

DIVINE LOVE

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DIVINE LOVE

AND

THE FALL OF MANKIND

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by:

LAILA SOLIMAN

Edited by

MORGAN STAGGERS

**Queen Mary & Prince Tadros
Coptic Orthodox Church
283 DAVIDSON MILL ROAD
SOUTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08831**

**In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
One God, Amen**

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Author: Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.
Translated by: Laila Soliman.
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1

WHY DIDN'T GOD EXCLUDE THE DEVIL?

God is love, and in His love, He gave Adam everything in abundance. He provided him with every possibility to be happy so he lives in the fullness of peace surrounded by the divine love from all sides. But many have wondered: Why did God allow the demon – the deceitful enemy – to tempt and scrutinize Adam? And why does He still allow the human soul to be tempted by the demon and by the world with its temptation and pain and by the flesh with its lust and desire?

We can say that allowing the demon to tempt Adam and Eve was a sign of God's love for them. By actual being of this fight, God declares the authority that man enjoys and how much God appreciates man, so He granted him free will.

If God had provided us with all love, granted us all our needs, and allowed us to enjoy paradise without being tempted, we would have been like chess pieces moved by the player, feeling no fascination or hatred. But then we would be like deaf tools that mindlessly obey, with no sense or emotions. Then life would become stale, and paradise turns out to be without beauty because we become incapable of participating in mutual love with free will.

❖ God has given a chance for conflict, because man was able to destroy his enemy the devil with the same freedom by which he submitted himself to him... and thus man would become worthy to obtain his salvation through triumph with the Lord's blessing. At the same time, the devil will be subject to more severe penalty although man attained triumph over who has already harmed him (i.e., with his defeat to the devil). At the same time, the goodness of God will seem a greater place where man will move, after his current life, to a glorious paradise and will have the right to reap the fruit of the tree of life.

Tertullian

IS THE DEVIL CAPABLE OF HURTING YOU?

❖ **One may ask: Didn't the devil hurt Adam when he damaged his soul and made him lose paradise?**

No, the reason behind this lies in the carelessness of who was affected by the harm, his lack of his discipline and because he did not bother to struggle. This devil who had used varied and powerful tricks failed to have control over Job. So how could he use a way that is less deceitful to have

control over Adam unless Adam was incapable to control himself by his own accord?

Then what? Doesn't harm affect he who suffers from those who speak evil of him, and he who suffers from looting money and losing his inheritance that leads to struggles from fatal poverty? No, he can benefit if he were thoughtful. Were the apostles hurt due to these matters? Didn't they struggle perpetually with hunger, thirst and nakedness? And because of these matters, were they honored, became famous, and gained for themselves more support from the Lord?!¹=

❖ When a loving father sees the man who killed his son, he is not only going to punish the criminal, but will also destroy the weapon that he used. Thus, **when Christ finds that the devil slaughtered man, He is not only going to punish the devil but also will destroy the weapon itself...**

The devil is aiming arrows against me, but I have a sword. **He has a bow, but I am a soldier carrying a heavy weapon...** He has a bow but he cannot dare to come near me, for he shoots his arrows from afar².

❖ Does the devil escape if anyone calls the name of the crucified thief or any other crucified individual? Of course not, he will mock him. But upon hearing the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth being called, he quickly runs away as if fleeing a fire.

❖ We should not fear anything because, to conquer the devil, we need to acknowledge that our capabilities will not help much and everything is from God's grace³.

❖ The devil does not defeat us through force or power or violence. Otherwise, all of mankind would have been destroyed. This is clear from the incident of the swine (Matthew 8:31), for the demons could not go away into the herd of the swine unless they were permitted by the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom

WHY DIDN'T THE LOVING GOD EXCLUDE THE DEVIL?

❖ Someone may ask: If the demon does not defeat us by force but through cunning and deception, wouldn't it have been better for him to be dead? Job defeated the power of the devil; however, Adam was deceived and cast out from paradise. If Satan had been thrown out and been banished

¹ لا يستطيع أحد أن يؤذي إنساناً ما لم يؤذ هذا الإنسان ذاته.

² *Baptismal Instructions, 3:10-11.*

³ *Ad. Pop PG 49: 66, 67.*

from the world, Adam would have not sinned and been expelled. Yet Satan remains, and if one is able to defeat him, he is able to defeat many. Ten can conquer him, but he can conquer ten thousand. If God had expelled him from the world, those ten thousand would not have been perished. So, what do we say regarding this?⁴-

St. John Chrysostom

1. The dignity of winners is greater than the shame of losers

- ❖ Those who conquered Satan are more honored than the losers, even though the losers are many and those who are first mentioned are less. “For better is one who fears God than a thousand ungodly” (Sirach 16:3)⁵-.
St. John Chrysostom

2. Those who are defeated are harmed due to their laziness, not because of Satan

- ❖ If the devil is cast from the world, the dignity of the winners will be hurt. But if the devil is left in the world, the lazy and the arrogant will not become hurt at the expense of the diligent, but the hurt will be due to their arrogance and laziness. But if the devil is cast from the world, it would be unfair to the diligent, for they cannot show their strength and will lose their crown. Perhaps you did not understand what I said. Therefore, it is important for me to repeat and explain. Let’s assume that an opponent was wrestling two others in the wrestling arena. One of the two was exhausted due to a voracious appetite and unwillingness to continue when his strength began to weaken and so he began to lose his temper. But the other was alert, had good habits and spent his time in training at the school of wrestling. If the opponent is sent from the arena, which of the two will get hurt? Who will be the victim? Is it the one who was negligent and not ready or the one who was enthusiastic and greatly diligent? It is clear that the one who was diligent and enthusiastic will be the one to get hurt. The diligent one will be angry upon the withdrawal of the opponent but no harm will catch the negligent because his laziness is the reason behind his failure⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

⁴ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٥. العنوان الأصلي للمقال: "رد على القائلين بأن الشياطين تحكم شؤون البشر".

⁵ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٥.

⁶ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٦.

3. Negligence of man led to call the devil a “deceiver”

- ❖ Here is another explanation to teach us that slackening and laziness hurt those who are not careful, not the devil... God allows the devil to spread evil excessively, not as a normal occurrence but because we choose, i.e., when we accept his evil. The devil is not naturally harmful (involuntarily or created this way), but, as is clear from his names, he is called “the deceiver.”

The devil offended man’s reputation when he said to God: ‘Does Job fear God for nothing?... But stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face’ (Job 1:9-11). Also, the devil tried to mislead Job when he said: “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep” (Job 1:16). He tried to convince Job that these calamities came down on him from heaven above, laying traps between the Lord and His servant. Thus the devil tried, but he failed!

And when he succeeded in misleading Adam, it should not be taken that the devil’s victory and strength were due to his nature. It is because of the laziness and neglect of man. Therefore, the devil was called “Satan.”

Misleading or not, it is not a natural thing. It might happen or not, without reaching the point of becoming “natural.” This subject of natural matters and matters that happen by accident are hard for many to perceive, but there are those who hearken to us with understanding, and to those we talk. We know that none of the devil’s names were given to him naturally. He was called “the evil one,” but his wickedness is not a natural thing. It is his choice. He was not like this from the beginning, but he brought evil to himself. Therefore, he was also called “the disbeliever⁷.”

St. John Chrysostom

4. Should we also exclude the beautiful creation?

- ❖ Let’s put aside the talk of the devil and pay more attention to creation so we learn that the devil is not the cause of our pains if we are cautious. Also let us learn that those who are weak-willed and those who are lazy and unprepared will fall even as if there were no evil. They would fall on their own to the deep bottom of evil...

Everyone knows – as I said – that the devil is evil, but what do we say about beautiful and wonderful creation?! How is the creature believed to be sinister? Who is he, the evil and foolish that dare to judge creation?

The universe is beautiful and it is a sign of God’s love, wisdom, and strength. Let’s listen to the prophet who said in wonder: “O Lord, how

⁷ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٦-١٥٧.

manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (Psalm 104:24). The prophet went through all the creatures in wonder, one after the other. But when he faced the invisible wisdom of God, he stepped back to say: “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wisdom 13:5). And let’s listen to Saint Paul the apostle who says: “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). So everything of this creation – as the apostle says – leads us to know God.

Now, if we found out that this same beautiful and wonderful creation had become the reason behind man’s evil, should we blame it? Far from it! But we should blame those who could not use the medication correctly. So when would these matters that lead us to know God become the cause of our wickedness? The apostle says about those who are wise: “They became futile in their thoughts... worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:21-25).

