ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

"Partakers of divine nature": this is what the Lord calls us to be. On the THEOSIS weekend, you heard quite a bit about this idea, perhaps for the first time. The initial study segments of this group experience focused on this doctrine of Theosis to help us become more conscious of its meaning for our lives. In this course we will look at the concept of Theosis from another standpoint, slightly different, yet the same. In his epistle to the Ephesians Saint Paul speaks of this climactic Christian experience as "being seated in the heavenly places" or "living in the heavenly realm". He then unfolds what this means for us in our day to day life.

We do not live in this realm in isolation from one another in the Body of Christ, the Church. By sharing in all the aspects of its life, we gradually come to learn what it means to share in the life of the Trinity which is, after all, a Community. The Church reflects the divine life in itself as it worships, as it shares life together in fellowship, as it proclaims God's Word, as it reaches out in service to others. As a parish or other community deepens its experiences in these dimensions, we who participate in them draw more fully from the life which flows within the Body.

This understanding of the Church as the heavenly realm affects the way we look at Scripture. One of the major differences between some forms of Protestantism and the historic Churches (Catholic and Orthodox) concerns the way the Bible is viewed. Many Protestants often see the text as revelation itself, God's message to mankind, much in the
same way as Muslims view the Koran. Thus they see revelation primarily as a book, and a book meant to be read chiefly by individuals, each of whom are enabled by God to interpret it for themselves.

From the beginning, however, the Church has held another view. The Bible is a book of the Church, the Church's record of God's dealings with it. It was written in the community and by the community. It was the community which recognized the various books as being divinely inspired and it is in the Tradition of the community that the Bible is best understood.

Thus, while individual readers may discern important lessons from the texts and even contribute greatly to the community's appreciation of the written word, the Scriptures are only fully situated "on location", ie in the Tradition of the Church. Hence this program will attempt to interpret the Scripture always in light of the lived experience of the Church, the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

This is also why our study is conducted within the framework of a group gathering. Our meetings are for prayer, for sharing our lives with one another, for expressing commitment to the Lord and His Church. Such commitment presumes the desire to grow continually in the knowledge and love of God. This is why we need a study dimension to our Christian life. But the fruit of this study is multiplied over and over again when we participate with others who are sharing what they have learned through their prayer and study.
This guide is meant to help you draw the most from your reading of Ephesians and to assist you in preparing to share your insights in the group session. Each meeting is built around discussion of one or another segment of the book. The following steps can help you derive the most benefit from your reading:

1. **Begin with prayer.** An opening prayer is suggested at the start of each section in this guide.

2. **Read** the assigned section of the epistle, as indicated in this guide.

3. As you read, underline the parts which seem most significant to you. This will give you a sense of what you have gotten from the reading.

4. Then **read the commentary** in this guide. It is meant to relate the Scriptures to our own experience as Eastern Christians. The Spirit's work in the written Word is never isolated from His activity in the other aspects of Holy Tradition. It is in the context of the wider Tradition of the Church that Scripture is always best understood. The reflections in this guide are meant to help us connect these evidences of His presence.

5. Answer the **content and liturgical questions** in this guide. Writing your answers out helps you to be certain that you understand what the author is saying.

6. Answer the **personal reflection questions.** These are meant to help you focus your attention on what you can do to make what you have read be a force in your life.
7. At the meeting listen closely to the comments of the other participants. Allow your own answers to be the occasion of a true interaction with your brothers and sisters in the Lord, not just a reading off of what you have written. In this way your study can be the occasion of a significant sharing within the Body, drawing you more intimately into the life of the Community in the Holy Spirit, where we can be transfigured into sharers of the divine nature.

We are indebted to those study groups involved in piloting the Theosis Program who reviewed this material in its initial versions. We hope they will recognize their observations and suggestions in these pages.
SESSION ONE: THE GLORIFICATION OF CHRIST

O heavenly King, Consoler,
Spirit of truth, present in
all places and filling all
things, the treasury of blessings
and the giver of life: come, O
good One and dwell in us; cleanse
us from all stain and save our
souls.

The Reading: Read Chapter One of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

Eph 1:1,2 As usual Paul begins his epistle with greetings to his readers. In this epistle he describes them as saints or holy ones. To be holy in biblical terminology means to be set apart, unique, completely other or different. As such it is the quality par excellence of God. He is the Holy One, the One who alone is holy (Great Doxology), completely other than our experience which is as creatures of creatures. The most common refrain in our liturgy is the echoing of the angels' song in Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory."

We repeat this in the anaphora of the Divine Liturgy, in the Trisagion, in various troparia (eg the troparion of the Bridegroom). In one sense only God is truly
holy, because only He is completely different from us. He alone is uncreated, without limit or imperfection. He is so different from our experience that some Fathers taught that even when we give Him the name "God", we are limiting Him. He is "more-than-God", beyond any idea we may have of what God might be!

The unique character of Christian teaching is that we can and do share in the holiness of God. We have become partakers of the divine nature and thus are partakers of His holiness. No one has this of their own doing: this participation is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. This is the major theological theme of Ephesians and it is evident from the first verse, as Paul attributes the holiness of God to the believers, calling them "saints".

