, the writings of **St. Clement of Rome**<sup>2</sup>, the book of the Shepherd by **Hermas**<sup>3</sup>, and the writings of **St. Polycarp the Martyr**.
  3. **St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea** have mentioned that the epistle of St. Peter is widely accepted by the church.
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<sup>0</sup> Compare the epistle of Barnabas 1: 5 with 1 Pet. 1: 9 – 4:12 with 1: 17 –5: 1 with 1:2 – 5: 6 with 1: 11-16: 10 with 2: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the epistle of Clement, bishop of Rome (1968 ed.) with 7: 4 with 1 Pet. 1:19, 9: 4 with 3: 2-36: 2 with 2: 9-30:2 with 5: 5-49: 50 with 4: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the book of "The Shepherd" by Hermas 3: 5, 4: 3,4 (under print)

4. The epistle is in harmony with the style of St. Peter's sermons as mentioned in the book of Acts, for example:

**First:** He referred to God as Judge, who judges with no partiality (Chapter 1:7 compared with Acts 10:34).

**Second:** He emphasized the Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. (Chapter 1:21 compared with Acts 2:32 & 3:15, 10:40).

**Third:** His declaration that the Lord Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. (Chapter 2:7 compared with Acts 4:11)

5. St. Peter did not know the Greek language; however, St. Mark and St. Selvanus were fluent, and they were very close to St. Peter.

## TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

1. It was written to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in Asia Minor. (ch.1:1)

2. Some believe that it was not St. Peter's intention to organize the regions by their official geographical locations, for example: Pontus was in the district of Galatia until the year 63 A.D and Phrygia, which occupies a large area in Asia Minor, was not mentioned. However, the carrier of the epistle could not have passed from Cappadocia to Asia without passing through Phrygia. Thus, it would have been impossible not to enter the region of Phrygia to reach the many intended readers of this epistle (Acts 18:23). Therefore, these names meant all of Asia Minor<sup>4</sup>.

3. On the Day of Pentecost, there were some from Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. (Acts 2:9)

4. Pontus is located by "Bohrof El-Karm, which is the origin of Aquila. Since St. Peter started addressing his epistle to this district, **Tertullian, St. Cyprian the Martyr, and St. Jerome** called this epistle "the epistle to Pontus."

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<sup>4</sup> *Studies in First Epistle of St. Peter by Dr. Moris Tawadros.*

5. Asia: the district of Asia under Asia Minor. This was the place where Aquila was born. (Acts 18:2)
6. Bithynia: which ,from Constantinople, was near Pontus.

### **TIME AND PLACE OF ITS WRITING:**

1. It was written between the years 63 and 67 A.D during the persecution of Nero. (54-68 A.D.)
2. It was written from Babylon (ch. 5:13). There were different opinions regarding the city of Babylon. All agreed that it was not the Babylon on the Euphrates River, for it had been destroyed by that time. Tradition does not mention that St. Peter had went there, and it is very unlikely that St. Mark and Silas had gone there in their travels.
3. Catholics claim that Babylon refers to Rome, relying on the fact that Babel mentioned in the Revelation refers to Rome. However, there is nothing that either supports or refutes this opinion:

First: Why did not St. Peter mention the name “Rome”?

Second: Historically, St. Peter did not arrive in Rome early enough before his martyrdom to allow him to write two epistles.

Third: Arranging the provinces as mentioned in the epistle from East to West supports the idea that the epistle was written somewhere in the East.

4. The most likely option is that “Babylon” is Old Cairo, which was inhabited by a Jewish community and was a station for Roman soldiers. Historical traditions , which state that St. Mark came to Egypt in year 61 A.D. or 62 A.D, support this opinion.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPISTLE:**

1. It is very similar to some of St. Paul’s epistles especially Ephesians<sup>5</sup>, Romans<sup>6</sup>, Galatians<sup>7</sup> and Titus<sup>8</sup>. We also find

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. 1: 1-3 & Eph. 1: 1-3, 1:20 & 1:4, 2:9 & 1:14, 3:22 & 1:21, 2:5 & 2:21,22, 3:1-6 & 5:22-24

many similarities between this epistle and St. Paul's to the Hebrews<sup>9</sup>.

2. Because he is the apostle to the Jews, the apostle of circumcision, St. Peter took many excerpts from the Old Testament.

3. St. Peter often refers to the words of the Lord Jesus because he was an eyewitness to what the Lord Jesus said and did.

### **PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:**

1. To encourage the believers to accept suffering. This epistle is considered to be an excellent source of comfort, and every chapter is filled with a comforting message.

2. To reveal the practical, holy mutual relationships in the family, society, and the Church through faith in the Crucified Lord Jesus.

### **OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE:**

**1. Salvation and sufferingsCh. 1**

**2. Our relation with Christ our RockCh. 2**

**3. Our social relations in the Lord Jesus Ch. 2**

**4. Our family relations in the Lord Jesus Ch. 3**

**5. Our relations with those suffering in the Lord JesusCh. 3**

**6. Tribulations and the life of holinessCh. 4**

**7. Our church relations in the Lord JesusCh. 5**

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet. 1:21 & Rom. 4:24, 4:1 & 6:6,7, 2:24 & 6:11, 5:1 & 8:18, 3:22 & 8:34, 2:5 & 12:1, 1:14 & 12:2, 4:10,11 & 12:3-8, 1:21 & 12:9,10, 3:8-12 & Rom. 12:14-19, 3:13,14 & 13:1-4, 2:6,7 & 9:33.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet. 1:4 & Gal. 3:23, 2:16 & 5:13

<sup>8</sup> Compare 1 Pet. 1:1 & Tit. 1:4, 2:9 & 2:14, 1:3 & 3:5, 1:8 & 2:14

<sup>9</sup> *Studies in First Epistle of St. Peter by Dr. Moris Tawadros.*

# Chapter 1

## ST. PAUL TALKS ABOUT SALVATION AND SUFFERINGS

### 1. Opening salutationv. 1

### 2. God's act of salvation:

**First:** The love of the Trinity to us.v. 2

**Second:** God's new giftsv. 3-5

### 3. Our stand toward salvation

**First:** Faith, hope, lovev. 6- 12

**Second:** Strife and workv. 13-25

### 4. Meditating in the greatness of the salvation

## 1. OPENING SALUTATION:

*“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (v. 1).*

Peter is the name by which the Lord called him. (John 1:42). In Syrian, he is called *Cephas* which means “a rock,” referring to the strength of his faith with which he proclaimed the Lord Jesus.

*“The apostle of Jesus Christ,”* here he calls himself apostle, that is, one of the twelve and not the chief or primary.

*“To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia...”* We have previously mentioned about these countries. Here he addresses them as pilgrims. This corresponds with the spirit of the epistle being directed towards suffering people. This pilgrimage is not solely based on the shortness of temporal life, but rather on that which is much better, our belonging to the kingdom of the heavenly Christ. As St. Paul said, *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* (Phil. 3:20)

The source of the feeling of being pilgrims is not pessimism,

but rather a cheerful outlook, a focus toward heavenly matters. This is our foundation for enduring sufferings with patience and rejecting earthly matters. Moreover, it is the foundation of all our spiritual life.

**St. John Climacus**<sup>1</sup> defined being pilgrims as: “Being pilgrims means forsaking all temporal matters on earth which hinder achieving our goal in the spiritual life. Pilgrimage is a humble behavior, hidden wisdom... knowledge about which most people do not know... hidden life... unseen goal... invisible meditation... longing for humility...desire for suffering... permanent determination on God’s love, abundant blessings... rejecting vain glory... deep silence.”

Hence, pilgrimage is carrying the human soul, with all of our energy, to cross over sufferings and tribulations for the love of the Holy Trinity.

## **2. GOD’S WORK IN SALVATION**

### **First: The love of the Holy Trinity to us:**

Since all of the epistle is centered on the sufferings in the life of the believer, it was necessary for St. Peter to start with the topic of “*Salvation*,” which the Holy Trinity offers to us with an indescribable love for us. Discovering God’s sacrificing love, is the incentive behind one’s enduring sufferings with thanksgiving. Therefore, St. Peter talks about:

1. The **Father’s love** declared in His choice of man.
2. The **love of the Holy Spirit** declared in our sanctification by obedience.
3. The **love of the Son** declared on the Cross.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Ladder 3: 1*

**The Father choosing us: “elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (v. 2).**

## 1. God declared His love to us by choosing us for the kingdom:

The fanatic Jew misunderstood this choice, for they thought that God is prejudiced toward a specific people or race (ie through circumcision). Therefore, the apostle, concerning circumcision, had to talk about the Father choosing us, for he clarified that the choice is based on the “*foreknowledge of God the Father.*” This foreknowledge is different from the will, for His will is that everyone is saved, but due to His foreknowledge, He knows who are the ones who will accept, believe and abide in Him. As St. Paul said, “*For whom He fore knew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...*” (Rom. 8:29). On the cross, the Son opened His arms declaring the Father’s calling to the entire human race. However, the Father knows who are the ones who follow Him and abide in His commandments, as the Son knows His sheep (John 10:14).

St. Peter here calls the believers “*the chosen.*” **St. Augustine** comments that not all the believers abide till the end, but the chosen are among the believers. The choice here is not depriving one from his freedom, but is the “*sanctification of the Spirit for obedience,*” that is, submission to the work of the Spirit of the Lord in obedience. **St. Augustine** tackled this subject by saying<sup>2</sup>:

*“St. Paul said to Philemon, ‘Whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel, but without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, **but voluntary**’* “(Phil.1:13,14)

*“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and*

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<sup>2</sup> Aug. Man’s perfection in Righteousness 19

*your descendants may live”* (Deut. 30:15,19).

Also in the Book of Sirach, “ *It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him”* (Sirach 15:14-17).

Also, in the book of Isaiah: “*If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”* (Is. 1:19, 20).

We cannot reach the end without our will being involved, and we cannot achieve our goal unless we receive Divine help.

## **2. Sanctification of the Spirit for obedience:**

The Father loves us and, He chose us for Himself. The Holy Spirit loves us with the same love of the Father, for He is the Spirit of the Father and, His work is to sanctify us for obedience.

Man cannot sanctify himself nor can he struggle by himself; that is why God granted us the Holy Spirit to help us. In the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, the Holy Spirit lives inside us and we become His own. In the sacraments of penance and confession, our sins are forgiven, and in the sacrament of the Eucharist, we abide in Him. The Spirit offers us works of righteousness from love, joy, peace, and meekness. The Spirit sanctifies us and helps us for obedience and perseverance<sup>3</sup>.

## **3.” And sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”:**

God’s love in choosing and sanctifying us made Him pay a high price. The blood of the Lord Jesus acting as an offering for our sins, a cure for our ailments and a covenant for His fellowship! In

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to the “Divine Love”, chapter of “God my Sanctifier”, p. 801-1044.

front of this sacrificing love, we are ashamed to complain from any tribulation nor grumble from any suffering nor fear death!

**“Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”** Since He granted us the Divine capability as He paid the price and granted us His Spirit, the Helper in our struggle, He overflows His grace and peace.

**1. Grace:** His free gifts and Divine blessings fill the heart with peace.

**2. Peace:** It depends on the grace of God. When one realizes his reconciliation with God, this is the source of peace and happiness. Thus one is infatuated with the fellowship in God’s love and is elevated above all sufferings. This fellowship reflects our peace to others, even the troubled. Because we are strong and steadfast on the inside, the outside is does not see us worried<sup>4</sup>.

## **Second: God’s New Gifts**

St. Peter writes about the greatness of God’s free gifts which we receive through the merit of the Blood: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again...”** (v.3). Glory is to You O our Father, for You have offered us the most precious gift through Your abundant mercy. You have granted us new birth through baptism! All our worship is built upon this birth, for You have granted us:

**1. New Birth:** We were removed from the old olive tree and were grafted in the new olive tree (Rom. 11:24). Our old man is crucified and we are granted a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”** (Tit.3:5). **St. Didymus the Blind** said, “When we are submerged in the baptismal font because of the goodness of God the Father and the grace of the Holy

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to interpretation 2 John 3

Spirit, we are washed from our sins. And are renewed from the old man, and are sealed by His power to be His own. When we come out of the baptismal font, we put on Christ our Savior as a new garment worthy of the honor of the Holy Spirit who renewed us and sealed us<sup>5</sup>.”