The devil is not mentioned here but creation had been made to lead us to know the wisdom of God. So how did it become the cause of evil? Certainly, this does not refer to its nature but to the neglect of those who take care of themselves. For what does the devil say? Should we remove the creation too?!⁸ =

St. John Chrysostom

5. Should we also exclude our body organs?

❖ Let’s put aside the creation and pay attention to our bodily organs. Even here we find cause that leads to our destruction if we are not cautious. And this is not because of the nature of our organs, but because of our apathy.

He has given us eyes with which we see the creation and glorify the Lord. But when we misuse it, it may lead us to commit adultery. And we were given a tongue to use for good education and to praise the Creator. If we are not cautious, this tongue will lead to blasphemy. We have hands to lift up in prayer but if we do not pay attention, they will be engaged in greed and rapacity. We were given legs to walk in goodness but due to our carelessness, they may lead us to do evil acts.

Everything may hurt the weak man; even medicines of salvation (for those who refuse them) may lead to death... It is not because of the nature of the medicine but because of his feebleness.

God created the heavens to highly praise His works, and to worship

[^] المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن" من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٧-١٥٨.

the Lord. But others abandoned the Creator and worshiped the sky. And they did this due to their laziness and failure⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

6. Even the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing

- ❖ Assuredly, there is nothing that leads us to salvation more than the cross. But this cross was lunacy to those who were perishing. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). And he also says: “But we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23)¹⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

7. The apostles were the aroma of death for many people

- ❖ The apostle became the aroma of death to many people. Who is more capable to better teach than St. Paul and the apostles?
- ❖ But they became the aroma of death to many people. For Paul the apostle says: “To one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life” (2 Corinthians 2:16). The weak, e.g., the one who rejects God, becomes hurt even by Paul the apostle, but the strong one can't be harmed even by the devil!¹¹

St. John Chrysostom

8. Many had stumbled in Christ

- ❖ Let's switch our talk toward Jesus Christ Himself. Who can acknowledge His salvation? How many more advantages we gained from having Him with us? But this blessed coming had become a cause of judgment for many people. Jesus said: “For judgment I have come into this world; that those who do not see may see and that those who do see may be made blind” (John 9:39).

O brethren, what should we say? Would light be considered cause to lead to blindness? It is not light but evil that blocked the eyes of the soul from recognizing light. And thus we see the weak who insist to do evil vulnerable to any harm that comes from anything while the strong receive blessings from everything.

In every situation, our will and status determine how evil could affect

⁹ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٨.

¹⁰ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٨.

¹¹ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٨.

us. If we are in a state of weakness, then weakness will prevail; but if we are strong, strength will prevail¹².

St. John Chrysostom

9. Benefit from Satan

❖ We could even benefit from Satan if we understand him... and this is clear in the story of Job. Also, we can learn the same from St. Paul the apostle who wrote regarding the adulterer, saying: "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved" (1 Corinthians 5:5). Be aware that even Satan has become a cause of salvation, not by his nature, but through the skill of the apostle. It is like the physician who brings a serpent and extracts medicine from it.

Let's be aware that Satan does not lead to salvation but his feet hasten to the destruction of the human race... As the apostle says about the adulterer: "I urge you to affirm your love to him... lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:8-11). Here, Paul deems that Satan executes God's judgments... For God said to Satan regarding Job: "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life" (Job 2:5-6).

Thus, the Lord has restricted Satan with limits so he won't go beyond bounds and destroy man without any considerations.

Therefore, we don't fear Satan even though he is a spirit without a body. Nothing is weaker than him who came this way without a body, and nothing is stronger than a brave one, even if he carries a body that is going to die!¹³

St. John Chrysostom

I do not exonerate Satan

❖ I haven't talked about these things to acquit Satan from guilt but to warn you about laziness. The wish of Satan is to blame him for our mistakes... because when we attribute our mistakes to him without offering repentance we drown in all kinds of evil, increasing our punishment, while we receive no forgiveness.

Eve did not receive any forgiveness. Let us hope we do not do what she did and seek to know ourselves and acknowledge our wounds. For then we can figure out the medicine we need because he who knows his illness does not care about his weakness.

¹² المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟" عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٩.

¹³ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟" عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٥٩.

We sin again and again; this I know very well because all of us are under punishment. But we are entitled to forgiveness and we won't be kept away from repentance. For we are still standing as if in a wrestling arena, and we fight for repentance¹⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

Why didn't Satan deceive you?

❖ A day before yesterday, we addressed a sermon about "Satan"... and upon delivering the speech; some went to the theaters to watch Satan's shows. They were engaged in pornographic songs while you participated in the spiritual music. They were eating from the waste of Satan while you were fed by a nutrient spirit. My question to you: Who is he that fooled them? Who is he that detached them from the sacred herd? Was the devil the one who deceived them? But why he did not deceive you even though you and they are human and alike. What I mean is that you have the same nature, the same soul and the same tendencies... as much as nature has given you.

So how come not all of you were in the same place? Isn't because of the difference of the goal? For this reason, truly, they were under deceit, but you have been above it. I am not saying this to exonerate Satan from being charged but I am jealously anxious that you become free from sin.

Satan is wicked and I acknowledge this. But he is evil for himself, not for us, as long as we are cautious. Because this is the nature of evil; it is fatal for only those who stick to it¹⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

Make them be quiet by setting good examples

❖ Do you use this way of setting a good example as a kind of a proof? If you meet a man who lives an evil life and practices all kinds of sins then at the same time he throws the blame on the Divine, claiming that sinning was a coincidence that falls under fatalism. Or because of the power of devils and that God gave us this nature... he will be using all these excuses to keep blame away from him, and blame the Creator who takes care of him... Then make him quiet by deeds and not by words. Show your companion an example of virtue and enduring life.

There is no need for long talks, or working on a complicated plan or even using logic. Through deeds the proof can be reached.

You may say that you are a creature and he is a creature like you. You

¹⁴ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟" عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٦٠.

¹⁵ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟" عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٦٤.

are human and he is human like you. You live in the same world and enjoy all the same things under heaven. So how come you live an evil life while he lives a life of virtue?¹⁶

St. John Chrysostom

¹⁶ المؤلف: "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ عن من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٦٤.

2

WHO CAN HARM MAN?

Turning away from the goal harms man

My dear... you are not a valueless creature. You are not a toy in the hand of predestination, nor stolen goods in the hand of Satan. But you need to know yourself. You are the Divine creature; God gave you authority over yourself and granted you free will so that neither Satan, or any creature, sword, poverty or power would be able to harm you unless you choose to harm yourself from yourself! God allowed you to make yourself happy or miserable, based on your choice to stick to your goal or to turn away from it. If your goal continues to be related to God, then all things will work together toward your happiness. Satan will fight you, but with the grace of Lord Jesus you will gain victory. You will be crowned while Satan will receive more judgment.

When you are surrounded by troubles, you feel as if you are sharing with the Lord His suffering! When joy fills your life, you thank and glorify the Giver of gifts! And thus all circumstances will work together for your good as long as you stick to your goal. But once you turn away from the goal you will stumble, even by the Bible. When Christ manifests Himself to you, you fall under tougher judgment. When you are flooded with blessings, and you give more attention to the blessing than its Giver, sorrows surprise you and you become troubled and annoyed.

My dear, you are without an excuse, because God provided you with power and capabilities that work for your good, if you want.

St. John Chrysostom wrote an article about this. "*No one can harm a man, unless this man hurts himself.*" He also wrote three articles about "*Satan's authority over man.*"¹⁷

1. The difference between sheep and goat

❖ The seat of judgment terrifies and frightens sinners and those who are under judgment. But those who are watchful of themselves and do good deeds, they yearn for that compassionate day. "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:33). Both of them are human, so truly, why are there sheep and why are there goats? It is not for us to learn that there is a difference in their nature, but it is **because the difference in the goal.**

¹⁷ الكتيب الأول "من يقدر أن يؤذيك؟" طبع سنة ١٩٦٥، والثاني "هل للشيطان سلطان عليك" سنة ١٩٦٦م، كما نشرنا هذان العملان عام 2007 في كتاب "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم".