Historically this word came to be associated with believers remarkable for their holiness. Biblically, however, the term was applied to all the baptized because it is the divine grace of this mystery rather than any personal qualities which gives us a share in the holiness of God (see also verse 4). This is why all the Eastern Churches phrase the invitation to Communion as "Holy Things for the holy!". The Holy Gifts are for the saints, the baptized. We reply, "Only One is holy", recognizing that we are holy, not by our own doing, but because of our incorporation into Christ. As Nicholas Cabasilas notes in his Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, "It is as if we were to place mirrors beneath the sun; each would shine, and send forth rays of light, so that one would think there were many suns; yet in truth there is but one sun which shines in all; just so Christ, the only Holy One, pours Himself forth upon the faithful, shines in so many souls, and gives light to many
Eph 1:3,4 Verses 3-14 are a kind of theological hymn, proclaiming the treasures of Christian life in a concise form. We are called to be "in Christ", a common expression Paul often uses to describe being a Christian.

It is in the Church, through baptism that we come to be in Christ. In this act the faith of the candidate, the life of the community, and the ministration of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church come together to join the person to the Body of Christ. This mystically intermingles the believer in Christ so that he can no longer be separated from Him (cf. 1 Cor 12:15ff). This, as Paul indicates later in this epistle, is what makes sin so tragic for the Christian. It is not simply an "offence against God", but a denial of the new relationship with Him we have in Christ.

Several elements of the rite point to this idea of incorporation. The most obvious is the immersion itself. We join Christ in the tomb, as St. Paul says in Romans 6, as we are buried in the water. As we emerge from the water, we are united with Him in resurrection. Then we are clothed with the radiant baptismal garment, symbolic of this new life which is ours, and we hear the joyful chant, "All of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!"

This chant is repeated at the Divine Liturgy on the major feasts of the Church year (Pascha, Pentecost, Theophany, etc.), days which in earlier times
were the occasions for the initiation of new Christians. Today many people would never think of having baptisms on Christmas, for example, preferring to keep the feast as a historical remembrance. The Fathers, however, knew that these festivals were the most appropriate times for enabling new believers to share in the divine life being celebrated and to remind us that we actually do participate in the divine nature of the One whose mysteries we are recalling.

Eph 1:5,6 Here St. Paul uses the image of adoption to explain this life in Christ. Theosis may be called an ontological image. That is, it speaks about the nature of God and man and how the life in Christ affects our nature. Adoption can be called a relational image. It speaks of this life in terms of a relationship with God, of being taken into His family, of having the intimacy of sons and daughters with their Father.

In our society we have come to value deeper relationships highly, since we seem to have fewer and fewer family settings in which to live. Thus this image can speak loudly to us, particularly when we realize how difficult it is for us to draw others into our family or how long it often takes for adopted children to begin to feel that they are truly loved and part of an adoptive family.

Both images - theosis and adoption - speak of the same reality: that God has given us a share in His life. Neither image can exhaust the depths of this mystery and all human terminology is, in the last analysis, inadequate for describing what God is doing. A good example of this inadequacy is associated with the word "grace". In his epistles St. Paul uses the term to mean the
favor of God: His generosity and givingness. Later the Church began using this word as a term for the divine life itself, describing it as a gift of graciousness. Eventually people began thinking of "graces" as something separate from God, which comes in different styles and quantities, proving our inability to use even Scriptural term to "define" the reality of the life we receive by God's grace.

Eph 1:13,14 The life of Theosis, our adoption by the Father, is not simply words: it is a reality. Yet the full force of this reality will not be evident to us in this age. So, as a downpayment or first installment of the reality of theosis, the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church. In this way we can catch a glimpse of what the fullness of divine life is meant to be.

This mystical indwelling begins in each member of the Church when we are chrismated. We are anointed with chrism, a double sign. The act of anointing suggests the penetrating presence of the Spirit of God, meant to penetrate and enrich us just as the chrism penetrates our bodies. The chrism itself suggests by its aroma how good and sweet the life of God truly is for us who will work with the indwelling Spirit and allow it to blossom in our lives. As the priest performs this rite, he uses words which allude to this passage from Ephesians, calling this mystery the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit".

Eph 1:18,19 The final section of this chapter, beginning with verse 15, includes a prayer for his readers. Here Paul speaks about coming to conscious awareness of what God is doing in us. He notes that when the Spirit actually enlivens a person through their
efforts to cooperate with His presence, they begin to see the world with new eyes, what he calls the eyes of the heart. When these spiritual senses are awakened, we see things in a new light, the light of God. Creation, the Fathers teach, becomes a vehicle which shows us the hand of the Creator. We also more clearly see other people in terms of God, as made in His image. We acquire a new zest for life because of the divine Spirit in us.