**2. New Hope:** “*To a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (v. 3). In the Old Testament every one was concentrating on the Promised Land and temporal blessings as a symbol for the Heavenly Jerusalem and the eternal blessings. However, now after the new birth from the Heavenly Father and the heavenly mother (the Church), it is not appropriate for us to have hope in the earthly matters. This new hope is based on the resurrection of the Lord, for we, as members in His Body, take off all temporal hope and look upward for a living hope toward an eternal inheritance. It is a living hope because it springs from a living heart continuously overflowing with a life of never ending love!

**3. Eternal inheritance:** The one born of the flesh expects a material inheritance, however, the one born of the spirit longs for a spiritual inheritance. “*And if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...*” (Rom. 8:17). What are the features of this spiritual inheritance?

**a.” *To an inheritance incorruptible*”:** for it is not an earthly inheritance but rather heavenly.

**b.” *And undefiled*”:** for it differs from an earthly inheritance that it can be taken by force or through robbery; however, evil spending may cause it to be lost.

**c.” *And that does not fade away*”:** for its beauty and splendor will never fade away.

**d.” *Reserved in heaven for you*”:** for this is the subject of God’s care and protection; therefore, we should never despair for God has prepared

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<sup>5</sup> *Divine Love p. 852.*

heaven for us in spite of all our misconduct.

**St. John Chrysostom** said: “Look how our nature was demeaned then elevated! For one could never be lowered more than what he had been, nor be risen more than where Christ was and raised us with Him. Today is the day where the Lord has risen and our nature has risen above all creation!<sup>6</sup>”

**4. New Power:** “*Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (v. 5). The divine hand which protects the inheritance also protects us, who are expecting the inheritance, because it offers us the possibility to be sanctified for the heavenly wedding which is declared for the Great Day.

### **3. OUR STAND TOWARD THE SALVATION**

God offers us the means for us to achieve salvation; however, we will not enjoy salvation unless we actively participate via our own will. Our participation does not discount God’s act of salvation, deny His freely given gift, nor drive us to self-righteousness. Even though faith, hope, love, and works are essential for our salvation, they are not by our own power, but are gifts that God offers to those who struggle and are built on the merit of the Blood of Christ.

#### **First: Faith, hope, love**

There is no justification without faith, hope and love (to be precise deeds of love). We cannot benefit from God’s mighty deeds for our salvation without faith, hope and love. What is our obligation, then?

**1. Faith:** “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials that the genuineness of your faith, being*

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<sup>6</sup> *Divine Love*, p. 737–740.

***much more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire...***” (v.6 & 7). St. Peter talks about our duty toward salvation. He asks us for practical faith.

**2. Life full of joy:** Faith in the Lord brings a joy that cannot be diminished by sufferings, temptations, nor any other circumstances. Let us rejoice with our mother the Virgin St. Mary saying, “*My soul rejoices in God my Savior.*” And let us sing with King David as he repented, “*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.*”

**3. Life full of temptations:** “*You have been grieved by various trials.*” In other words, trials are obligatory in the life of the believer. Through trials, we share with the Suffering Lord. The believer is exposed to various trials carrying the cross with the Lord Jesus, like Simeon of Cyrene. In reality these trials are few because no matter how long we live on earth, it is nothing compared to eternity. From the divine grace of God, endurance purifies our faith even-though we receive it through strife. Our endurance does not nullify that salvation is free and that it grants us God’s blessing.

**4. Hope:** “*May be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (v. 7). Hope supports the believer in tribulations because it lifts up his eyes to the Great Day of the Lord.

a. Praise: from God for his patience and endurance till the end.  
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b. Honor: in front of his brothers sharing with Him in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

c. Glory: for he deserves to be united with the Heavenly Groom!

**5. Love:** “*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing you rejoice with joy*

*inexpressible and full of glory” (v. 8).* We do not see what we are going to be like, yet we believe hoping for the eternal glory; therefore, we love God and rejoice because of His work in us. We love the revelation of Jesus Christ where our corruptible body carries incorruptibility, and the soul sees her Heavenly Groom face to face. This is the end of our faith and “the salvation of our souls.”

As **St. Augustine** said<sup>7</sup>, “The apostle says here that we are saved through the new birth, yet he declares in another place that ‘*For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*’” (Rom. 8:24, 25). St. Peter said a similar statement: “***Though now you do not see Him, yet believing you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls***” (v. 8 & 9).

Since this time is the time of faith, the reward of faith is the salvation of our souls, and this faith works with love (Gal. 5:16), then one should not doubt that these days will come to an end. At the end we shall receive the reward, not only the salvation of our bodies, which St. Paul had talked about in Romans 8: 23, but also the salvation of our souls, as St. Peter said. This present age will end; therefore, we rely on hope more so than on focusing on receiving the reward. We have to remember that though our inner man, which is the soul, is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), yet while we wait on eternity for the body and salvation of our souls, we say we are saved because of the deposit, which we have received here on Earth. We consider all matters, which the Only Begotten Son has heard from the Father and which we hope to obtain in the future, even-though the Lord has declared these things as though we have already received them. This yearning for the heavens and the longing for the eternal salvation is:

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<sup>7</sup>N. & P. N. Frs, p. 323.

1. The subject of the prophecy of the prophets.

2. The subject of the preaching of the Gospel.
3. The subject of the amazement of the heavenly creatures.

**1. The subject of the prophecy of the prophets:** They desired eternity through love and the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit of Christ” has granted them prophesy about the salvation. St. Peter said, “*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Sprit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (v.10 & 11). They looked and searched for it, and it was the proof of love. The Spirit of Christ has granted them to testify for the eternity for the glories are related to the sufferings of Christ, for there is no salvation without the shedding of blood. The cross, to which the fathers and prophets testified, was the center of the symbols and prophecies, for the Lord said, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad*” (John 8:56). They saw it in a surpassing way; they saw the sufferings. Here, the apostle mentions the sufferings in the plural form to reveal their intensity and abundance. Also, St. Peter mentioned the glories in the plural form because as the sufferings abound likewise do the glories. Here there is an inner longing for the soul to carry the sufferings of Christ without grumbling in order to participate in the glories. This is the meaning of true love.

**2. The subject of the preaching of the Gospel:** Since the prophets loved the Lord through the shadows of prophecies and desired to see the cross of the Lord and His glories, how much more should we love Him since He did all that for our sake? “*To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*” (v. 12). In the fullness of time, we preach about the things that the prophets desired to see. Here, St. Peter states that the prophets were ministering,

that is, it was a matter of ministry and humility and not pride.

**3. The subject of the amazement of the heavenly creatures:** “...*things which angels desire to look into*” (v. 12). Love is one of the traits of the angels too: that is why they desire to see the salvation of man. Their desire is not mere curiosity but rather sharing and longing for man’s repentance. (Luke 15:10). God’s great work with us is the subject of the amazement of the angels and their praises to the Creator!

## **Second: Strife and Work:**

Since we look toward God’s salvation for us, believing in Him, hoping for the inheritance, for love and for eternity, what do we do now?

**1. “Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober...” (v.13).** St. Peter is waking up the bride to meet her Groom repeating the call three times: “*be sober, be watchful, be sober*” (ch. 4:7; 5:8), so she may be always ready for her Groom girding up her loins! St. Peter adapted this comparison from what the travelers used to do. They used to gird their loins because their clothes were long, so their long clothes would not hamper them. Or he may have adapted this comparison because one rolls up his sleeves while deeply thinking on an important matter. Or he may have adapted this comparison because the fishermen used to gird their loins while walking into the water. Then, let us gird our minds with righteousness in the life of holiness resembling our Bridegroom. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** said, “Let us gird our minds resembling our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ about whom Isaiah wrote: ‘*Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist*’” (Is. 11:5<sup>8</sup>).

**2. ” Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 13).**

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<sup>8</sup> *Epistles of the Resurrection, epistle 3, p. 52*

Watching without hope faints. Therefore, all our hope should be directed toward the glory (grace), which we shall receive when the Lord Jesus appears. May the Lord be our hope (1 Thess. 1:3), and His appearance be before our eyes because He is not far from us, but He comes to us. In the Greek script, it means that He is on the way so we may receive Him. Let our hope be “*fully*” in the eternity, that is, with perfection and maturity. As **St. John Chrysostom** said, “Certainly, hope resembles a strong rope hanging from heaven to help our spirits. Whoever holds on steadfastly to this rope is elevated above the temptations of this evil world. If one weakens and does not hold on to this hope, he will fall into the pit<sup>9</sup>.”

**3. “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance...” (v. 14).** This means that we should look forward to the reality of our splendid position as children of the Heavenly Father, who is full of goodness. As obedient children, let us not behave as we did when we were ignorant. As **St. Augustine** said<sup>10</sup>, “We have earthly parents who beget us on earth for struggle then death. However, we have other parents, for God is our Father and the church is our mother, who begets us for eternal life. Let us reflect on whose children are we. Let us behave accordingly in a manner fit for such a Father.

We found a Father in heaven; therefore, we have to be careful in our behavior on earth. Whoever is related to such a Father as ours has to behave in a way fitting to deserve that relation and to obtain that inheritance.” How should we behave? “*But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear*” (v.15-17). St. Peter clarified the source, the incentive and the boundaries of our behavior:

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<sup>9</sup> “You will Return with greater Power” by St. John Chrysostom

<sup>10</sup> *The Lord’s Prayer*, 68 ed. P. 9

1. Our behavior: **is holiness**, that is, love for heavenly matters and hatred of sin.

2. Its incentive: First: to walk according to the call with which we are called as obedient children to submit to the will of the Holy Father. As **Tertullian** said<sup>11</sup>, “God’s will is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3) for He wants us to be according to His likeness, to be holy as He is holy. (Lev. 11:44).” St. Peter puts the Day of Judgment before our eyes as an incentive for leading a life of holiness and righteousness.

3. Its source: The Holy God is our Father, and this is what Christianity is all about, that is, to realize the fatherhood of God and to enjoy it. This fatherhood is not build on partiality, but rather on God’s mercies and His justice, for He judges every one according to his deeds, without any partiality. Therefore, we should not despair for He is our Father, nor should we be negligent for He is the Judge. He is the just Father and the compassionate Judge. Thus, the apostle concerning circumcision abolished the incorrect Jewish thought that God is biased towards the Jews at the expense of the other nations.

4. Its boundaries: “*In all your conduct.*” In Greek, it means in all the roads of life or in every behavior; whether in silence or talk, whether in inner thoughts or in apparent acts.... Let every thing in us be sanctified for the Lord.

#### **4. MEDITATING IN THE GREATNESS OF THE SALVATION:**

Since we are required to be watchful and to live in hope, obedience, holiness, and in God’s fear, then we accept the hard labor and sufferings voluntarily. The motive behind that is our continuous reflection on the greatness of the salvation, for it is:

1. Not with silver or gold

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<sup>11</sup> Tert. : *On exhortation to chastity 1.*

2. Eternal redemption!
3. It makes our faith and hope steadfast in the Father!
4. It grants us the capability of being pure.
5. It gives us the new birth.

**1. Not with silver or gold:** “*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your father, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (v.18, 19).

One pays silver or gold to free the captives of war. However, the Lord did not pay silver nor gold to redeem us from our aimless conduct, but He presented His precious blood, the sufferings which the Son of God has endured and which led to the reproach of the cross! He presented His precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. The lamb is considered the most pure animal (Ex. 12:5, Deut. 28:3). The lamb was a symbol of the holy, harmless Lord Jesus (Heb. 7:26, John 1:29). **Tertullian** said: “You were bought at a price, that is with the blood. You were removed from the tyranny of the flesh to glorify God in your bodies<sup>12</sup>.” Meditating in the Cross of the Lord Jesus makes the soul yearn for sufferings, despise the riches of the world and urges her to seek the eternal glory. **St. Ambrose** said: “Therefore, the Cross of the Lord is my wisdom! The death of the Lord is my salvation! For we are saved with His precious blood as St. Peter said<sup>13</sup>.” He addresses the rich to reflect on that price saying: “Let no one think that a different price was paid for him because of his richness. Richness in the Church is richness in faith, for a believer has the world of riches. Do not wander for a believer owns the inheritance of Christ, who is richer than the whole world. It was said to all and not only to the rich that you were redeemed with the precious blood. If you want to be rich, obey the One who said, ‘*Be holy in all your*

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<sup>12</sup> Tert. : *On Modesty* 16.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Christian Faith* 3: 5

conduct.’ He said, ‘*Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning in fear.*’ He said in fear, neither in luxury nor in pride, but in fear. You have a temporary stay here on earth, so use it wisely!<sup>14</sup>”

**2. Eternal Redemption:** “*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*” (v. 20). Let us meditate on His eternal love as this redeeming act is not new. Before He created us, that is before the foundation of the world, He planned to redeem us and to pay for our rebellion. This is the reason for the joy of the true believers to realize the sacrificing love of God for them. This drives them to lovingly kiss the cross and carry Him joyfully.