❖ But why does he consider those who do not show compassion as goats? That is because this animal is not productive for his people; he does not produce milk, give birth or provide wool. Those without fruit, He likened them to goats, but those who are on the right side He called them “sheep.” This is because they provide natural wool in abundance, they breed and produce milk. What does He tell them? “I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in.” Another time, He said the opposite to others.

In spite of this, both sides are similar, as they are both human; both are given the same promises and the reward has been granted to all, so they intend to do good deeds. The same poor and naked person came to both sides, as did the same hungry stranger... All things are similar for both parties. So, why was the result not the same? **Because the goal is not the same...** Based on that principle, one side will go to hell and the other to the heavenly kingdom. If Satan was the reason to commit sin, why were those sent to be punished while Satan is the sinner who drove them unwillingly toward sin?¹⁸

2. The difference between the wise and foolish virgins

❖ He said there were ten virgins (Matthew 25). There are right goals and wrong goals, both are side by side, next to each other -- sins for some people and good deeds for others... Both sides were virgins; five virgins on one side and five others on the other. All of them were waiting for the Groom. Why were some of them wedded while others did not? Isn't because some were cheap and tawdry while others were noble and loving? **Don't you see that the goal, not the devil, is to decide their fate?** Do you believe that their circumstances were similar and the decision was made by those who were alike? Behold, he will judge their fellow servants¹⁹.

3. Queen of Sheba and the Jews who were disbelievers

❖ If it wasn't for those to judge, He would not have said that they will condemn this generation. He wouldn't have said that the Queen of the South will rise and condemn the Jews. It is not just a nation that can condemn a nation; a man also can condemn a nation²⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

¹⁸ عن "من كتابات القديس الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٦٩.

¹⁹ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٧٠.

²⁰ عن "من كتابات القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم"، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٧١.

DOES OPPRESSION HURT YOU?

- ❖ Then what? If someone is falsely accused or his money is stolen, would he suffer because he lost his fortune and his inheritance and living in fatal poverty? No, he would not be hurt if he were thoughtful. Was money harmful to the apostles? Didn't they always struggle despite hunger, thirst and exposure? Due to their suffering they earned all respect, became famous and attained for themselves more support from the Lord!

St. John the Chrysostom

Why does God punish those who deceive?

- ❖ It might be asked: What is the purpose of discipline and punishment? And why is there a hell? And what is the purpose of many threats if no one harms anybody or is harmed by anyone? I did not say that there is no one that harms others; what I meant is that no one is harmed by others. But how is it that no one is hurt by others if so many tried to hurt others? For example, Joseph's brothers hurt Joseph but Joseph himself was not hurt. Cain threw his net to Abel but Abel did not fall in it. This was the reason for discipline and punishment.

God does not lift punishment for those who seek to hurt others just because of the goodness of those who can bear the harm. Rather, He affirms His punishment because of the evil of the transgressor. **However, although those who are hurt by evil gain more glory at the expense of the intrigues that are plotted against them, that was not the intention of those who conducted the evil - it was due to the courage of their victims.** Therefore, crowns of wisdom will be prepared for these victims, but others will be punished for their evils.

Have you lost your money? Remember these words: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there (Job 1:21). Add the words of the apostle: "For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).

Has your reputation been offended? And have you been insulted with many curses? Remember the phrase that says: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:27). Also, "When they say all kinds of evil against you... rejoice and be exceedingly glad" (Matthew 5:11).

Have you been exiled? Remember that there is no place for you here, and if you are wise, the world for you will be considered as a foreign land.

Have you been sick with a serious illness? Remember what the apostle said: "Even though our outer man is perishing, the inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Is there someone suffering a severe death? Let him remember John who was beheaded in prison and his head was presented on a plate as a prize for the dance of an adulterer.

Think of the reward that you gain at the expense of these things. When all of these pains happen to us **unjustly**, it takes away our sins and iniquities. We accept oppression without complaint, believe in God and hope for the afterlife. This will help us gain recommendation. This suffering is a great benefit for those who bear it with courage!

St. John Chrysostom

Harm affects the oppressor not the oppressed!

❖ Losing money, being falsely accused, being cursed, being exiled, being exposed to diseases or persecution or even facing death (which is the worst) is not able to harm those who suffer from these losses. Rather, they benefit from it, so how can you prove to me that man is not harmed if any of the wrongs mentioned above took place in his life? I will try to prove much more than this. Those who are being harmed and suffer from evil are the ones who pour their wickedness over others, for there is no one is more miserable than Cain who killed his brother!

No one was more miserable than Philip's wife (Matthew 14:3), who was responsible for the beheading of John. How miserable were Joseph's brothers who sold him to the foreigners and sent him to an alien land! Also the misery of Satan who burdened Job with all those great calamities - he does not only pay a severe reckoning for his wickedness but also for what he did to Job. **We found more evidence than we expected. We found that those who fall under oppression are not being hurt, but harm returns to those who planned the disasters!**

The righteousness of the soul does not depend on richness or physical freedom, not being exiled or any of the other matters to which I referred. It depends on the deeds of that soul. Therefore, any harm that may affect these matters will not damage human righteousness in the least.

Then what? Suppose that a man wrecks his spiritual life. If by some reason someone tries to hurt him, he won't be hurt unless the harm comes from within itself, from him. You might be wondering how this could be. When someone hits someone or takes away his money or insults him or curses him harshly, the second person is certainly harmed. But the hurt does not come from the one who offended him; it comes from himself who is troubled. What I have said already, I go back and repeat myself. There is no man, no matter how evil, able to violently attack someone else and be more harmful than the envious Satan, the enemy who does not care

for us. Even this wild Satan did not have the power to destroy this man Job who lived before the Law and before the era of grace, despite Satan using many of the weapons that were sharp in every aspect. This is the power of the greatness of the soul!

And what can I say about St. Paul the apostle? Didn't he bear countless sorrows when he was thrown in prison, chained, put under tight security, whipped and stoned by the Jews? His back was torn not just by whips but also with sticks. He almost drowned in the sea, was attacked by thieves many times and was in constant conflict with his people, his enemies and his opponents. He faced uncounted conspiracies against him; struggled with hunger, nakedness, disasters and continuous sorrows... it is enough to say he faced death every day. Despite all this severe pain, he never uttered a word of blasphemy. Moreover, in the midst of pain, he was pleased and proud: "I now rejoice in my suffering" (Colossians 1:24). "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance" (Romans 5:3). He rejoiced with these severe tribulations while being tortured and was proud of it. So, what is your excuse for complaining and being unable to endure hardships that are not as difficult as this?

St. John Chrysostom

DOES POVERTY CAUSE ANY HARM TO YOU?

How do I give alms?

- ❖ One may say: I have been harmed in a different way. Even though I have not complained because I lost my money, I have become incapable of providing alms. This is a simple and easy objection. If you feel sad because of this, learn that poverty does not stand as an obstacle before giving. Despite how poor you are, your poverty has not reached the destitution of the woman who did not have anything except a handful of flour (1 Kings 17:12) or the woman who had anything except two mites (Luke 11:2). Both of these women gave all they had. They were highly admired by all. This great poverty does not stand in the way of kindness. Giving two mites was abundant and it showed strong generosity that exceeded the hospitality of all the rich. Also, pure intention and fiery jealousy has surpassed those who have given much money to the treasury. **So even regarding this matter you are not being harmed. Rather, you should have learned that by giving small alms, you will gain a reward more glorious than those who give huge amounts of money.**

St. John Chrysostom

Did poverty cause any harm to Lazarus?

❖ One may say poverty may make people irascible, and often causes them to utter blasphemy and reduces them to despicable acts. It is not poverty that does this to a man; it is the misery of the soul. Because Lazarus was poor, extremely poor, and moreover his body was so weak, it led him to suffer more harshly than from being under any form whatsoever of poverty. Beside this infirmity, he had no one to take care of him, and it was hard to meet his needs... Having no one around him made his pain more severe, made the flame higher, the calamity harsher, the test more brutal, the waves more violent and the furnace to burn hotter with flames...

Beside the three tribulations above, there was a fourth one -- the apathy of the rich man despite his richness. And if you want to find a fifth ordeal that could increase the burning of the fire, it was the rich man. He was the one who lived the life of luxury and saw the poor man more than twice or three times a day. He saw him every day sitting sadly at his door. Just looking at him was enough to soften any stony heart. In spite all of this, the cruel man was not moved to help that poor man. He had his luxurious table with cups decorated with flowers and full of pure wine. He had a crew of cooks, insincere and deceitful ones who would work from early dawn. He had teams of singers, stewards and clowns. He spent all his time pampering himself with pleasures, drinking and eating greedily, enjoying clothing and food and other comforts. He did not even think of this poor man although he saw him suffering from severe hunger, bitter from the weakness of his body and many sores which led him to be deprived and ill.