**3. It makes our faith and hope steadfast:** “*Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God*” (v. 21). St. Peter wanted to rebuke the heresy of Philo the Alexandrian, who said that there are two gods: one for the Old Testament, who is severe and punishes sinners, and the other of the New Testament who is gentle and compassionate with sinners. Thus, St. Peter emphasizes that what the Son did was in obedience to the Father; therefore our faith and hope in Christ are in God the Father and not separated from the Father. Christ obeyed the Father, “*Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*” (Heb. 5:8). He submitted to the will of the Father; therefore, He emptied Himself, incarnated, suffered, rose from the dead, and took the glory by the will of the Father, which is the same as the will of the Son<sup>15</sup>.

**4. It grants us the capability of purification:** “*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another*

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<sup>14</sup> Letter 63

<sup>15</sup> Refer to the article “His obedience to the Father” in the book of “Divine Love”, p. 225-228.

*fervently with a pure heart*" (v.22). Let us meditate on the greatness of this salvation because He does not rob one's freedom, but He asks one to strive. For it is written, "You have purified your souls..."; therefore, there is no salvation for anyone who does not purify himself. Obeying truth through the Holy Spirit, that is obeying the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, fulfills this purification. Obedience is by our will, whereby our will submits to the will of Christ, so that His purpose is fulfilled in us. Obedience requires strife and labor, and the Holy Spirit supports us in that! This obedience is summarized in our brotherly love because this is the purpose of the Lord Jesus and His commandment. St. Peter said that the brotherly love is open to all the human race:

1. **Without partiality** or bias.
2. "**Without hypocrisy**," for it stems from inner love not from outward incentive.
3. "**With a pure heart**": It has been purified with the Holy Spirit and has become pure in its purpose.
4. "**Fervently**," for it is according to the love of Christ who died for us.

**5. It grants us the new birth:** "*Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever'*" (v. 23-25). Here, St. Peter emphasizes "*the new birth.*" Because through it, we enjoy the greatness of salvation, and through it, we have the right to the inheritance and are willing to joyfully go through suffering. Here, he makes a comparison between the spiritual birth and the physical birth. The spiritual birth is from an incorruptible seed. It is from the living word of God that endures forever. By word, St. Peter means:

1. Logos<sup>16</sup>: In other words, the Word Incarnate, for through His crucifixion, burial and resurrection, we were buried with Him in baptism so we may rise up by putting on Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

2. The word of the gospel: It focuses on the cross without which the heavenly birth would not have been existed. **St. Ambrose** said: “Water, after being sanctified through the mystery of the cross, becomes fit to be used in the baptismal font and the chalice of salvation. As Moses the prophet threw the rod in the well of water, likewise the priest utters on the baptismal font with the testimony of the cross so the water may become sweet due to the work of the grace<sup>17</sup>.”

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to Fr. Hepolitus, “The Refutation of all Heresies” 4: 5.

<sup>17</sup> The Sacraments by Fr. Ambrosios, *Morcus Magazine*.

## Chapter 2

After St. Peter concluded his talk about the salvation through the second birth, he discusses our responsibilities as children of God.

### 1. The negative aspect:v.1

### 2. The positive aspect:

First: To be joined to the mother.v. 2

Second: To be joined to God, the true Stone.v. 2 -10

Third: To be attached to the practical behavior:v. 11,12

### 3. Our behavior in society as children of God.

First: Submission to the rules of the country:v.13-17

Second : Faithfulness in the service.v.18-25

## 1. THE NEGATIVE SIDE

*“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (v. 1).* Since we have received our heavenly birth, it is more appropriate to lay aside all the evil works of the old man and its lust, which hamper the growth of the new man created in accordance with the image of God in righteousness and holiness of truth. Therefore, we should do the following:

1. Let us lay aside *all malice*, that is wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8), for it is one of the traits of Satan and the pagans who resist God and who deliberately follow evil and harm.

2. Let us lay aside *all guile*, so we may become like our simple Father, who is without deceit or any twisted ways. Thus, we return to the simplicity of childhood in our worship and our preaching. Thus, we become children of the Kingdom. (Matt. 18:3).

3. Let us detest *hypocrisy*, so we do not put on the pretense of

the Pharisees, but rather seek the hidden glory as a bride adorned to her groom.

4. Let us forsake *envy* where one examines his brother's failure. This was what made Satan attack Adam, and why the Jews betrayed the Lord Jesus<sup>19</sup>.

5. Let us abandon *evil speaking* by which one insults his brother publicly and demeans him. This is the third level of wrath. The saints<sup>20</sup> divide wrath into wrath that is internal, wrath accompanied by words like "*Raca*" and wrath accompanied by insulting words like "*You fool*."

## 2. THE POSITIVE SIDE:

### First: Attachment to the Blood:

*"As new born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby"* (v. 2). The starting point of the positive side is that the believer continuously realizes that he is a nursing baby "*As new born babes*." Nothing can satisfy him except his compassionate mother's breast, thus he desires it and throws himself on it. The advantage of the church's milk is that it is pure and grants continuous growth, "*that you may grow thereby*." Notice that the word "*pure*" in Greek is derived from "Logos, that is Word," meaning the milk which the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, grants in His church. **How does the church nurse us?**

1. **St. Clement of Alexandria** said: "**It [the church] is the milk of love!** Blessed is he who nurses from it! It is available in winter, as well as in summer. It does not need to be heated or to be cooled, for it is always ready<sup>21</sup>."

2. **It is the honest spiritual teachings** that we transmit from

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<sup>19</sup> *Sayings of the Fathers about envy in the book of "Brotherly Love".*

<sup>20</sup> *Brotherly Love, p. 232.*

<sup>21</sup> *Instructor 1: 6.*

generation to generation. It does not contain any philosophy nor elaboration, but rather it is spirit and life, which the saints have experienced throughout the ages.

3. **It is the living rituals**, which revive the soul, and help the flesh and spirit in worship.

4. **It is the intercessions and prayers of the saints.**

## **Second: Attachment to the Lord, the living stone:**

*“If indeed you have tasted the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (v. 3 & 4).* “If” does not indicate doubt, but rather the assurance that the Lord is gracious. Whoever tastes that the Lord is gracious comes to Him as a living stone. Perhaps St. Peter remembered what the Lord had called him “Peter, or Cepha or Rock” when he declared his faith in the Lord Jesus. Here, St. Peter reveals that the Lord Jesus is the rock or the living stone on which the church is built. **St. Cyprian** said<sup>22</sup>: [Christ was called “Stone,” for it was written in Isaiah, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily”(Is. 28:16). Also, in Psalm 117; “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” (v. 22). Also, in Zechariah, “For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold I will engrave its inscription,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day...” (ch.3:9). In Deuteronomy, “Joshua, the son of Nun, took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God”” (**Josh. 24:26, 27**).] This is the stone that Jacob laid under his head

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<sup>22</sup> Three books of testimonies against the Jews 2: 16.

as mentioned in the book of Genesis, for Christ is the head of the man.

When he slept, he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven where the Lord is, and His angels are ascending and descending. It is the stone that Moses sat upon on top of the mountain, when Joshua was fighting the Amaleks as recorded in the book of Exodus. Through the Holy Stone and Moses, His servant, sitting upon it, Joshua defeated the Amaleks as Christ defeated the devil. It is the great stone mentioned in the book of First Kings wherein the Ark of the Covenant was placed. In the book of First Kings, it is the stone with which David slew Goliath. Goliath's defeat and death symbolize the defeat of Satan and his followers, whose foreheads are not sealed with the name of Christ; this seal continuously grants us hope and life. It is the stone that Samuel had put on when conquering the strangers, and he called it the stone of help, that is, the stone that helps us. The Lord Jesus is the stone with which we conquer Satan, and He is the living stone to which we go.

The apostle addresses the believers saying, coming to Him, not when you come to Him, for we should continuously struggle till the last breath. It is the living stone that is full of love. Let us approach Him not in dry worship but in love, where we praise Him and hear His praise. We listen to His rebuke and reveal to Him all that is in our hearts, for He is not hard or cold concerning our weaknesses.

***“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5).*** Since He is the living Stone, we are built on Him as living stones, for as He is living, we live by Him (John 14:19). He made us spiritual houses and habitations for God's spirit (Eph. 2:18-21). In this verse, we notice that:

1. It is one house that is not divided against itself and attached by the bond of love beyond the limits of time and place. All the apostles and martyrs are as living stones. St. Mary is praying for us, we who are struggling, as we are living stones too, and we also pray and love the future generations. **Hermas**<sup>23</sup> saw in one of his visions that the victorious church is like a building. Many stones from the earth were moved and built beside

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<sup>23</sup> *The Pastor, Book 1 vision 3.*

each other and united together that the rows were not noticed and it became like a tower as one stone.

2. **Hermas** also saw that many stones refused to go into the building. These stones are the ones that depend on their own power and the belief that they can build their foundation on Christ outside the church; thus, they rejected the spirit of the fathers and refused their doctrines and wanted to become independent, hence they became outside the spiritual house.

**“Common priesthood”**: for we are to offer spiritual sacrifices from *“within the heart,”* as **Tertullian** said: “This sacrifice proceeds from the whole heart and is nourished by faith and guards the truth. It is full of innocence, purity, and chastity and is adorned by love. We have to protect it through our good deeds presenting psalms, praises on the altar of God to receive everything from Him<sup>24</sup>.” All believers offer these sacrifices, but there are priests who are devoted for the priesthood as mentioned in the epistle of James chapter five, and St. Paul has clarified their conditions in his first epistle to Timothy<sup>25</sup>. **What are these acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God?**

1. **Slaying the human will or the ego** is the best sacrifice, with which one raises his hand to the cross like a spiritual knife to slay his personal will and his private desires as Abraham raised his knife to slaughter Isaac. As Isaac, the son of blessing and of promise, returned alive, we too should slaughter our will by the cross, so we may have the strong will of Christ, His desires and the mind of Christ. Thus, we sing with the apostle saying: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” I have crucified the “ego,” so Christ may live in me.

2. **The sacrifice of humility** before God and men: As David, the psalmist said: ***“For you do not desire a sacrifice, or else I would give it.; You do not delight in burnt offering. . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, these O***

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<sup>24</sup> Tert. On Prayer 28.

<sup>25</sup> Refer to the First Epistle of St. Timothy.

***God, You will not despise” (Ps.***

**51:16,17).**

**3. The sacrifice of good deeds:** As St. Paul said, “*Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*” (Heb.13:16). David the Psalmist said, “*Offer the sacrifices of righteousness*” (Ps. 4:5). Doing good and righteous deeds involve sacrifice and carrying the cross, and the Lord smells them as acceptable sacrifices, through His cross.

**4. The sacrifice of pain and suffering:** for the sake of the Lord, as St. Paul said, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine... as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’*” (Rom. 8:35, 36).

**5. The sacrifice of the flesh:** The believer does not look at his body as an enemy, but rather he nourishes and cherishes it (Eph. 5:29). When the Bible or the holy Fathers speak about the enmity of the flesh, they mean the desires of the flesh. **St. Augustine** wrote a book about controlling the soul that emphasized the importance of the flesh and that refuted what the heretics said, which was that flesh is an enemy<sup>26</sup>. Let us then control the flesh through the bonds of love and offer it on the altar. Let us hold on to the cross of the Lord offering the members of the body as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). Let us slay the members of the flesh and not present them as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present them as instruments of righteousness to God. Hence, all the desires, emotions and feelings of the members of the body are sanctified to become energyhelping the spirit instead of a force fighting the spirit.

**6. The sacrifice of thanksgiving:** St. Paul commands us saying: “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks*

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<sup>26</sup> Printed under the name of “Chastity”, 1962

to His name” (Heb.13: 15) <sup>27</sup>. The sacrifice of thanksgiving is the sacrifice of the angels. The heavenly creatures have no physical bodies to offer as living sacrifices, nor material belongings to offer to charity, nor anyone to annoy them so that they may forgive. They have no contradicting will to their Lord’s, nor do they suffer any physical pains. The only thing they can offer is their continuous praise and thanksgiving. Therefore, the church trains her children to live a life of praise as in the praises of psalmody, psalms and hymns, so they may be trained to do the work of the angels. **St. Anthony the Great**, the father of the monks, elaborates on this exercise: “When you go to sleep on your bed, remember God’s blessings, His care for you and thank Him for that. Then when you are filled with these memories, you will rejoice in the spirit offering praises to Him in the highest. When one is not committing evil, the only thing that can satisfy God is the offering of thanksgiving<sup>28</sup>.”

*“Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame’” (v. 6).* The Father has put His Son as chief cornerstone in Zion, that is in the church, whereby the believer becomes a member in the mysterious Body of Christ. **Hermas** said: “The Lord Jesus is the old Rock and the new Door. When questioned about that, he said that this rock and the door is the Son of God. I asked, ‘How can the rock be old and the door be new?’ He answered, ‘Listen, O you ignorant, the Son of Man is old, for He is the Partner of the Father in the creation, thus He is eternal.’ I asked, ‘Why is the door new, my master?’ He answered, ‘For He was manifest in these last times (1 Pet.1:20) ; therefore, the door became new, so that whoever is saved through it, enters the kingdom of God.’ He asked, ‘The stones which formed the door were used in building the church, but the ones which did not form the door were thrown outside.’ He continued, ‘Likewise, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he accepts the name of Christ. If you desire to enter a city surrounded by fence and has only one

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<sup>27</sup> Refer to Ps. 56:12, 102:22.

<sup>28</sup> Filokalia p. 23.

door, you cannot

enter unless you enter through that door. In the same manner, no one can enter the kingdom of God except through believing in His Beloved Son Jesus Christ<sup>29</sup>.” The Lord Christ is the cornerstone who controls all of the building and connects each stone to the other. **St. Augustine** said<sup>30</sup>: “The cornerstone connects two walls; when the wicked Jews rejected the faith, He connected those who believed in Him with those who were previously Gentiles; thus, He joined the two without any prejudice toward the Jews as there thought in their blind fanaticism.” The Lord Christ is also the mysterious cornerstone who joined the wall of the Old Testament with the wall of the New Testament. On Mount Tabor Moses, who received the Law, met with Elijah the prophet and three disciples, uniting the two testaments, declaring that the Lord is the Cornerstone for the Law, the prophecies and the preaching of the Gospel.

*“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’ (v. 7). When building Solomon’s temple, the builders brought a huge stone, but they could not find a use for it; therefore, they forsook it and neglected it, but when they were searching for a cornerstone, they could not find another one except that huge stone, so the builders rejoiced with it. The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus, despised Him and crucified Him because they wanted Christ to be in accordance with their earthly interests, reigning as an earthly king. However, those who believed in Him found that Jesus Christ Himself, being the chief cornerstone through whom the whole building is joined together, grows into a holy temple for the Father and in whom you all also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22). We found Him the spiritual Rock, which is not solid, that followed us and from which we drink the same spiritual drink. (1 Cor. 10:4).St. Augustine* said: “The Jews knew Him and they crucified Him; but

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<sup>29</sup> *The Book of the Shepherd, 3 rev.12*

<sup>30</sup> *Sermons on certain chapters from the New Testament 1:14,15.*

the whole world heard about Him and believed in Him<sup>31</sup>.” St. Peter said that He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to those who

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<sup>31</sup> *Reference 30 (12: 4)*

reject Him. ***“They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed”*** (v. 8), Saying, ***“To which they also were appointed,”*** does not mean that God is the One who rejected them, but they rejected Him, and the Lord had declared earlier what they would do (Is. 8:13-15). Moreover, He declared it when He said, ***“Whoever falls on that stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder”*** (Luke 20:18). He is like a stone, on which they stumbled, and a rock of offense. A rock is usually huge, and normally one would not stumble on it. However, in their disobedience, they stumbled in Him, but He was not affected at all! They did not obey the Law (The Word carved on stone) because of their stony hearts. Thus they stumbled on the living stone, but we, upon obeying Him, do not stumble in Him. **St. Augustine** said:

“With your soft heart, you can see in these stony tablets (The New Testament) what fits the stiff-necked people. In the mean time, you can see the Stone, your Bridegroom, whom Peter has denied. For them, He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; but for you, He is the stone, which the builders rejected, and has become the chief cornerstone.

Do not be afraid when you read these tablets for they are sent to you from your Bridegroom. For others, they are like stones because of their insensitivity, however, to you, they refer to power and steadfastness.

The finger of God wrote these tablets, and the finger of God cast out the devils. Also, the teachings of Satan which tortures the conscience, are cast out by the finger of God<sup>32</sup>.”

***“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”*** (v. 9). Since we are founded on the Cornerstone and are attached to Him we are: ***“A chosen generation”***: The apostle of circumcision uttered this statement to correct Jewish misconceptions concerning being a chosen generation, which was that God has chosen them

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<sup>32</sup> Reply to Faustus the manichean 15: 5

because they were

Jews. However, when the Lord incarnated and many Gentiles were from His ancestors and when He sent His apostles to the Gentiles, God's love was revealed to humanity; being chosen should not lead to pride and fanaticism, but rather to carrying the responsibility.

***“A royal priesthood”***: This was excerpted from the book of Exodus (Exodus 19:1). Nevertheless, in the Old Testament, we know that not every one was a priest or a king, but only the chosen. Therefore, the saying ***“royal priesthood”*** means that from our midst there are priests dedicated to the ministry of the King of kings.

***“A holy nation and His own special people”***: Our special function is to minister and to witness to the One who called us from darkness to His marvelous light through practical behavior as children of light.

What we proclaim are the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. This means that we reflect the beauty of the radiant Christ, so people may see His divine light inside our hearts and get to know Him through our behavior in our lives. Thus, the saying of the Psalmist David is fulfilled, ***“Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth”*** (Ps. 50:2).

In all that, we do not take credit, but the credit goes to the One who had mercy on us. St. Peter continues, ***“Who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”*** (v.10). We were full of darkness, but He called us to His marvelous light... What else could we want? He has chosen us to be His people as Hosea prophesied. (Hos. 1:6, 9, 2:23).

### **Third: Practical Behavior**

After St. Peter concluded his speech about our foundation on the Lord Jesus and proclaiming His praises, he started to clarify the

importance of proper conduct by saying, “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (v.11).

He calls them “*Beloved*” to attract them to listen and to apply themselves. This call was very close to the souls of the disciples and apostles for they heard it from the loving Lord Jesus, and during the baptism and the transfiguration, they heard the voice of the Father saying of His Son, “*My Beloved Son;*” therefore, they became fond of it.

He also calls them *pilgrims*, that is guests, for he previously commanded them to forsake the lust of the flesh because they are God’s children, and also because of their feeling of being strangers and not being attached to the world. Our fathers the monks used to train the new monks to visit the cemeteries, daily for long hours, to realize the reality of this life.

When St. Theodore the ascetic fell in lust with the beautiful lady Hermoine, **St. John Chrysostom** wrote to him asking him to return to his first ascetic life, telling him about God’s abundant mercies. In order to overcome the lust of the flesh, He advised him to visit the cemeteries and reflect on the dust, ashes and worms, and in the mean time, to remember the end of evil and the happiness of the righteous<sup>33</sup>. Listen, St. Peter did not say abstain from sin, but rather he said to abstain from the root of sin, which is the “carnal lusts.” Father Dorotheos said, “Sins are fulfilling practically the lust of the flesh, that is, one practices what the lust stirs in him<sup>34</sup>.” We have to uproot these lusts, even if they were just thoughts.

This inner war between the lust of the flesh and the desires of the spirit exists continually, but it does not have any power over our will, as long as we do not yield to it. Therefore, let us abstain from the lusts of the flesh by not surrendering to them, but using the members of our body as instruments of righteousness. When they see the visible fruits, which are reflections of the inner purity and the victory over the source of the desires of the flesh, we witness of

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<sup>33</sup> “*You will return with greater power*” by St. John Chrysostom, p. 22

<sup>34</sup> *Filokalia* p. 152

God

to them<sup>35</sup>. Father Mathetes, from the second century<sup>36</sup>, compared the relationship of the soul and the flesh to the relationship of the true Christians and the pagans who constantly attack them<sup>37</sup>:

“The soul is spread throughout all the members of the body, like the Christians who are spread throughout all the cities of the world. The soul abides in the body but it is not from it, like the Christians who live in the world but they are not from the world. (John 17:11& 14:16)

The soul is invisible and it protects the visible body, likewise the Christians are visible but their righteousness is invisible.

The body hates the soul and attacks it, not because the soul harms the body but because it prevents him from enjoying the lust of the flesh. Likewise the world hates the Christians, although the Christians do not harm the world, but because they instruct them not to follow the lust of the flesh.

The soul loves the body who hates it; likewise the Christians like those who hate them.

The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet it protects the body; likewise the Christians are in the world as if in a prison yet they are not defiled in it.

The eternal soul dwells a tabernacle susceptible to death, and the Christians dwell as strangers in a temporary dwelling looking for their unperishable dwelling in heavens.

When the soul neglects food and drink, it becomes in a better condition; likewise when the Christians accept persecution, they multiply.”

**“Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (v. 12).** The Romans spoke against the Christians as evildoers! Tertullian, the scholar wrote:“The Tiber River flooded and it harmed the walls of Rome, and the Romans blamed that on

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<sup>35</sup> *“Chastity” by St. Augustine*

<sup>36</sup> *One of St. Paul’s disciples or his companions.*

<sup>37</sup> *The Epistle of Diognetus 6.*

the Christians. They used to blame the Christians whenever

the River Nile does not produce mud or whenever an earthquake or famine or pestilence occur and they used to scream, ‘Throw them to the lions’.” But on the Day of the Lord for judgment, which is the day when God reveals to their eyes the knowledge of the truth, the good conduct of the believers will be manifested, and they will glorify their Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). St. Cyprian the martyr wrote to Rogatanus the priest and other confessors who were thrown in prison: “I am delighted to tell you that this is a great responsibility put on your shoulders that through your testimony and your quiet righteous life, they may glorify God<sup>38</sup>.” St. Cyprian the bishop and martyr wrote that good conduct adorns the confessors and the martyrs.

### **3. OUR BEHAVIOR IN SOCIETY AS CHILDREN OF GOD**

#### **First: Submission to the governments:**

**“Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme” (v.13).** The Jews stirred up dissension among various rulers by stating that the Christians submit only to Christ the King; thus, they do not submit to the emperors or rulers and rebel against every law and regulation. To clarify this issue of whether the Christian should submit to the heavenly or earthly kingdom, the Lord declared the necessity of submitting to the governments (Matt. 22:21). Thus, St. Paul followed the same example (Rom. 13:1-7) and asked his disciple Titus to remind the people to submit to authorities and to be ready for every good work. (Titus 3:1)

The essence of Christianity is love and submission (humility), not pride and rebellion. **St. Augustine** is advising his people not to be afraid of the threats of the rulers when they force them to worship

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<sup>38</sup> *Epistle 13 (Oxford edition) to Rogatianus the priest*

the idols. He said<sup>39</sup>: “Should we follow the road of pride and ignore the

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<sup>39</sup> *Sermons of certain chapters from the New Testament 12*

authorities? St. Paul himself said, ‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God...’”(Rom. 13:1,2). **Tertullian** said<sup>40</sup>: “Regarding proper honor for kings and emperors, it is very clear that we have to be in complete obedience as the apostle commanded us to be subject to rulers and authorities (Tit 3:1). However, there are limits to this obedience, which is to keep ourselves from worshipping idols.” A good example for that is the three youths. In spite of their obedience to Nebuchadnezzar, they did not accept to worship his idols. Also, Daniel, who submitted to King Darius, yet he was steadfast in his faith (Dan. 6). **“Or to governors, as to those are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good” (v.14)**. This means that we do not fear our governors, but we love them and submit to them for they are appointed by God to punish the evildoers and to praise those who do good (Rom. 13:3,4). Let us submit to the rulers and pray that they deal justly with every one. This silences those who unjustly accuse the church. “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” (v.15)

Some may ask: Why do we submit to them, aren't we free? Freedom in Christianity is not chaos nor is it rebellion against rules and regulations, but rather joyful submission and obedience doing good and conquering evil under our feet. **“As free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God.” (v.16)** St. Anthony the Great said: “Do not think that the free are those who are free because of their positions, but rather because they are free in their lives and nature. The freedom of the soul and her blessings are a result of the inner purity and rejecting the earthly matters. A free person is the one who is not a slave to any lust of the flesh but subdues his body in chastity. He is satisfied with what God gives him, no matter how little, thanking God from all his

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<sup>40</sup> *On Idolatry 15.*

heart<sup>41</sup>.” A free person is free from the inside; thus, he is not enslaved to any lust. Freedom

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<sup>41</sup> *Filokalia* p. 24,43.

does not instill in us carelessness, but rather teaches us to carry responsibility. St. Irenaeus said: “A slave is accountable for his deeds, however a son is accountable not only for his deeds but for his words too, (Matt. 12:36), and for his thoughts too (Matt. 5:28); hence, obtaining this power of freedom makes him more sensitive to his mistakes<sup>42</sup>.”