Nosy people and those who flatter others enjoyed more than their needs while the poor man, miserable and afflicted with many hardships, was not even given the crumbs that fell off the rich man's table despite his strong desire to get them. In spite of all this, none of these things caused any harm to Lazarus. He did not utter any harsh words or say any despicable talk but **he was like a piece of gold that shines brightly when it is treated with more fire to purify it**. Despite all of these tribulations, he was able to overcome and conquer its outcome.

How much more should this poor Lazarus be thinking? Wasn't he truly a wise man with a good heart? He considered himself the poorest among the poor because of his illness and because there was no one to protect him or be kind to him. He was thrown in the middle of the city as if he was in the midst of a far-off desert, writhing from the bitterness of hunger. At the same time he watched the rich man being showered with all goodness as if it came from a water fountain. Yet at the same time there

was no human condolence. Lazarus was the food for dogs to lick. Due to his weakness and his broken body he was not even able to drive them away.

Don't you realize that nothing harms he who does not hurt himself? What kind of harm afflicted Lazarus due to the weakness of his body or due to lack of protection or because of the dogs that surrounded him? Was he harmed because he was near the rich man, watching his life of luxury, his pleasure and pride?

Were these things able to weaken him to stand against virtue? Did it cripple his goal? Nothing harmed him at all. But his many hardships, in addition to the cruelty of the rich man, increased his strength and became a great support for him to gain the infinite crowns of triumph. These hardships were ways and motives for him to be rewarded...

St. John Chrysostom

WHAT ELSE CAN HARM YOU?

Illness

- ❖ Also, what harm inflicted Lazarus due to his illness, his sores, his poverty and also due to the lack of having someone to protect him? These things led to braid a crown of flowers for his victory.

St. John Chrysostom

Criticism of the people!

- ❖ What harm inflicted Joseph when he was accused of a bad reputation in his own land or when he was in foreign parts? He was accused of adultery and fornication. How was he offended by those who made him an expatriated slave? Wasn't because of these matters that Joseph was highly honored and respected by all?

St. John Chrysostom

Death

- ❖ And why I am talking about exile in a foreign land, or poverty, or denigration or captivity? If we look at Abel, what harm had inflicted Abel by his death although he was violently murdered, wronged by the hand of his brother? Wasn't it because of this that Abel became known to the whole world? This example proves what I have said before -- because it does not just prove that man can't be harmed by others. It also shows that man can attain great benefit from his opponents.

St. John Chrysostom

EXAMPLES FROM ACTUAL HISTORY

Obedience to God and understanding His love depends on man's goal and his desire to keep the source of his life. It is not a result of certain circumstances that surround him or because of some individuals with whom he interacts. There are some people that are given many gifts but they denied God, while there are others who did not enjoy what others enjoy and at the same time were able to meet with God.

Did the Jews who were known of their cruel heart, benefit from God's gifts?

St. John Chrysostom compared the stubborn Jewish people and the capabilities given to them to the people of Nineveh who were quick to repent, although they were not given the same capabilities as the Jews.

❖ **The divine gifts were not able to soften the stubbornness of their hearts.** Do you want me to explain using examples from all nations?

What kinds of gifts were given to the Jews during their exodus from Egypt? Weren't all visible creatures working in their service? They were given new and unique ways of life. In the desert they did not need to go to market; they received what they needed for free. They did not need to farm, plow or prepare the ground for planting, or to sow seeds. They did not need rain or wind or different seasons for farming, or sunlight, or a certain phase for the moon, or certain weather or anything like that.

They did not prepare the ground for threshing, did not use a pitchfork to separate the wheat from chaff and did not use a mill or an oven; they did not bring wood or fire to any house. They did not need tools for kneading... nor any other kinds of tools for textiles, construction or making of shoes, but the word of God was everything for them. The table was prepared for them without the use of human hand; it was prepared for them without any fatigue or any effort. Regarding their clothes, their shoes and their bodies - they did not wear out over the course of the time. Natural weakness did not affect them; even their feet did not swell despite frequent walking.

It was never stated that there were physicians among them or medicine or anything like that. Thus, every weakness was removed from them. It was said: "He also brought them out with silver and gold and there was none feeble among his tribes" (Psalm 105:37).

The heat of sunlight did not harm them because clouds shaded them and surrounded them as a moveable shelter, protecting them all. There was no need for a torch to dissipate the darkness of the night. The miraculous pillar of fire was the source of light for them. It managed two

jobs: one to give them light and the second to direct them in the way of their journey... leading those numerous guests in the midst of the desert in a way that was much more accurate than any human guide. They traveled overland and by the sea, as if it was dry land... They went through an adventure that was against nature's laws when they stepped in the raging sea, and walked on it as if walking on solid dry rocks. Once they placed their feet in the water, the water turned to a dry land... But once their enemy reached it, the sea returned to its natural state. It served as a boat for the Jews and a tomb for their enemy...

That irrational sea led a precise role like the wisest and smartest man. It served as a guard, then as an avenger, showing contradiction in one day.

And what should I say about the rock that evoked fountains of water, and the birds that abundantly covered the land? And what about the wonders that happened in Egypt?

All of these wonders were not there to just satisfy their needs. It was for the people in order to preserve accurately and carefully the teachings about God that was given to Moses...

Despite all of the magnificent perceptible care, the blessings that were impossible to utter, the strong miracles, extra attention, constant teaching, warnings that at times took the form of speaking and at others were in action, glorious victories, abnormal success, the food and water that surpassed their needs, the potential of seeing the unbelievable glory in Moses, who represented humankind... **Despite all of this, they complained, and without any discipline they worshiped the calf and honored the bull even though they had been enjoying God's blessings.**

St. John Chrysostom

People of Nineveh and their readiness for repentance

- ❖ But the people of Nineveh were Barbarian and foreigners and did not have any share in the blessings, not in words or in miracles or in actions. When they met a man who had been rescued from drowning, who had never met them before, and they never knew him previously, this man entered their city saying: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). They returned and repented and "then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it" (Jonah 3:10). How did those people change despite their great evil, their terrible cruelty and the incurable sores of their morals? It is written: "Their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jonah 3:10), indicating the greatness of their evil that rose to that level of height until it reached to heaven...

Note that how man who is watchful, alert and has self-control is not just able to keep himself from being harmed, but he can lift heavenly wrath! Despite the people of Nineveh did not have any portion of the miracles that happened to the Jews with cruel hearts, they depended on their good inward readiness. When they were given a small chance, they took advantage of it to reach a better condition, even though they were unaware of divine revelation and away from Philistine (Israel)!

St. John Chrysostom

The stance of the three young men

❖ Once more I wonder: Had the morality of the three men been corrupted because of the hardships they faced? Despite their young age... they were painfully and seriously captured. They were taken away from their country... They also were taken away from their homes, their temple, their altar, their sacrifices and offerings and even from the instruments used to sing psalms. The inevitable outcome was that they were driven away from all aspects of worship. They were handed over to the hands that were more like wolves than human. They were devastated by disasters more than anyone else... They endured serious captivity without being supported by a teacher or a prophet or a guide... Furthermore, when they were taken to the royal palace, they felt as if they were between cracks and stones. It was though they were sailing in a sea full of coral and rocks, forced to sail in a sea of wrath without a guide or someone to control the signals, without a crew or sailors. They were locked up in the royal palace, which for them was like a prison! However, they learned the divine wisdom, grew in celestial things and despised every human pride. Wings grew for their spirits and with them they would fly high; they considered their expatriation in the palace as a way to support them through their ordeals.

If they had been in a private residence and not in the Royal Court they would have been more independent. But for them it was as if they were thrown in prison... submitted directly to any command or harsh measure. When the king asked them to join him at his table, and to enjoy his luxury and his unclean banquets with the food that was forbidden for them - this action was more terrifying than death. They were like lambs among many wolves; they were forced to eat the forbidden food, or be executed...

They did not care for the cruel and absolute power, despite that they had their reasons to justify their obedience to him. Instead they offered advice and an appropriate opinion to avoid sin despite taking everything from them. It was not possible to buy the eunuchs' chief with money; how much harder would it be when they were captives and without money?!