**“Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (v.17).** St. Peter starts by honoring all people, so that they may not think there is partiality or humiliation in being poor or weak. We have to honor all God’s creation for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died. Whoever despises any human being despises his Creator and Savior. When we honor all people, we love our brothers. This is the love that St. Paul wrote about in chapter 13 of I Corinthians. Without that love, worship loses its essence. We have to fear God in love. If one does not love his brother whom he sees, then how can he worship God? The fear of God instills in us respect for the rulers and kings sent by Him. The incentive for honoring rulers is not the person of the rulers but the fear of God.

## **Second: Honesty in Service:**

**“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also the harsh” (v.18).** Since the basis for submission is the fear of God, the believer should not question his master’s deeds, but he should respect and obey them, even if they are harsh. St. Peter also means slaves by the word “servants”. The historian Benenos said that one of his friends had 4000 slaves who did not have any legal rights. Because many slaves believed in Christianity, St. Peter had to give them some advise concerning their work asking them to submit without grumbling even if their masters were harsh. Through instructing slaves in this manner, Christianity was able to win many of the masters. Through the

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<sup>42</sup> *Irenaeus against heresies 4 : 165*

good conduct and the sweet aroma of the slaves, they were able to win their

masters. The importance of honesty in work was manifested in the letter that Pope Theonas, the Alexandrian, wrote to Lucianus, one of the chief guardians of the emperor's palace. Here are some of the excerpts from this letter:

“My dear Lucianus, I do not want you to brag that some of the men from the emperor's palace have attained the knowledge of truth. Moreover, we need to offer gratitude to our Lord who uses us as good vessels for worthy deeds, and He granted you great honor in the eyes of the emperor so that the aroma of Christ may be manifested for the glory of Christ and the salvation of many.

The emperor himself is not a Christian, yet he trusts the Christians for they are the most honest people in their service. Therefore, you have to be very cautious lest you fall in any sinful act nor utter an unfruitful word so that the name of Christ may not be blasphemed.

God does not like you to bribe the emperor for your personal interests.

Beware of any covetous man who is an idolater (Eph. 5:4,5).

Let us do everything in meekness and righteousness so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in everything.

Fulfill the duties entrusted to you in the fear of God and in love to your boss, and with great carefulness.

Consider every matter coming from the emperor as if it is coming from God Himself, as long as it does not contradict with God's commandments; Let us be inflamed with love, fear and joy.

Trample all your vices and lusts of the flesh under your feet.

Abide in patience, courage and be revived with virtues and the hope of Christ.

Endure everything for the sake of your Creator. Endure everything and conquer everything so you may win Christ Himself.

My dear Lucianus, the wise man, endure gently the unwise, maybe they become wise (2 Cor. 11:19).

Do not harm anyone any time and do not make anyone angry.

If someone tried to harm you, look to the Lord Jesus... Do not let any day pass without reading part from the Holy Bible and meditating in it<sup>43</sup>.”

**“For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do well and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God” (v.19 & 20).** Slapping was the normal punishment for slaves when they erred. What is our glory if we are slapped because of our sins? However, whoever is slapped for doing good becomes commendable before God. The word “commendable” in Greek has two meanings, which are grace and favor. Father Piamon<sup>44</sup> related that an honorable lady at Alexandria asked Pope Athanasius for someone to help her. He told her about a widow who fears God. She came back asking for another woman to help her. This time he offered her a wicked widow who beat her . She came back thanking the Pope saying: “Truly, you have given me a lady who helped me and strengthened me. The first one used to honor me and spoil me with her services.”

The Lord Jesus is our example: **“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (v.21).** The Lord Jesus came Himself and lived as one of the servants and was slapped on the face. He did this so that we may follow His footsteps. “For to this you were called,” that is, this is Christ calling for us. St. Augustine said: “Let us lift our eyes to our Bridegroom, for He was hanged, unjustly, on the cross as a slave<sup>45</sup>.” Pope Athanasius the Apostolic said<sup>46</sup>:

“Our Lord endured unjustly to teach us how to endure. When He was beaten, He endured patiently, when He was insulted, He did not insult back. When He suffered, He did not threaten but rather offered His back to the scourges and His cheeks to

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<sup>43</sup> *A. N. Fathers V. 6 P. 158/161.*

<sup>44</sup> *Kassian p. 464 – 469.*

<sup>45</sup> *Spiritual values of Neyrouz Feast, p. 4*

<sup>46</sup> *Letters of the Resurrection, p. 120-121.*

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who smite. He did not turn His face from spitting.

His will was to be led to death so that we may see in Him all virtues and immortality, so that we may follow His footsteps so that, through the truth, we may trample on serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy (sin). “

What did Christ offer as an example?

1. **“Who committed no sin, now was guile found in His mouth’;” (v.22).** St. Peter was not talking about the holiness of the Lord Jesus, for He is holy without sin, but he discusses the way of the cross so that we may follow His footsteps. He did not commit any sin, yet He was accused of being an evildoer. He had no guile in His mouth, yet He was accused as a deceiver.

2. **“Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;” (v.23).** As a Judge, He has the right to take revenge, yet for the sake of the cross, He endured the insults as a silent sheep before its shearers (Is. 53:7); this is true for everyone who wants to walk with the Crucified Christ!

3. **“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (v.24).**

St. Peter, as an eyewitness to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, saw Him as an example for enduring suffering. He heard Him saying: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.” He entered the garden of Gethsemane to carry the sins of all humanity and to crucify them on the cross. St. Paul talked about the Lord Jesus as an example for enduring death on the cross.

St. Peter reveals the concept of the sufferings of the cross. It does not center around mere courage or the ability to endure but rather love and sacrifice. For He wanted His stripes, that is His wounds, to heal our wounds. He bent His back willingly to carry our sins in His body. “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). “He poured out His soul unto death, and He was

numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (v.12). Through the sufferings of His love, He demonstrated to us His extreme caring nature and that He is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, who seeks every sick soul, opening His arms to every one who goes astray! He chose death on the cross. This was not coincidence, but as St. Athanasius the Apostolic said<sup>47</sup>:

“It was not appropriate for the Lord to be sick and He is the One who heals others.

He came as the Savior not to die Himself, but to die instead of others.

If His death was in secret, it would not have witnessed the resurrection.

He became a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13), and this is the cross.

How can He call us (the Gentiles) if He were not crucified stretching His arms to call us?

Since the cross was the worst kind of death and the most brutal punishment, therefore the Lord Jesus endured the cross, willingly, through His humanity, redeeming all human beings from the worst punishment of death.”

St. Augustine said: “He chose the cross to taste the bitterest sufferings, for He died slowly, for He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). The scholar Tertullian said, “He chose the cross to fulfill the prophecies and the symbols written in the Old Testament<sup>48</sup>.”

How can we imitate the Crucified Christ? St. Peter said, “Having died to sins, might live for righteousness.” St. Ambrose said<sup>49</sup>: “Have you crucified sin to live for God? Whoever dies to sin, lives for God! Do you live for the One who sacrificed His Son to crucify our lusts in His body? Christ died for us so we may live in His life-giving Body; therefore, our rebellious nature has died in Him. Thus, the cross is the ship of our salvation.” St. Ambrose gave us

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<sup>47</sup> Summary of an article about “Was the shame of the cross necessary?” in the book of “Divine Love”.

<sup>48</sup> A. N. Fathers V, 3 p. 164–165.

<sup>49</sup> On the Holy Spirit 1 : 9: 109 & 110.

another lesson saying: “Upon looking at Jesus on the cross when  
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forgave those who crucified Him, who does not learn to forgive those who trouble him? Those qualities of Christ are your strength!

<sup>50</sup>”

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<sup>50</sup> *The Christian Faith 2: 11: 95.*

# Chapter 3

In this chapter, the apostle addresses the issue of our family relationships in Christ Jesus:

## **1. Marital commandments:**

**First: The woman's submission to man:v. 1-2**

**Second: Taking heed of our conduct: v. 3-6**

**Third: The relation of husband and wife:v. 7-8**

## **2. The relation of the Christian to those who trouble him: v. 9-22.**

## **1. MARITAL COMMANDMENTS**

### **First: The woman's submission to man:**

**“Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even, if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (v.1 & 2).** The Roman Law allowed a man to have authority over his wife and children as he did over slaves and animals. Thus, women had no rights at all, which caused some to flee. However, when Christianity came calling for love, some thought that Christianity urges women to rebel against their husbands. Therefore, the church directed these clear commandments to women, which instructs them to submit to their husbands.

St. Peter asks the women to submit to their husbands even if they do not obey the word. The husbands hear the practical word through the pure conduct of their wives, which is full of righteousness

and fear of God. It is not appropriate for her to teach her husband, because he is her head, yet she can win him to the Lord by her submission and good behavior. **St. John Chrysostom said:** “Through the obedience of the wife to her husband, he becomes meek toward her... Through love, all attack is abolished; if he is atheist, he will accept the faith, and if he is Christian, he will become a better Christian<sup>51</sup>.” Submission is not due to fear but rather it is submission in the Lord (Col. 3:18), for she submits because the church submits to her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:24). **St. Clement of Alexandria** said<sup>52</sup>:

“It is written in the Holy Bible that the Lord gave man the woman to help him. She can help her husband and relieve all his burdens through her service and her good conduct and ability.

If he is not influenced by her good behavior, then she does all what she can to live a pure life, trusting that God is her helper and her Savior in this life and the life to come.

Let her take God to be her Guide in all her undertakings, doing righteousness and looking at God’s blessings as her goal.”

St. Paul addresses Titus in his epistle saying: “The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” (Tit. 2:3-5)

## **Second: Taking Heed to Good Conduct:**

**“Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very special in**

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<sup>51</sup> “*Brotherly Love*”: *Attributes of loving husbands*, p. 258, 260.

<sup>52</sup> *Stromata*, 4 : 20.

**the sight of God” (v.3 & 4).** This part is read in the

liturgies of the departed virgins; the church wants to direct everyone to be adorned for her Groom with the inner ornamentation. The soul of the believer is adorned for her Bridegroom, but “the adulterous woman was arrayed with purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication” (Rev. 17:4). Let the women be adorned for their husbands, but they should know that what appeals to their husbands is not their outer adorning but their inner adorning. This is also what attracts the heart of Christ, for He said, “Behold, you are fair my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes” (Song of Sol. 1:15). **St. John Chrysostom** said:

“Do you want to be beautiful? Be clothed with giving alms, put on compassion, be filled with chastity, avoid being pride. All these are more honorable than gold and make the ugly look beautiful.

O woman, when you exaggerate in adorning yourself, you become worse than a naked woman, for you have taken off the beauty of your countenance.

If you put on a royal robe, would you put on it a robe of slaves? You have put on the Lord of the angels, how can you go back to the earthly matters?

To whom are you adorning yourself? Is it to please your husband? Then, do it at home! <sup>53</sup>”

**St. Clement of Alexandria** said: “The true adorning of a woman is not the outer one where others do it for her, but rather the inner adorning for which she struggles. The work of her hands grants her special beauty. Thus she adorns herself with her efforts. She weaves with her hands; for the one who is formed on God’s image cannot adorn herself with improper things from the market<sup>54</sup>.” **“For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose**

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<sup>53</sup> Summarized from “Brotherly Love”, p. 262.

<sup>54</sup> Instructor 3 : 11.

**daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror” (v.5 & 6).** St. Peter gives Sarah, Abraham’s wife, as an example for she was

adorned with:

1. Her reliance on God; therefore, she heeds to please God, not men.
2. Her submission to her husband, for she calls him “my lord” in love.
3. Her good deeds, that is her diligence in the salvation of her soul and caring for her home.
4. Her feeling of no fear at all for she submits; this is not due to the fear of a slave, but to marital love.

### **Third: The Relation of Man to his Wife:**

**“Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (v.7).** St. Peter puts great responsibility on men to treat their wives wisely. **St. Clement of Rome** said: “Let us direct our wives to what is good, so that they may reveal pure personalities which we admire, showing true humility<sup>55</sup>.” St. Peter enumerated the causes, which drive the man to honor his wife:

1. They are weaker vessels who need compassion in order not to perish.
2. They are members in the body, and the head is not holy unless the members are holy.
3. They are heirs with us in the eternal inheritance, without any partiality between man and woman.
4. To keep the peace of the heart and home, thus our prayers may be mingled with love and one spirit, without wrath and doubting. (I Tim. 2:8)

After concluding about family relations, St. Peter said: **“Finally, all of you, be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (v.8).** In the end, the purpose of all these commandments is to have one mind; this is true not only for those who are married, but for everyone (Phil.