Also they were not likely to use friendship or social relations in order for him to intercede on their behalf. How much tougher would it be since they were strangers? It was not possible to be in a better situation, even if they had power. How much worse could it be when they were slaves?

It was not possible to take control over him through a large number. How would it go for them when they were just three?

However, they approached the eunuch who was tasked with this job, and explained their reasons when they found him afraid and terrified... For he said: "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. Why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king" (Daniel 1:10). They saved the eunuch from that fear and persuaded him to give them time... They did their best, and God did His part with His power... When they showed their nobility and courage, they gained for themselves divine support, and thus they reached their goals.

Do you realize now that if man does not hurt himself, no one can hurt him? At least look at the young age and captivity of those young men and their circumstances. All of this did not harm them; to the contrary, they gained a better reputation. Thus, after they completed their work, they were subject to be submitted to other enemies. Again they were the same men who went through a harder temptation when a furnace of fire was lit for them, and when they had to face an army of barbarians who were with the king, where all the energy of the Persians was against them, to deceive them and grill them... However, since they did not betray themselves and gave everything they could, they were not infected by any loss. They gained for themselves crowns of glorious victory that they have not won before.

Nebuchadnezzar tied them and threw them into the furnace but they were not burnt. On the contrary, he restored them with honor. Despite that they were taken from the temple and the altar, when they were in the furnace surrounded by strong men and the king himself, they established a glorious memorial and won a tangible victory. They sang a wondrous and strange melody which ever since has still been used in the world, and it will continue for generations to come...

If captivity and slavery... were unable to corrupt the inner virtue of the three young men, who were prisoners, enslaved, and strangers... but rather fighting the enemy had become a chance for them to strengthen their faith, that what could hurt the man who can control himself? Nothing can harm him, even if the whole world with its armies is against him.

One may say that in that case of the three young men, **God was with them and protected them from the fire.** Certainly this happened; so, **if**

you do your best with all your power, the divine assistance will inevitably be with you

Nevertheless, the reason that makes me wonder about those three men and makes me call them blessed -- and I wish to be like them -- is not because they overcame the flame and put out its heat, but because they were tied and thrown in the furnace for the sake of firm faith. That led to the fulfillment of their victory.

Crowns of victory were placed on their heads at the moment they were thrown in the furnace. Before it happened... these crowns were prepared and braided for them from the moment they uttered the words of courage and freedom when they talked with the king. When they were in his presence, they said: "We have no need to answer you in this matter. Our God who we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace and He will deliver us from your hand. O king, we do not serve your gods nor will we worship the golden image which you have erected" (Daniel 3:16-18). After saying these words, their triumph was shown. They found the trophy of the reward and rushed to the crown of glorious martyrdom, taking with them their talk and their deeds...

What do you say regarding these matters? Have you been exiled or been taken away from your country? Then look, this had happened also to them. Have you been captured in a war and become a slave for barbarian leaders? Have you been tied, burned or put to death? You cannot tell me anything more painful than that. Nevertheless, those men went through all of this and they become more honorable due to each of these pains. Yes, they gained more fame, and their heavenly storage has been increased in heaven.

St. John Chrysostom

The difference between Adam and Job

❖ Therefore, we refer to Adam and Job.

Truly, **Satan attacked Adam with abstract talk, but he attacked Job with acts.** From one of them, he took away all his wealth and children but from the other one, Adam, he did not take much or less of his property. Let's look at the same words and the same plan. The Bible says: "The serpent said to the woman: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

In the story of Adam there was a serpent; but in the story of Job, it was a woman. Does that mean there is a difference between those who introduced the advice? One of them was a serpent and the other was Job's wife, i.e., his partner, but the first one was under Adam's authority...

Did Eve have an excuse?

1. Truly Eve, who was under Adam's authority, was able to deceive him. But in the story of Job, Eve was not able to mislead him even though she was his partner and his assistant. **Let's examine what the serpent said.** “Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” Look at the malice of Satan. He told them what God never mentioned in order to learn from them what God had told them.

What did Eve do? She should have been silent. She should have not exchanged any talk with the serpent. Foolishly, she revealed what God had said, and in a way she offered a great opportunity to Satan...

Look what kind of evil is this that we submit ourselves to the hands of our enemies and to those who plot against us! Therefore, Christ says: “Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matthew 7:6). This is what happened with Eve. She gave the hallowed to the dogs and swine, so they trampled over them with their feet and turned and tore into the woman.

2. Look how Satan played evil when he said to them: “You shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Pay attention to this point. Eve had the chance to understand the trick, for Satan had planned his war against God, contradicting His words... Before that, Eve declared what the Lord says to whom who wanted to learn. But why did she keep talking with he who talks against what God had said?

God had said: “You shall surely die” but Satan replied, saying: “You shall not surely die.” Is there more than this hatred? How is it important for man to recognize the enemy and the opponent through this response that contradicts what God says? She had to flee from the bait and stay away from the net.

He had said: “You shall not surely die,” for God knows that in the day you eat of the fruit your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (Genesis 3:40). Eve threw the good she had in her hands, hoping to win a greater promise. Satan had promised her to make both of them gods; instead he turned and threw them in the pit of death.

O woman, how did you trust Satan? What good had you seen in him? Wasn't your trust in the Giver of the command enough to confirm to you that one is God? He is the Creator and the Organizer of the world and the other one was the devil and the enemy?

3. If I say it was not Satan; perhaps it was just a serpent. Would the serpent claim equality for Eve and ask her to be like God in His judgment?

You can tell that Eve was able to recognize the trick but did not want to

know. At that time God gave her abundant evidence of His blessings and showed her His care for his creation. God created man from nothing; He breathed spirit into him, and made him in His image. He gave him power over everything on earth, granted him a helper, made a paradise for him and commanded him to eat from the rest of the trees, except just one. This ban was for the good of man.

Satan did not show much of any good work, but he fooled the woman with abstract talk and tricked her with worthless hope, and thus she was deceived. Nevertheless, she trusted Satan more than God even though God showed His will through His good work.

The woman trusted the one who used abstract talk.

Have you noticed how was Eve deceived, not by force, but as a result of foolishness and laziness? And to recognize this clearly, listen to the accusations of the Bible to the woman. “The woman saw that the tree was good for food... she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6).

She was blamed for not controlling her sight, not just being tricked by Satan. She was defeated due to her lust that dominated her, not because of the evil of Satan. Therefore, her excuses did not save her. Despite that she said: “The serpent deceived me.” She fell completely under punishment because she had the ability not to fall.

St. John Chrysostom

Let's take Job who was tempted as an example

❖ My beloved, as an example let's take Job who was tempted so we may profit from both cases (Adam and Job). Taking Adam as an example, we learn the amount of evil that comes from laziness; taking Job as an example, we learn the greatness of glory that comes from vigilance.

Think of the one who lost everything. He will be the source of comfort for you when you are in pain or distress. He will be the blessed and noble man standing on the stage of the world, talking to all about the pains he endured, so that humankind will bear with nobility what might come upon them, without surrender to any troubles. There is no trouble of man that can't find comfort from that story. The troubles in the whole world have gathered in the body of one person...

St. John Chrysostom

1. He was the poorest among the beggars

❖ Let's recall this disaster that seems beyond all comprehension. I mean the poverty and the pain that resulted from it, for people suffer because of poverty. Who was poorer than Job, who was the poorest of the beggars on the road? They had tattered clothes, but Job was naked. Job had that

garment given to him by nature, i.e., flesh; even that garment, Satan ripped it, and Job was infected with sores...

At least that poor herd found roofs to shelter them while on the road but Job spent his nights homeless without a roof to harbor him.

What made the ordeal harder was that some might believe the dreadful evil they did in their lives was the reason for their plight, but Job did not have this feeling. Thus, he felt extreme pain and terrible confusion because he was not aware of the reason that caused this disaster to occur to him. I said that those had reasons to blame themselves, and that provides much comfort during the disaster because the man feels he is being punished fairly. But Job had lost all means of comfort.

Those who were poor since the beginning of their lives became accustomed to this destitution. But Job endured an ordeal to which he was unaccustomed, living with severe deprivation of his former wealth. So, while being aware of the reason of disaster gives comfort, it won't be less if the man tasted and lived with poverty from the beginning. This man did not receive any compassion, and the problem did not stop there, for he could not even enjoy living in his dwelling since he lived with trash.

Therefore, if you enter into poverty, think of what this righteous man endured and immediately rise and shake off any despair...

St. John Chrysostom

2. Bearing physical pain

❖ The second disaster that happened before, which was severer than poverty, was physical pain. Who is helpless like him? Who can bear diseases like this? Who is he that suffered, or saw a man suffering from severe pains like this? Little by little, his body started to become weak, the sores on his extremities hurt... A bad smell surrounded him, his flesh deteriorated little by little so he could not taste the food. He said: "Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt?" (Job 6:5)

O men, if you fall because of weakness, think of this holy flesh because it was holy and pure even when infected with many wounds!

If someone was not guilty, was unfairly judged, was tortured and was dismembered, let him think of this saint to help ease his pain.

One may say that he sensed great comfort because he knew God was the One who brought him all this pain.

In fact, it bothered him and worried greatly him to think that the righteous God that he served was in a fight against him. He did not have a reasonable excuse for what happened. Therefore, when he finally learned the reason, he became most devout. He said: "Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4-5). And

another time he says: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 24:5-6).

But if you believe that was enough to comfort him then you too can experience this comfort. If you are suffering from these troubles that are not from God, but as an outcome of the arrogance of evil, then be grateful. Do not curse He who is able to lift these troubles and you will be rewarded the same way....

St. John Chrysostom

3. He was able to bear the death of his children

- ❖ Do you want me to show you the nature that stirred an intense fight against that noble man? He lost his ten children at once; all of them were young and innocent. They did not face a regular death but one that was severe and causes us to feel sorry for them. Who can come across a disaster like this? No one! If you lose a son and a daughter at the same time, look at this righteous man and you will find great comfort...

St. John Chrysostom

4. Bearing irony of the people

- ❖ It was unbearable that his friends fled from him; they taunted him, mocked him, ridiculed him and hurt him. Suffering from disaster is not comparable to the reprimand that comes from others during our ordeal...

However, having no one to alleviate the calamity was not the only reason everyone was hurting him. He wept bitterly and told them that they were torturing him (Job 19:9). He described them as unmerciful when he said: “My relatives have failed me, and my close friends have forgotten me. Those who dwell in my house and my maidservants too, count me as a stranger. I am an alien in their sight; I call my servants, but they give no answer, I beg him with my speech” (Job 19: 14, 16).

And also he said that he became the subject of talk, and everyone made fun at him (Job 19: 9-10). He said: “My own clothes will abhor me” (Job 9:31).

St. John Chrysostom

5. Bearing horrifying night terrors

- ❖ He did not find comfort even at night; the horrifying nightmares were more difficult than his troubles during daytime... “You scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions” (Job 7:14). Who is able to bear all of these disasters, even if he was strong as iron, with a heart that is powerful like steel?

It is hard to bear any disaster even though Job was able to bear many calamities. Despite what happened to him he did not err or utter with evil.

St. John Chrysostom

You have no excuse

❖ Let's look at the pain of this man and consider it as medicine for our diseases and consider the waves of his raging sea as a port for our troubles. Let's take him as an example in everything that happens to us so that we will experience his ability to be above life's disasters, and we will be encouraged.

But if you say: "It was Job who was able to bear all of this, but I am not like him," I will greatly blame you and praise Job. It is preferable for you to be able to bear disasters more than him.

Perhaps you may ask me: Why? **Job lived at the time before the grace and before the Law.** Job lived during an era distinguished by great hardship and lacked the blessing of the great Holy Spirit. During that time it was hard to resist sin; hate and terrifying death prevailed. But now the fight has become much easier and there has been no hate since Jesus came. We have no excuse if we do not reach Job's level in tolerance after we have been given many advantages and gifts by God.

By considering all these matters - the opponent was more dangerous and man was unarmed before his enemy Satan - we must be able to endure whatever happens to us bravely. We must be thankful in order to win the same crown as Job, with the grace and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and all times and to the end of ages. Amen.

St. John Chrysostom

3

GOD AND MAN AFTER THE FALL

Often man becomes so humble that he sees himself as a small creature before the greatness of nature. Man lives for a short time, like a shadow that walks then disappears. Man is a creature that may stumble over a small stone that can cause death. Or a very small microbe – which the eye can hardly see – may attack him and send him to bed for years of pain. He will seek to die but won't find death.

Man is a weak creature. Perhaps because of a simple and dirty desire, he forgets his dignity, spends his money recklessly, destroys the unity of the family and may lose everything even though he knows that it is a temporary pleasure that soon will be gone!

Do you want to know who you are? You are the subject of God's love. You are the center of His care and attention, which appears as if He forgets the whole world for your sake.

When He created you, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). He sees in you His image and likeness. You have the mind and you enjoy freedom of will. He gave you the ability of love that attracts you toward the Creator to be satisfied. His impressions are reflected on you and He will be pleased with you.

He created heaven and earth that will pass away one day (Matthew 24:53) but He made you to live immortal life forever. This is your soul that God did not want to match with the whole world. He said: “What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”

His relation with you is a relation of a lover to his beloved...

What did sin do to me?

With my free will, I chose to be independent from God and away from His great love. That was Adam's first sin; it is also every sin we commit. I have separated myself from its source of happiness, satisfaction and life. I fell under the burden of sin and crashed under its cruel injustice.

I willingly chose sin, so sin introduced to me all that it has, even if it is against my desire. Sin provides nothing but privation, injustice and death, etc.

1. Privation: sin introduced to me a fruit from “a tree that was good for food, was pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise,” but took away my satisfaction, kept me away from paradise, peace, joy, good and true knowledge.

2. Injustice: God is right and just. Sin does not belong to God. Sin does not exist. It is wrong and it does not acknowledge law or legislation. If there

was to be a law for sin, it will be fraud and injustice itself.

3. Death: darkness is the absence of light. The same is true for sin; sin has no existence. Sin is separation from God, the Creator of everything. Sin takes away the soul from God, the Life-giver.

This is where the human soul has come to be. The image of the soul has been shifted from its original and has lost its beauty. Its nature has been corrupted and has lost its power. The human soul is no longer able to live or meet with God, the Source of her life. Man has become confused and terrified, but in vain he tried to submit himself to his God using his own self-ability. Man tried to mend his mistakes by depending on his own-self; that was an indication of his great desire to be self-reliant and independent from God, which resulted in other successive outcomes. These outcomes were demonstrated by the insistence of man to stay away from the source of his goodness, and his inability to return to his initial life. Man made himself clothes from fig leaves that went dry. Those kinds of clothes were adequate to prove to man that he was naked and should be ashamed of this crime.

Man became helpless, and it was essential that God interfere to clear the outcome of what man had done.

It was necessary that God gives man another chance so that He would show man His deep love, support and capability so that the sons of humans will be able to accept that love and acknowledge it if they want.

But how would this chance become available if man with his free will had chosen sin that led to death? Should God interfere to forgive at the expense of justice? If so, how is unlimited justice achieved?

Would it be possible for God, who has this amount of love and compassion, to forsake man and let him suffer and perish forever?

There was a need for reconciliation to take place between God and man so that God would pay the wage of the sin without waiving His justice, and in a way that He would be able to achieve justice through His deep love!

- ❖ Grace is accompanied with joy, peace, love and truth... but all the figures of sin are accompanied with confusion and lack love and joy toward the Lord.
- ❖ The nature of the soul is not fit to belong to the nature of theology or the darkness of wickedness; it is a rational, great and beautiful creation that took the image and the likeness of God. The whims of darkness and wickedness found its way to the soul due to its trespasses.
- ❖ Do not undermine the nature of the soul that is identified with understanding; the immortal soul is a valuable vessel!

Despite the greatness of heaven and earth, God was not fully satisfied

(Ecclesiastes 4:5-8) while he was satisfied with you only.

Bear in mind your value and your great origin. Man was the master over everything... but the devil blinded his mind.

St. Macarius the Great

- ❖ God made man with a nature that tends to be both angelic and animalistic. If man submits himself truthfully to his Creator and Lord, and if he sincerely keeps His commandments, he will participate in the fellowship of the angels, receive eternal and immortal life and will not die.

But if he disobeys the Lord His God, taking advantage of his free-will, being arrogant and disobedient, he will submit himself to death, will serve his lust through his conduct and will be sentenced to eternal death.

- ❖ Yes, O my God... the absence of your light means the coming of death and nothingness. Death itself has no existence. **And this nothingness drives us to the corruption of sin.** Hence, it takes away our fear from committing sin. We sin and turn toward the abyss of hell as we become corrupted....