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<sup>55</sup> *Letters of St. Clement of Rom, p. 6.*

1:27), and to have one heart toward one another, full of

brotherly love, compassion, and gentleness (Phil. 2:3). The Lord Jesus requested this unity in His farewell prayer (John 17:21) and commanded us to rejoice with the joyful and to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). “Courteous”, in the Greek, means humility before God. The Romans believed that courtesy was the opposite of courage.

## **2. THE RELATION OF THE CHRISTIAN WITH HIS PERSECUTOR:**

It is very hard for someone to love the one who persecutes him, but in Christ Jesus, it is easy for the following reasons:

1. As heirs to the blessing, we should not say anything except for blessing: **“Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (v.9)**. This is our call, to inherit a blessing. Therefore, it is not appropriate to utter anything except for blessing, and we should not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). Hence, it is not hard for us to obey God’s commandment: “Bless those who curse you, and do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

2. To practice tasting peace here: **“For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (v. 10 & 11)**. This is another incentive that we are heading toward the eternity of peace. Thus, we train ourselves while on earth, as if in school, for the life of peace in which we will live with the King of peace. Thus, when we love eternity and to see good days, the deposit of the life to come, we have to:

1. Refrain our tongues from evil, as a servant who fears his master.

2. Do good as an employee who waits for the reward.

3. Seek peace and pursue it, not due to fear or for the reward, but as sons of the King of peace, who do not want except to taste peace!

**St. Dorotheos** said<sup>56</sup>:

“David, the psalmist, expressed this sequence by saying: ‘Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it’ (Ps. 34:14).

Depart from evil, that is, avoid evil completely. Escape from any act which leads you to sin.

However, the prophet did not stop at that but continued, ‘and do good’, for sometimes one does not do evil but in the same time does not do good.

David continued, ‘Seek peace and pursue it’, that is, you have to struggle to obtain it.

Reflect on this verse, for when one refrains from evil, and when he struggles to do good, he can become an object for the enemy’s attack, therefore he has to labor, and strife, once as a servant who, from fear refrains from evil, and another as an employee who seeks the reward for his doing good. When he accepts God’s help in doing good, he finds comfort in doing good and tastes peace. He experiences the struggling battle and the meaning of the joyful peace and happiness, thus he seeks peace and struggles with persistence.”

**St. Augustine** said: “We will reach the true peace when our nature cleaves to its Creator, thus we have no inner conflict<sup>57</sup>.” Thus, by refraining from evil and doing good, we attain peace, and this is our exercise here on earth.

**3. To Please God: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and their ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (v.12).** The apostle does not mean that the Lord does not look at evildoers or listen to their prayers; instead, he means that He does not answer them. The goal of the believer is to please God; therefore, he overcomes evil by

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<sup>56</sup> *Philokalia* p. 166–168.

<sup>57</sup> *Chastity by St. Augustine*, p. 38.

good and

loves those who trouble him, as long as this pleases the Lord.

**4. No one can harm him:** When the believer realizes that no one can harm him, not even the worst circumstances can harm him, unless he harms himself by forsaking doing good. Thus, he is not afraid even from the one who wants to kill him, for he is certain that he cannot be prevented from doing good. The more his sufferings abound, the greater his crown will be. **“Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed” (v.13 & 14).** St. John Chrysostom wrote a book called, “No one can harm one’s self unless he harms himself<sup>58</sup>.” He clarified that neither devils, nor oppression, nor sickness, nor death, nor poverty can harm anyone unless that person harms himself by doing evil. On the contrary, we see that sufferings have blessed Job, that poverty has benefited Lazarus and that the rain and the winds have assured the steadfastness of the house on the rock (Matt. 7:24). The envious person does not harm the one he envies, but rather he harms himself. The oppressor kills himself and does not harm the one whom he oppresses. Thus, sufferings do not produce harm, but rather blessing to the one who endures them for the sake of righteousness.

**5. To give an opportunity for preaching: “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (v.14 & 15).** St. Peter excerpted this verse from Isaiah the prophet (Is. 8:12,13). St. Peter asks the believer not to fear those who trouble him, nor be annoyed by them. The motive behind this is the sanctification of the Lord in our hearts. Because whoever sanctifies the Lord in his heart, does not fear men but God, and whoever fears God, not men, sanctifies God in his heart. This is the best proof of the truth in the believers’ preaching and is

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<sup>58</sup> This book was translated and printed under the name of “Who can harm you?”

a practical testimony to the Lord, and it is a true answer to whoever asks him about the reason for the hope that is in him, enduring hardships in meekness and the fear

of God. Thus, others smell the pleasant aroma of Christ in the good conduct of the believer when they unjustly accuse him, but he endures with a clear conscience without any desire for revenge, but rather in love for the salvation of all. **“Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed” (v.16).** Festos and Agrippa witnessed about St. Paul. “This man is doing nothing worthy of death or chains” (Acts 26:31). The more Christians were persecuted, the more people were drawn to Christianity because of Christians enduring with joy and thanksgiving. **St. Justinus** said: “You can see very clearly that when they behead us or crucify us or throw us to the lions or in fire or any other suffering, we do not forsake our faith, but the more we endure, the more Christians are added to the faith in the Lord Jesus<sup>59</sup>.”

**6. Following the example of the Lord Jesus: “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit” (v.17 & 18).** The Christian trains himself on the life of endurance and loving those who trouble him, from the life of the Lord Jesus who suffered and endured. Through the Lord Jesus and from Him, one obtains inner power to accept suffering with thanksgiving. According to logic, when one suffers for a transgression that he committed, he feels that he deserves that suffering. But the mind of the Lord Jesus, the concept of the divine love, requires that we rejoice when we unjustly suffer, for it stems from love and this works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). When the Lord suffered once in the flesh, He endured the wages of our sins in His flesh. This is the suffering in love which drove Him to accept the death of the flesh. However, since He was living in the Spirit, His Spirit did not taste death. The Lord died in the flesh, His soul separated from the flesh, but His divinity did not separate from His humanity nor from His

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<sup>59</sup> Book of “Army of God”, *Morcus Magazine*.

soul!

**“By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (v.19 & 20).** When the Lord died in the flesh, His soul was separated from His flesh, but His divinity was not separated from His flesh nor from His soul. The soul departed to Hades to preach those who had died in the hope of the resurrection, for Satan has no power over them. St. Ambrose said: “It is obvious that the Lord Jesus did not fall under the power of darkness but rather He abolished its dominion, preaching even to the dead in Hades to liberate them<sup>60</sup>.” But who are the ones to whom He preached? There are many explanations:

- A. The opinion of **St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, and St. Jerome:** After the Lord’s death in the flesh, He descended into Hades and preached to those who did not believe Noah when he was warning them about the flood, but when some saw the rain pouring, they repented and asked for mercy.
- B. The opinion of **St. Augustine:** The Lord Jesus, with His Holy Spirit, preached the people, through Noah, and warned them of the flood, so they may repent, but they did not believe. By saying “in the prison”, he means the spirits who were in the flesh. Only eight, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives were saved through this preaching.
- C. The opinion of **Tertullian**<sup>61</sup>: The number eight was to show that the creation started with Adam and Eve, a man with only one wife, and also, the new world, after the flood, Noah and his sons, each having one wife.
- D. The opinion of **Fr. Hippolytus**<sup>62</sup>: “He arranged everything on earth; therefore, He became man to restore to us our image through Himself, also He arranged everything under the earth for He was

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<sup>60</sup> *The Christian Faith* 3 : 4 : 28.

<sup>61</sup> *On monogamy* 4.

<sup>62</sup> *A. N. Fra V. 5 P. 209.*

numbered with the dead preaching the Gospel to the souls of the

saints who died on the hope of the resurrection. Through death, He conquered death.”

E. The opinion of **St. Irenaeus**<sup>63</sup>: After mentioning the people who sinned in the Old Testament, he said that the Lord descended to the deep earth proclaiming His ascension, declaring the forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him. All those who believed in Him, hoped in Him and declared His coming and submitted to His blessings, that is, all the prophets, the fathers, He forgave them their sins, in as much as He forgave us.

F. The opinion of **St. Clement of Alexandria**<sup>64</sup>: He relied on what Job said in ch.28:24, that He looks to the ends of the earth and sees under the whole heavens. He descended and preached not only to those who hoped in His salvation, but to the Gentiles, who in their ignorance, lived righteously according to their law.

After mentioning Noah’s ark as a symbol for baptism<sup>65</sup>, he began talking about the effect of baptism. **“There is also an anti type which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** (v. 21). **St. Augustine** said: “The Christians of Carthage give a perfect name to baptism which is ‘Salvation’, and the mystery of the Body of Christ is ‘Life’. They excerpted this from the first apostolic tradition where the early churches depended on them as foundation, for without baptism and partaking in the Lord’s Supper, one cannot obtain the kingdom of God and the salvation and the eternal life<sup>66</sup>.” The Holy Bible witnessed to that... Does baptism, an expression of salvation, differ from what is written? “... He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). **Hermas**<sup>67</sup> saw in one of his visions the victorious church built as a tower on the water. When asked the reason it was built on water, he

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<sup>63</sup> *Irenaeus against heresies* 4 : 27 : 2.

<sup>64</sup> *The Stromato* 6: 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Sayings of St. Ambrosios* p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> *On Forgiveness of sins and Baptism* 1 : 34

<sup>67</sup> *The Shephard: Book 1 Vision* 3

said: “the

tower is built on water because your lives will be saved through water.” Baptism does not only wash the dirt from the flesh, but also grants a pure conscience by the power of the resurrection of the Lord, whereby we are buried with Christ and rise again. For this reason, the church used to baptize the catechumens the Sunday before Easter, called “Baptismal Sunday.” Therefore, it is appropriate not only to obtain the capability of the life of holiness in the sacrament of baptism, but also we have to abide with a clear conscience for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus<sup>68</sup>. **St. Basil the Great**<sup>69</sup> talked about the effect of baptism when He answered the question: Why should baptism be through immersion in water? He said: “In baptism, there is purification of the soul from dirty, carnal thoughts, as it is written, ‘You shall wash me and I shall be whiter than snow’”(Ps. 51:9).Therefore, we do not wash ourselves after each transgression, as the Jews used to do; instead, we have only one baptism(Eph. 4:5), for in baptism death is carried away once. The resurrection from the dead occurs only once. For this reason, the Lord granted us the “covenant of baptism” and in it the nature of life and death. Being submersed in the water is a symbol of death, and the Holy Spirit (at the same time) grants lifeThis answers the question: Why was the water related to the spirit (John 3:5)? In baptism, we achieve two goals:

The First: is to purify the flesh of sin (Rom. 6:6) so it may not carry the fruits of death (Rom. 7:5).

The Second: is for our life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), so we may have fruits for holiness.

The water receiving the body is like a tomb carrying death, but the spirit overflows with reviving power renewing our spirits from the death of sin from our first life. This is what he means by being born of water and spirit. Through baptism, we are baptized to the death of Christ and His resurrection. Therefore, we accept sufferings joyfully even to the point of death, abiding in the Crucified Lord, and waiting to have an inheritance with Him in the eternal glories.

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<sup>68</sup> *St. Augustine refuting Festus 19*

<sup>69</sup> *On the Holy Spirit 35*

**“Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (v.22).** After the Lord passed through the cross, He

ascended to the right hand of the Father. We notice here that the word “right” does not mean the direction right, for the Father has no right nor left; instead, it is merely an expression, in human terms, so we may understand the greatness of the Son. The Lord went to His throne in heaven. He was not separate from His divinity even while His Incarnation. All the angels, authorities, and all the heavenly hosts worship Him and glorify Him. In His ascension, in which He carried the flesh, He declares the victory of the human race, in His Person, and their return to heaven to inherit that which sin had deprived them. Therefore, He says, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

# Chapter 4

In this chapter, St. Peter addresses the issue of sufferings.