How miserable I am... darkness has reigned over me, and although You are the Light I nonetheless turned my face away from You! Unfortunately, I have been greatly hurt. Although You are the Comforter I nonetheless turned away from You!

How miserable I am... I was overwhelmed with many fools, and though You are the Truth I nonetheless did not seek Your advice! Unfortunately I have been lost. Although You are the Way I nonetheless stayed away from You!

How miserable I am! Death destroys me with many hits, and although You are the Life, I have never been with You!

How miserably I often fall in evil and sin. Although You are the "Word" with whom everything was made I nonetheless separated myself from you. O, without You, I would have not been existed. You are the Word, my King, You are the Word, my God, You are the Light of creation, You are the Way, the Truth and the Life... You dissipated darkness, deception and death... You are the Light - without You all people will live in dark night. You are the Way which without there will be nothing but wrong paths. You are the Truth which without there will be only a lie. You are the Life which without You, death hangs over everyone.

O, just say: "Let it be light," and then I will be able to see the light and escape the darkness. I will be able to view the right way and leave the wrong way. I will see the truth and stay away from improper ways.

I seek life and escape from death. My God, shine within me with Your light. You are my light and the light that lightens me.

If You rebuke me, I will be afraid of your justice. I will be glad of Your true kingdom. I will be honored, for You are my God. I will love You, as You became a father to me, and I will be faithful to You, as You became my Groom.

You are the exalted light; please hasten to shine within a blind man who desires to become one of Your people. The darkness has surrounded me and the shadow of death has besieged me. May I take steps toward the narrow way of peace that leads to Your holy kingdom and Your eternal dwelling. Through this way, Your name will be hallowed and acknowledged.

And when we acknowledge Your name, the true way will be formed through which we reach You, as You are the true way. Yes, with You, we leave evil ways and we return to the holy way which is You. Because truly there is no other way, except You.

❖ I confess to You... I confess to You, the heavenly Father, King of heaven and earth...=

My wickedness led to my deep wounds because I did not take the narrow way. Although You are the Life, but I was not with You.

My evils are the nothingness. You are the Word. With You everything was made and without You nothing would have been there. Because I was not with You so I lost my life and I sinned by committing evil and that led me to nothingness, i.e., spiritual death or the state in which the soul loses God, the Source of her life.

All whatever is there... is hand made by the Word, so that all is good... But whatever is outside the Word is nothingness... and whatever does not come from the true goodness of God is not subject to be good, so that nothing outside Him is considered good, it is but evil.

Evil is the lack of good and darkness is lack of light. So evil is nothingness; it is not the work of the Word... it is a separation from the Word.

My God... I thank You for the light that You have given me that made me able to see, so I can see You and get to know Thyself.

Yes... every time I turn away from You, I fall into sin and corruption. When I forget You I fall in wickedness, because You are the "Good." How miserable I am. I did not know that my richness is in You. I am the one who has no existence.

But what can I say? If I do not exist, how do I want to know You?

It is by being separated from You, I become nothingness that has no presence. I become like a statue that has no life. A statue that has ears but doesn't hear, has a nose but doesn't smell, has hands but don't touch and

has feet but don't move. In one word, I say, it has the body of the human but lacks life and sense.

❖ My God, when I was separated from You, I lost my presence, I became nothing... And in the midst of my blindness, deafness, and frozen senses, I wanted to follow good, escape evil, feel pain, and find my way in the darkness. But I could not because I was away from You. You are the True Light that gives light to every man coming to the world.

How shameful that my wounds have hurt me, but I didn't feel its pain. I was sharply pulled toward lust without sense... because I was a sinner, separated from life, separated from the "Word," the Creator of all...

My God... You are my light... here are my enemies, the devils; they did to me all what they wanted... They hit me, killed me, abused my corpse and led me to death.

That was a fair discipline that I deserved because of my separation from You! And because I became as spiritual nothingness due to Your absence from my life.

My God... You are my life, You are my Creator, You are my Leader, You are my fortress and my Creator who brought me to existence... Have mercy on me and raise me...

My God... You are the breeze in my life; You are my righteousness, my power and my comfort on the day of trouble.

Look at the multitude of my enemies and save me from their hands. Those who hate You, where are they going to escape from Your face? But for me, it is by Your help I live in You.

Those who experienced living with You, O my God, rejected Your assistance. They became despicable.

They have divided the garment of the glorious virtues which You have garnished for me.

They made their way into the market; they came toward me and trampled me with their feet.

With the ties of sin, they defiled Your sanctuary that You sanctified within me.

They filled me with depression and crushed me with bitterness.

I followed their pattern... I became blind, naked and was shackled with the chains of evil.

They pulled me toward the loop of hideous immoral acts and depravity. I was subservient to them and my loads added burden to me.

I became a slave and I liked my slavery.

I was blind and was happy with my blindness.

I was not terrified of the burden of my shackles. But I thought the

bitterness of sin was sweet and I regarded its sweetness as bitterness.

Woe to me! How ignorant I am! All of this has happened to me because I was not with You, O the Divine Word. Without You, nothing will exist. With You, everything continues to exist. But away from You, everything returns to nothingness...

With You, all the creatures continue to exist; creatures that are in heaven, on earth, in the sea or under the ground.

I wish I can stick to You, O the Word, for it is in You that I will be kept safe. I am devastated every time I am not faithful to You, and I become hopeless.

You have created me so would You provide me with a new creation! I have sinned; You would visit me! I fell; You would raise me!

I have become a fool; You would give me understanding!

I lost my sight; You would restore light to my eyes!

❖ It is true that sin makes us slide into death. When the Law forbids sin, the sin becomes more serious than if it has not been forbidden by the Law. In any case, with grace we can fulfill without any difficulty. With our full will, we can do what the Law strongly recommends. We are no longer slaves to the Law out of fear; we are friends and bondservants for righteousness out of love.

❖ Return to your heart and you'll find yourself alone with He who sees all. Hate sin so you can please God.

Do not seek sin; do not think of it while repenting. You would rather despise it and stay away from it.

Temptation may suggest to you that sin is able to make you happy. It threatens with sadness to seduce you to follow evil, but all of this is just passing emptiness.

Thoughts and evil talk may bring evil suggestions; easily it will corrupt the upright life.

Throw evil suggestions outside your heart; do not pay attention to them, and do not seek them...

Remember what He recommended in His Gospel: "Pray without ceasing." If you don't cease to pray, He surely will not forget His mercies.

❖ Jesus answered them: "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). He is a slave; he was not a slave of man, but he is a slave of sin!

Who would not be alarmed before these words? May the Lord our God bless us – me and you – to speak with the appropriate words regarding this freedom, and to avoid that slavery...

How miserable that slavery is! When mankind suffers from evil leaders they can ask to change the leader. But what does the slave of sin do? To whom should he go and submit his request? To whom he would go and seek salvation?

Where would the slave of sin flee? He carries his mistress, i.e., sin, wherever he goes. The evil conscience does not go away by itself; there is no other place to go.

Yes, the sinner cannot withdraw sin by himself because the sin that he commits is inside him. He sins to enjoy a little of carnal lust. But **the pleasure passes and the sin stays**. What pleases him goes away while the thorn stays behind it. How evil this kind of slavery is...

Let's all escape to Christ and let's protest against sin to God, for He is our savior.

Let's ask to be sold so that He saves us with His blood. For thus says the Lord: "You have sold yourselves for nothing and you shall be redeemed without money" (Isaiah 52:3). You won't pay for your salvation, thus says the Lord, because He paid not with money. Instead he gave His blood; otherwise we would continue to be destitute slaves.

❖ Everyone - be he Jew or Greek, rich or poor, one with power of an emperor or that of a beggar - his status matters not, because "**whoever commits sin is a slave of sin**" (John 8:34). If people acknowledge their slavery, they will find how to acquire their freedom.

He who is born free and is captured by Barbarians will turn from being free to becoming a slave. If another person hears about him, and has compassion on him, he will find money and go to the Barbarians. He will give them money and redeem the man. Truly, that person will restore freedom to this man while saving him from injustice...

I ask the person who was redeemed: Did you err? He answers, "Yes, I erred." So do not have pride in yourself that you have been redeemed. Also, you who redeemed him do not boast. Both of you should turn to the True Redeemer. Those who are under sin, he calls them slaves but actually they are called dead.