- 1. Sufferings and forsaking lusts: verses 1-4**
- 2. Sufferings and the judgment: verses: 5-11**
- 3. Sufferings and the glories: verses: 12-19**

## **1. SUFFERINGS AND FORSAKING LUSTS<sup>70</sup>**

*“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (v. 1).* The beginning of man’s fall was his desire to be independent from God, to be liberated from God’s will; thus, his thoughts live in the spirit of darkness and in the flesh. When man started to submit to the lust of the flesh, he lowered his head, so he could not see heavenly matters, but only earthly matters as if he will live forever here on earth. The Lord Jesus suffered for us in the flesh, offering us His cross to put out sin living in the flesh, to put to death our inner corruption and to restore health to our bodies; therefore, we can say, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with...” (Rom. 6:2,6).

*“That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (v. 2).* The lusts of the flesh are put out; thus, we live the rest of our sojourn according to the will of God, according to His power and not according to the lusts of the world. “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). **St. Clement of Alexandria** said: “The cross of our Lord became a fort, a refuge against our former sins.

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<sup>70</sup> Book of “Divine Love”: “Christ was crucified for me.”

Therefore, since we are renewed, let us be steadfast in the cross, in the truth, and

restore our sanctification<sup>71</sup>.”

***“For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (v. 3).*** St. Peter rebukes us in gentleness so that the days of our sojourning are few. We have lost enough time because of our evil conduct in doing the will of the Gentiles. Instead of the human nature with all its thoughts and lusts, we have the Crucified Christ working in us; therefore, through Him, we become victorious over these lusts.

**“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (v.4).** Pagans are perplexed how we, the believers, can take off the old man, whereby we are no longer attracted to the dissipation in which they lived. In their confusion, they blaspheme by saying that this is due to the suppression, deprivation and ignorance of the believers without realizing how much happiness the believer experiences. A lustful man convinces himself that no one can live in purity; thus, he sees the human race very weak, and if he sees any pure man, he thinks that he is hypocrite. In the same manner, the struggling believer, who is attached to the Lord’s cross, is astonished by the fact that others cannot taste the sweetness of the pure and holy life.

After St. Peter talked about the effect of the sufferings of the Lord in the life of the believer, he encourages him to endure sufferings by lifting his sight to the Day of Judgment.

## **2. SUFFERINGS AND THE JUDGMENT**

**“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (v. 6).** St. Peter proclaims to those who are suffering that the Lord is ready to judge. Judgment is drawing near. How can we possibly not endure suffering joyfully

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<sup>71</sup> *Instructor 3 : 12.*

or fear those who blaspheme against us? He judges the

living and the dead, that is He judges the saints living by the Spirit as well as the dead who died in sin. He also judges the living who have not yet departed to His Second Coming, for in a moment they will be transformed. He does not forget those who preceded and slept in the flesh. Everyone, whether young or old, since the creation, receives his reward. For this reason, the Judge, the Lord Jesus, preached to the dead. Who are the dead?

1. Perhaps he meant those who departed from this world that carried their sufferings for the sake of the faith, those whom people have judged according to the flesh and condemned as deserving death, eventhough, in God's eyes they are alive.

2. The Judge has preached to the dead in the Spirit (Matt. 8:22& John 5:25), that is sinners, so they may repent and live according to the Spirit.

**St. Augustine** said: "St. Peter does not mean to describe only what happens in Hades, for the Gospel is now preached to the dead, that is, the evil unbelievers. So whenever they believe, they are judged by many tribulations and mortifying of the flesh itself. Then, they live for God according to the Spirit, where their spirits were dead when they were enslaved in their unbelief and evil doings<sup>72</sup>."

What are the fruits of our continuous meditation in the Lord's Second Coming? The early church, especially among monks, used to practice three exercises, which were considered basic for the life of a believer.

1. Visiting cemeteries.

2. Practicing the prayer, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me", or the continuous prayer, which St. Augustine called the directed prayer because it is directed against the devil who is defeated by the arrows of prayer.

3. Remembering the day of judgment and the Second Coming of the Lord.

St. Peter says: "**Be serious and watchful in prayer**" (v. 7). Remembering the day of judgment subdues our carnal lusts; thus, one should live alert, that is, submitted to his spiritual mind and not

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<sup>72</sup> Letter 164 ch. 7

to his carnal lusts. **St. Anthony** defines the alert as: “Those whose souls

are alert, can discern between good and evil, heed wisely to what is good and for edification, and practice it with great thanksgiving to God<sup>73</sup>.” Let us be serious and watchful, so we do not end up with those whom **Hermas**<sup>74</sup> saw as lazy, old and unable to move. When asked about the reason, he replied, “because your spirits are old, you lost your power because of your weakness and doubts. You became like old people who lost hope in renewing their strength and do not expect except to sleep their last sleep. Thus, you weakened because of the worldly cares and surrendered yourselves to idleness and did not cast your cares upon Him (I Peter 5:7).”

**“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (v. 8).** Our goal in worship is to attain continuous prayer and to be continuously in the bosom of God; however, this is of no use if it is not supported by fervent love for our brothers, love which stems from the depth of the inner heart. Love covers the sins of others; hence, God covers our sins and forgives us and makes us enjoy quiet prayers<sup>75</sup> acceptable to Him. Thus, our unity with God abounds. **St. Clement of Rome** said: “Love unites us with God, for love covers a multitude of sins<sup>76</sup>.” This love stems from reflecting on the Day of Judgment. God never forgets a labor of love, even a cup of cold water, and He does not forget its reward. When we lift our eyes to the Day of Judgment, we desire to see, even those who trouble us as angels of God, participating in praising and glorifying God. This creates in us a deep spiritual love.

**“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling” (v. 9).** Reflect on the Lord’s Second Coming, on being called by name, on being in fellowship with Him, and on His eternally accepting us joyfully into His bosom. This should drive us to open our hearts and houses to our brothers, even if they are strangers; thus, we invite them to our houses without grumbling and with great joy.

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<sup>73</sup> *Filokalia* p. 19

<sup>74</sup> *The Pastor Book I* vision 4.

<sup>75</sup> Refer to the interpretation of St. James 5:20 & article of Fr. Isaac in *Kassian letters* p. 210.

<sup>76</sup> *St. Clement bishop of Rome*, p. 40.

Because our fathers the monks heeded the call to be hospitable to strangers, they sometimes would take a break during their fasting hours for the sake

of the strangers. They did not bar themselves from offering a sacrifice of love to God.

**“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever, Amen” (v.10 & 11).**

The more a believer directs his vision toward eternity, the more he stirs up the gift(s) which he has received from God. Here, we notice the following:

1. St. Peter said, “As each one”, which means that there is none in the church who does not have a gift from God, whether a child or an old man, whether male or female, whether a priest or a lay man, whether a celibate, married or widowed, for we are all members in the mysterious Body of Christ, and there cannot be an idle member without a function in that Body.

2. “Has received a gift”, which means that no member deserves credit in whatever gifts he has. St. John Chrysostom said: “God distributes His gifts with the measure that is fit for our salvation.” God gives one person fewer gifts than someone else, not because He does not love him as much, but because He knows he cannot use more than that gift. If God offers him more gifts, he will become negligent. God offers another person more gifts than the other, not because he is better than his brother, but because God knows that that person can work with that many gifts, and without all of those gifts, he will fail in his job. Hence, God does everything that is good for our salvation.

3. “As good steward of the manifold grace of God”, meaning that these gifts were given from God’s hand, not for vain glory but for the ministry of the church and all entire human race. **St. John Chrysostom** said: “There are different members in the church, some are more honorable than others, for example, some celibates, some widows,

some married and all compliment one another. One's gift may be less than the other's, but it may be indispensable, so if that member is delayed from his job, many other jobs will be delayed<sup>77</sup>."

4. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." As the preacher allows himself to diminish so that the Word of God can clearly manifest, anyone who is granted a gift from God also has to know that he cannot use it unless God gives him the power to implement it. The word "Amen" means "let it be so!"

Thus, the Father is glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion.

### 3. THE SUFFERINGS AND THE GLORIES:

**"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy"** (v.12 & 13). This statement reveals the severe persecution, which the church had to go through in Asia. It is for this reason that he calls it "the fiery trial". Temptations and sufferings are essential in the believer's life. Even though they are fiery trials, they are beneficial for two reasons:

1. To try them: a student during exams stays up late at night studying, but he joyfully does it for the success to come. Gold and silver are purified in the crucible to burn the impurities, so they will have a more brilliant shine. **St. Cyprian the Martyr**<sup>79</sup> encouraged the people of Thibares to embrace martyrdom when he said:

"The apostle is teaching us the same

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<sup>77</sup> *Brotherly Love*, p. 423 – 424.

<sup>79</sup> *Epistle 55 (Exford ed. Epistle No. 28)*

commandments of the Lord and the heavenly teachings. The Lord is encouraging us saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life’ (Lk. 18:29,30).

He says, ‘Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did it to the prophets’ (Lk. 6:22,23).

The Lord wants us to rejoice and leap for joy in tribulations, for where there are persecutions, crowns of faith are granted and the soldiers of Christ are purified and the heaven is opened to the martyrs.”

A believer has to go through these tribulations, whether during persecution or during peaceful times, for Satan’s war against God’s children is perpetual. The war does not have to be external; it may be against internal sin. **St. Cyprian** said in his eleventh epistle: “During persecution, man is crowned with a crown of martyrdom. Also, during peaceful times, man is crowned with the crown of a pure conscious<sup>80</sup>.”

2. “As you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice...”: The secret of our joy is not just being purified to receive the crown, but to partake in the sufferings of Christ... What great glory when we have a share of His suffering! **St. John Chrysostom** said: [“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us so our consolation also abounds through Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:5) He elevates our souls, considering our

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<sup>80</sup> *Oxford edition letter # 13*

sufferings dedicated especially for Him. How great is our joy when we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, and for His sake, we suffer!<sup>81]</sup>

***“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified”*** (v.14). As long as the sufferings and the reproaches do not stem from personal enmity or from a mistake that the believer has committed, but instead in the name of Christ, he is blessed. The secret of this blessing is that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory, dwells in him for the sake of the Lord. It dwells in him to carry his labor, to support him, and to grant him glory. Thus, the evil person blasphemes against the Holy Spirit in the person of the believer.

**“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, or evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter”** (v.15 & 16). One may be ashamed if he is punished because of committing crime, murder, robbery or evil doing. However, if he endures sufferings as a Christian, that is, because of his relationship with the Lord Christ, then he glorifies God. As the Lord Jesus told His disciples, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you... In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 15:20&16:33)<sup>82</sup>. However, one may complain by asking: Until when are we going to endure suffering for the sake of glory? St. Peter confirms his answer by saying:

1. The time has come for judgment.
2. Salvation requires strife and perseverance.
3. We are in the hands of the Faithful Creator.

1. The time has come for judgment: **“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us**

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<sup>81</sup> *Divine Love* p. 360 – 361.

<sup>82</sup> Refer to article of sufferings in the book of “*Divine Love*”, p. 355 – 366.

**first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (v.17).** Perhaps St. Peter meant that the Lord has ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s

temple because the Jews have rejected the Lord and persecuted His disciples. This is proof that the judgment will come, and there is no need to feel hurried. Therefore, the believer can patiently endure hardships while waiting for eternal glory.

2. Salvation requires strife: **“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (v.18).** St. Peter is trying to calm those who cannot wait for God’s judgment because of their sufferings. He is telling them that the salvation of one’s soul is not easy, but requires struggle and effort. Since the Lord Jesus said, “...The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent takes it by force” (Matt. 11: 12); therefore, we, the sinners, should patiently endure sufferings for our salvation. He reminds us with the Lord’s saying, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate” (Lk. 13:24). Hence, every vespers we pray saying: “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I the sinner appear. The burden and the heat of the day I could not endure because of the weakness of my humanity, therefore, O merciful God, consider me as one of the eleventh hour...<sup>83</sup>” **St. Anthony** said: “We cannot say that behaving in righteousness is impossible, but it is not easy. You cannot become wise or good in a moment, but you need to study, practice, and to continuously struggle<sup>84</sup>.” Therefore, we are required to endure afflictions voluntarily, that is, to crucify our lusts and to offer the sacrifice of voluntary poverty and the labor of piety and sacrifice for the sake of the love of the Lord Jesus.

3. We are in the hands of the Faithful Creator: **“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (v. 19).** The Lord Jesus led by example when He cried out on the cross saying, “Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). Why do you fear sufferings when the Lord has assured us that not one of our hairs can fall without our Heavenly Father’s permission? He is the Beneficent, as the church calls Him in all prayers; therefore, we

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<sup>83</sup> *Agbeya Prayers.*

<sup>84</sup> *Filokalia p.22, 29*

submit to Him our

lives. If He allows temptations, it is for our own good, just as the clay surrenders to the hands of the potter. Even if we enter the oven, it is sufficient that the eyes of the Potter are on us all the time. He knows the right temperature, the correct position inside the oven, and the time needed to prepare us as vessels for honor.

When sickness or troubles surround a child, his father and mother show more love to him and give him more attention; likewise, when tribulations surround a believer, God and the church are more compassionate toward him.

# Chapter 5

In this chapter, St. Peter addresses the issue of pastoral relationships:

1. Advices to the pastors v. 1-4
2. Advices to the flock. v. 5-7
3. Concluding advice. v. 8-11
4. Conclusion v. 12-14

## 1. ADVICES TO THE PASTORS:

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed”* (v.1). Notice that the word “elders” was translated in Acts 20: 17 as priests and in Acts 20:28 as overseers. It is obvious that he means bishops and priests. **St. Jerome** said: “The early church used to call the bishops and priests ‘elders’, but he addressed the deacons separately<sup>85</sup>.” St. Peter said “I who am a fellow elder” without claiming to be chief or primary over the others as some have claimed; however, he is one of the elders. This is what the Lord Jesus established, that there is no one greater than the other, but that whoever wants to be first has to be last. “Witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that will be revealed”: St. Peter writes here with great wisdom for he is focusing on the sufferings in the life of the believer, and he is connecting that to the sufferings of the Lord Christ. He is assuring them that he has seen the Lord’s sufferings; thus, he is not talking theoretically but from experience as a witness. Since he is relating suffering to glory, he reveals that he is a partaker of the hope for eternal glory. Advice to the pastors:

First: **“Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you,”**(v. 2). Service is shepherding, for the servant provides for the needs of

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<sup>85</sup> *Letters of Eronemos.*

those whom he is serving; ultimately, it does

not come from the servant but from the Shepherd of the shepherds, the Lord Jesus who said, “I am the good Shepherd.” It is a precious flock for it is the flock of God, whoever takes care of it offers a service to the Owner of the flock, and whoever neglects it insults Him. **Father Ephraat** said:

“You shepherds, follow the example of the old good shepherds, for Jacob used to shepherd Laban’s flock and he used to struggle and be watchful, hence he received the reward. Jacob said to Laban: ‘These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock, that which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes’ (Gen. 31:38-40). As Jacob was a shepherd, also Joseph and his brothers, Moses, David, Amos, all were shepherds and they were good shepherds. Now, my beloved, why were the shepherds chosen to be shepherds for the human race? Definitely, to learn how the shepherd takes care of his flock, and struggles for their own good. Then, after they attain the attributes of a good shepherd, they are chosen to shepherd human beings<sup>86</sup>.”

Second: **“Serving as overseers” (v. 2)**: that is to watch over them with open eyes and to be wise in directing them. **St. John Chrysostom** said: “He has to be very alert, fervent in the spirit as if he is breathing fire<sup>87</sup>.” **St. Gregory of Nyssa**<sup>88</sup> said: “How important is wisdom for the shepherds because:

1. They are shepherding precious souls whom the Lord has died for!
2. The diversity of the traits and the circumstances of each individual.
3. The diversity of ages and races.”

Third: **“Not by constraint but willingly” (v. 2)**: The

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<sup>86</sup> *Pastoral Love*, p. 463 –464.

<sup>87</sup> *Pastoral Love*, p. 734.

<sup>88</sup> Article “Be wise” in the book of “*Pastoral Love*” p. 727 –759.

shepherd does not consider the ministry as a heavy burden, but he ministers joyfully for he is part of the vine of the Heavenly Father.

Fourth: **“Not for dishonest gain but eagerly”**(v. 2): The shepherd does not serve his flock to achieve temporal gain, but with an alert mind toward the flock, he cares for their salvation and their relationship with the Lord. **St. Augustine** said: “Those who shepherd the flock of Christ to win the sheep for themselves and not for Christ, love themselves and not Christ<sup>89</sup>.”

Fifth: **“Not as being lords over those entrusted to you,”**(v. 3): The shepherd does not consider the flock as his inheritance giving him the right to dominate them; instead, he loves and cares for them.

Sixth: **“But being examples to the flock”**: The shepherd is an example to his flock; his behavior, conduct and his life are a practical sermon, more so than his words. **St. Gregory** said: “If the shepherd goes astray, his flock will go astray too.”

Seventh: The shepherd lifts his eyes continuously toward heaven waiting for the Second Coming of the Shepherd of shepherds to grant him the heavenly inheritance. **“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away”**(v. 4). He is the Chief, full of glory, when He appears, He offers the shepherds, who followed his example and cared for his flock, a share in His eternal glory.

## **2. ADVICES TO THE FLOCK:**

**“Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”** (v.5-7). St. Peter directs the attention of the flock to the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore he asks us to do the following:

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<sup>89</sup> Article of “Love distinguishes between the shepherd and the heirling” in “Pastoral Love” p. 493 -526

**A. Submission to the Shepherds:** Humility is the garment, which one has to put on; therefore, St. Peter said, “Be clothed with humility.” Humility is manifested in obedience and submission to one another. How much more should we submit to those whom God has appointed for our spiritual care (Heb. 13:7)? **St. Philoxinos** said: “I warn you, my brothers, not to argue about the counsel which our spiritual guides give us, lest the earth opens its mouth and swallows us like those who disobeyed Moses and the earth swallowed them<sup>90</sup>.” **St. John Climacus** said: “How blessed is the one who mortifies his will and leaves God, his Father and Teacher, to arrange everything in his life; he will be at the right hand of the Crucified Christ<sup>91</sup>.”

**B. Submission in the Lord:** Therefore, St. Peter said, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.” The one who grants the help is not the teachers themselves, nor their righteousness, nor their private teachings, but the grace of God, which supports them. **St. Augustine**<sup>92</sup> compares this grace to a lady who has a secret song when he said, “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Thus, we submit to what God says through the tongues of teachers. We are not responsible for any mistakes for God will judge the teachers accordingly.

**C. Looking at God’s Care:** We are not distracted by the care and love of the shepherds, but through them, we see God’s love and His watchful care. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” When we call the priest “our father”, we call him that in God the One Father. When we call him “Our shepherd”, it is through the Great Shepherd, who is the true Bridegroom (John 3:29, 10:11). **St. John Chrysostom** said: “The flock is God’s fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9) The flock belongs to its owner; the flock is the building of God who belongs to its owner<sup>94</sup>.” Therefore, the wise flock is the one who does not get attached to the shepherd personally, but to the Lord as a good Shepherd.

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<sup>90</sup> *True Fathers of worship, Syrian Monastery.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ladder to heaven and levels of virtues.*

<sup>92</sup> *City of God 17 : 4.*

<sup>94</sup> *Pastoral Love, p. 14.*



### 3. CONCLUDING ADVICES:

St. Peter concludes his epistle by talking about the devil, our adversary, who wants us to perish. Thus, one should not hate his brother who annoys him, but the devil. **“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all peace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (v.8-11).** The cause of the battle and the sufferings in this world is not human beings, but it is instead a battle between God and Satan. The devil is the enemy, and God is the Lord of all grace who perfects, establishes, strengthens and settles us for a victorious life. **St. Augustine** said: “We should not hate our brothers, but their enmities<sup>95</sup>.” **St. John Chrysostom**, the suffering Archbishop said: “Till when are we going to oppose one another? Till when are we going to fight one another, so that the devil may laugh at us?<sup>96</sup>” The devil is a very strong enemy, like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is our enemy because of his enmity to God, and we are God’s image. He is our enemy because of his pride. He annoys us because he is jealous that we took his position from which he fell. In spite of all that, he does not have dominion over us unless we surrender to his will. He can deceive people, but he cannot oblige anyone. He seeks to devour everyone, but he cannot approach anyone, unless one allows him. **St. Shenouda the archimandrite**<sup>97</sup> wrote an article about the incapability of the devil to dominate the children of God. **St. John Chrysostom** wrote three articles to refute those who say that the devil has dominion over us, by saying<sup>98</sup>:

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<sup>95</sup> *Sermons on certain chapters from the New Testament.*

<sup>96</sup> *Spiritual values of Neyrouz Feast, p.45.*

<sup>97</sup> *Deacon Joseph Habib translated it and printed it in the year 1968.*

<sup>98</sup> *Pamphlet about “Does the devil have dominion over you?” 1967 edition.*

a. The devils could not enter the pigs except with permission from the Lord Jesus. (Matt. 8:28-38)

b. The devils could not tempt Job without God's permission.  
c. Our negligence allows the devil to deceive us, while our alertness and vigilance make us conquerors.  
d. We cannot blame the devil because there are some who stumble from the sheer beauty of creation (Rom 1: 21-25); others stumble from the members of their own body, which were created to glorify God; others stumble from the cross which is the power of God for salvation (1 Cor. 1:28-32); others stumble from the Lord Jesus Himself, the Conqueror and Giver of life (John 9:39), and still others stumble from the apostles preaching the truth (2 Cor. 2:16).  
St. Peter asks us to attack the devil by faith. Let us believe that the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory, would not invite us without offering us the capability to reach our goal. His invitation is accompanied by His divine support to endure suffering and the attacks the devil. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**, said<sup>99</sup>: "Is there anything more scary than the devil? Nevertheless, we cannot find a shield against him except the faith, for it is an invisible shield aimed at an invisible enemy who shoots fiery darts at those who are negligent." He is an invisible enemy, yet we have, in faith, a strong shield. As St. Paul said, "Above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Eph. 6:16).

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

**"By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand" (v.12).** Perhaps Silvanus is the same as Silas who is mentioned in the book of Acts (Acts 15: 22,32,40). He could also be the same person mentioned in St. Paul's epistle to the Thessolonians (1 Thess.1:1, 2 Thessl 1:1, 2 Cor. 1:19). He called Silvanus, "our faithful brother", because Silvanus was more than likely a minister to the Gentiles.

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<sup>99</sup> *Catechetical Lect. 5 :4.*

**“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son” (v.13).** In the introduction, we mentioned that Babylon was, most probably, Old Cairo. There is an opinion, which has no proof at all, that Babylon was St. Peter’s wife, a chosen wife from the Lord who used to help him and that she was martyred before him. Our brothers the Catholics interpret “Mark my son”, as being him who knew Christianity through St. Peter after the resurrection of the Lord; they claimed that St. Mark never heard the Lord Jesus nor followed Him<sup>100</sup>. However, it is well known that the Passover was prepared in the house of St. Mark, (Mark 14:13,14). He was the young man who followed the Lord, and during His arrest, he left his cloak and fled away (Mark 14:51,52). The Catholics claim that St. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter, but this is true. It is mentioned in the Catholic Theotokias: “O the apostle and evangelist St. Mark, speaking of divine matters, you have received the crown of apostleship. The apostles, your companions, are proud of you, and we too<sup>102</sup>.” Thus, when St. Peter called St. Mark “My son”, this was a demonstration of his love, his old age, and the fact that they were related, for St. Peter’s wife was a cousin of St. Mark’s father. Also, St. Peter used to visit St. Mark often<sup>103</sup>.

**“Greet one another with a holy kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen” (v.14).** From the time of the apostolic age, the people in the churches used to kiss one another. That is why during the Divine Liturgy, the deacon says, “Kiss one another with a holy kiss.” This is very evident from the following<sup>104</sup>:

1. The sayings of the saint Paul and Peter at the end of their epistles (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20. 2 Cor. 13:12).

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<sup>100</sup> *Treasure of valuable worship in the saints’ stories* (Nissan 25)

<sup>102</sup> *Kiahk Month* 175 – 177.

<sup>103</sup> Refer to the book “*The Evangelist St. Mark*” by Pope Shenouda.

<sup>104</sup> *Sayings of the Fathers in explaining “Tasbeha and Liturgy”*, 1958 edition by St. Mary Church in Moharram Beh, p. 43.

2. In the commands of the apostles: “Let no one have any hatred or hypocrisy between his brother, then let each one kiss the other with a holy kiss.”
3. **St. John Chrysostom** assured us that the kiss was used in

the church since the apostolic age<sup>105</sup>.

4. **St. Dionysus** said: “May the divine kiss be given during the uncovering of the prospherine.”

5. **Tertullian** said: “It is the custom now that during fasting, we use the kiss of peace, which is the seal of prayer, to conclude our prayers with the brothers; therefore, our prayers may ascend to heaven with great acceptance. For how can our prayers be perfect without the holy kiss?<sup>106</sup>”

St. Peter concludes by wishing the peace of the Lord Jesus to all of them.

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<sup>105</sup> Article 24 in the interpretation of First Corinthians.

<sup>106</sup> Tertullian. *On Prayer* 17.

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