Why does man fear captivity, which is actually a result of iniquity? Is it because they look like they are alive? Was it wrong to say "Let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22)? So that all those who are under sin are dead. They are dead slaves, dead in their service and slaves in their death.

❖ Prohibition by law usually enhances the wrong desire as long as love and joy in holiness are weak and not able to overcome tendency toward sin. Therefore, without the assistance of divine grace, it is impossible for the

man to love holiness or be glad with it.

- ❖ O brethren, if we keep in mind our inherited punishment, so the whole world will be considered blind. Christ, the Light-giver, has come because the devil is the one who causes blindness. The devil made all mankind to be born blind when he deceived the first man. Let mankind run to the Light-giver. Let's run, believe, and receive the mud which is from saliva... let them wash their faces in the Pool of Siloam... This is Siloam; wash your face, be baptized so you will be enlightened and will be able to see, you who were not able to see before.
- ❖ When the Law prohibits something, we err more seriously than if we had not been prohibited by the Law to do it. In any case, with grace, we can fulfill the Law with no difficulty and with a desire that is more than if the Law pushes us to do it. We are no longer slaves under the Law through fear but we have become friends through love. We become slaves for the righteousness which itself was the source announced by the Law.
- ❖ The way of sinners attracts you because it is wide and many are walking in it... You realize how wide it is but you do not see its end.
- ❖ Sin enters our life with the waves of this world through the cracks in our weakness.
- ❖ Every sin is a kind of a lie; every sin is more harmful for its perpetrator than it is for the victim.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The man who travels south from Jerusalem to Jericho falls into the hands of the thieves because he chose to go with his own will... The Savior says: "All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers" (John 10:8). What kind of wounds afflicted man? It is the corruption of sin.

Origen

- ❖ The pains of sin are tangled together; if you suffer from any kind of pain, certainly you will become a slave to the rest of the pains.

St. John Saba

- ❖ If you hear a bad story about truthful people, pour your tears until you quench the fire that burns others... grieve for that person who is lost so that he may return and repent.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

- ❖ If a man falls by sinning, he loses the joy of his heart, becomes depressed and sad and will suffer from the severity of the ache of his conscience. But if he repented and became free from sin, he will restore the joy of

salvation...

Our Lord Savior Jesus Christ is the salvation for all nations; therefore, the prophet asks God the Father to bring joy to the world through the incarnation of His Son. But the leading spirit is the Holy Spirit Who prevails and leads the entire universe.

- ❖ The prophet asks to blot out all iniquities because if one of the sins remains, it will prevent us from entering the kingdom of God. Also, if our clothes are defiled, it will stop us from entering into the holy. This saying corresponds with what Paul the apostle says: “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers or extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Fr. Onthimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ Sin is heavy and it needs great mercy.
- ❖ [St. Jerome wrote to Castrutius of Pannonia to comfort him in his blindness:]

I write to you asking not to look at this carnal tragedy that came upon you, thinking that it happened because of sin... Don't we see a large number of pagans, Jews, heretics and those who come with strange ideas stumbling in the mud of lust and making their way through blood in violence more than predatory wolves and ravisher hawk? Yet they are not afflicted with any calamity.

They are not hurt like others; at the same time they are more arrogant in their conduct when they lift their faces toward heaven.

On the other hand, we know that the saints suffer from illness, pain and need...

If you think that you are blind because of sin, and the illness that physicians cannot cure which is a sign of God's anger, then you must consider that Isaac was a sinner. For he became completely blind, was deceived and gave the blessing to the wrong person. We blame Jacob, for he sinned, he lost his sight and was not able to see Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:1). However, with his inner eye and his prophetic spirit he was able to see far into the future and foretell that Christ will be coming from the royal tribe (Genesis 49:1).

St. Jerome

- ❖ Many times the mind is disturbed deeply when remembering sin; this leads us to sin in a way that could be much worse than before.

(Pope) Gregory the Great

- ❖ There is no excuse for any of us when we fall in the trap of mistakenly thinking that some sins result in punishment while others don't. The apostle says: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Thus every sin is evidence of ignoring the Law and is considered an obstacle that exalts against the knowledge of God.
- ❖ Every sin is a sign of ignoring the divine Law and it is called "**an obstacle that exalts against the knowledge of God.**"

St. Basil the Great

The commandment between the Old Testament (Moses Law) and the New Testament (the Gospel)

- ❖ The Hebrew is like a man who closed his door and lit a light. The sun shone and he did not realize it. He did not open his door to see the shining outside his dwelling or to enjoy it with others without the need of his light. The windows of his soul have been kept blocked from understanding; therefore he was seeking a small light during daytime.
O Jew, the sun has shone on hills and filled the earth, sea, world and air... Why have you become a joke among the shining world by being far from the daylight while it is with you?

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ The Jews are still dwelling by the Well of Marah (Exodus 15: 23-25), staying at the bitter water, because God has not yet showed them the tree by which the water becomes fresh.
- ❖ The Lord threw a tree in the water and made the water fresh. When the Jesus tree, the cross, comes and when the teaching of my Savior dwells within me, then the Law of Moses becomes fresh. Its taste becomes truly sweet for those who read it with understanding.
- ❖ "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), to turn from following word by word instead to follow the Divine Spirit. "When someone returns to the Lord, he takes off the veil."

Origen

- ❖ Moses' commandments are the "service of judgment," but the grace by the Savior, he calls it "service of righteousness" which excelled in glory...
The Law that condemns was given by Moses, but the grace that justifies has been given by the Only Begotten Son. Christ has been superior in glory, incomparable.

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ The Old Testament was not void in Christ but it was the veil that obstructed the truth. Thus when we understand through Christ, the Old Testament becomes clear and visible. Without Christ it is concealed and ambiguous.

The same apostle added straightaway: **“When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”** He did not say: “The Law or the Old Testament will be removed.” It is not this way! With the blessing of the Lord anything that was covered would be removed due to its lack of use. **The cover that conceals the useful truth is removed.**

This is what happens to those who yearn faithfully to seek the meaning of the holy books. For them, it has been made clear the order of the events, the harmony of the words and the demeanor between both testaments, the Old and the New, so that there would not be even one point without complete explanation.

These mysterious facts were declared through symbols when it was revealed. By explaining the facts, those who tend to criticize will be obligated to learn.

- ❖ God commanded to pursue chastity, and He gives chastity. He commanded the Law and gives the Spirit, because sin abounds when there is Law without grace (Romans 5:20), and the letter kills if it is without Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6). He gives these commandments to teach us how to ask for the assistance of grace when we try to obey His commandments but due to our weakness we fall in trouble under the Law. Also, He gave these commandments to teach us to be thankful for His support that makes us able to do any good work.
- ❖ The Law was given by a servant that led people to be sinners, while forgiveness came from the emperor and saved those sinners.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Through Law God held the staff, for He said: “If man did this or that he will die.” But in His incarnation He put His staff away, showing the way of life through kind ways. It has been said to Him by the Psalmist: “Ride prosperously because of truth, humility and righteousness.” He does not frighten because He is God, but He dwells in our heart as a compassionate Father. As Paul teaches us clearly: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

Fear has no power to raise us up from the death of sin, but the blessing of the meekness that is poured on us can raise us up to the throne of life. Referring to Elisha, when he sent his servant with the staff to lay it on the

dead child, the servant did not bring the child back to life. But when Elisha personally and physically came to the scene, stretched his body on the body of the dead lad, laid his eyes, mouth and hands on the child, and then breathed into his mouth seven times, the dead child came to the light of the new life through the tenderness of Elisha.

When Elisha breathed seven times in the dead body, he was proclaiming the divine grace, giving the spirit, the grace of sevenfold, to those who were thrown to the death of sin. After this, the child came back to life. That child who was not raised and brought back to life by the fearful staff, he gained life through the spirit of love.

❖ **Is it possible for someone to taste something that may bring death to him?** Because he who tastes the Law using a carnal way will bring death to himself. The commandment of the Law acknowledges sin, but does not remove it... As Paul witnessed, saying: “For the Law made nothing perfect (Hebrew 7:19). Also: “Therefore the Law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12-13). He then immediately says: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”(Romans 7:13).

(Pope) Gregory the Great

Conclusion

Now my God, my life has been corrupted and I am in need of someone who may change my nature and save me from death. What would You do, O You who is full of unlimited love? (This will be the topic of the second book of the Divine Love).