This awareness of God's presence and of creation as His handiwork points to as basic distinction in the way we approach reality. When we know something only intellectually (with our mind or head), we may have a conceptual grasp of it. We can explain it and discuss it, but we do not know it from the depths of our being. That kind of knowledge or experience comes only when we have personally invested our hearts (ie our wills and emotions) into it. Thus we may know intellectually that the Church is the place where God reaches out to us, but until we make the personal commitment to live its life to the fullest and experience the joys and even the frustrations of that commitment, that we will know that truth from the depth of our hearts.

Eph 1: 20–23 Besides the family image of adoption, Paul uses what we might call a "geographical" image to explain the reality of theosis. "Sitting in the heavenly places" is drawn from the idea of the universe current at the time when heaven was considered "up". The reality it represents is the glory of God to which no image can do justice. Jesus, in His humanity, in elevated to the heavenly places and sits at the right hand of the Father, ie. He shares in the glory of the
Father.

It has been said that, while Christ's incarnate life lasted a few years and His resurrected presence a few weeks, His life in glory lasts unto eternity. This is why Byzantine churches have as their most prominent image the Pantocrator, or Christ in the heavenly places. It represents the "real" Christ, i.e. as He is now, rather than at one moment in His historical life such as the cross. Thus our church buildings graphically portray what this text speaks of, using Paul's geographical image as a sign of Christ's present life of glory, for this icon is always displayed in the highest, most prominent location, such as the dome, i.e. in the heavenly places.

The feast of the ascension, forty days after Pascha, is the Church's annual celebration of Christ in the heavenly places. Recalling the event recorded in Acts 1:1—11, our liturgical hymns specifically stress that it is as God and man that Christ is glorified:

"Ascending in glory today from the Mount of Olives, through Your great love You lifted up our fallen nature and placed it on God the Father's throne."

(doxastikon at vespers)

The One seated at the Father's right is not simply the eternal Word: He is Jesus, true man as well.

Once the itinerant preacher of Nazareth, then the Crucified, now the Glorified, Christ has a cosmic or universal role to play in the future of the entire...
creation. Verses 21–23 indicate this universal dimension where Christ is shown as greater than all creation, the head of all things for the Church (cf also vv 9,10).

Liturgically, it is this same thought which draws the Divine Liturgy to its climax. After recalling the institution of the Eucharist at the last supper, the priest remembers the entire divine plan and offers the Holy Gifts to the Father "in all and for the sake of all". Thus we share in the glorification of the Lord and of the fulfillment of the divine plan at every Liturgy. This cosmic vision of the place of Christ in God's plan is thus not only part of our weekly celebration, it is its apex.

Content Questions:

1. In verse 3 St. Paul says we have been blessed "in Christ". Is this the same as saying "by Christ"? How do we get to be "in Christ"?

2. What is the "purpose" of God's choosing or adopting us according to verse 6? How does this compare with the purpose expressed in 1 Pt 2:9?

3. Who is "chosen": who is the "us" of verse 12 and the
"you" of verse 13? Now look back at verse 4: who is the "us" in this verse? How would you connect this to the idea that we are made in God's image and likeness?

4. Review the chapter. According to St. Paul what are the respective roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in this divine plan?

Liturgical Questions

1. What elements in the rite of Christian initiation do you see as pointing to our being "in Christ"?

2. Why are we reminded of baptism at every major festival with the singing of "All of you baptized into Christ"?

3. Paul calls God's plan a "mystery" (hidden, yet in some
way revealed). We use the same term to describe what the Western Church calls sacraments. How would this term apply to them?

4. How do the arrangement of icons in Byzantine churches relate to the imagery in this chapter of Ephesians?

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. In verse 4 Paul speaks about "every spiritual blessing". What do you understand by "spiritual"? Is everything non-material automatically spiritual? If so, why do you think we eat, bow, kiss, smell, etc. in church?

2. In verse 8 Paul sees redemption and the forgiveness of sins as the sign of God's immeasurable generosity to us. What place in your life does awareness of being redeemed hold?
3. In verse 10 Paul describes God's plan as "bringing all things ... into one". Why does the idea of unity often inspire fear in us?

4. Have you had an experience of God enlightening your innermost vision (opening the "eyes of your heart", verse 18)? Can you describe it?

Resolve

Pray Paul's prayer (Eph 1: 18–23) daily for the members of your group until your next meeting.
SESSION TWO: THE GLORIFICATION OF HUMAN NATURE WITH CHRIST

O Lord, who at the third hour sent down Your Holy Spirit upon Your disciples: take Him not away from us but renew Him in us, we pray.

The Reading: Read Chapters Two and Three of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

Eph 2: 1,2 Paul's use of two different terms to indicate moral failings, sins and trespasses, points up another variance in thought between the biblical/Eastern expressions and the Western approach with which we may be familiar. A sin is something that implies conscious awareness of wrongdoing and the willingness to do it anyway. In popular perception, if these conditions are not fulfilled it's not a sin and therefore ok. In the East this equation of sin and guilt is recognized, but attention is also paid to transgressions or trespasses: offences which are no less real and have no less effect for not being malicious. The child who accidentally breaks a window is not guilty of sin, nor is the person who innocently breaks a confidence. The window, however, is still broken and the reputation is still tarnished. In the same way, if we fail to follow God's way out of ignorance there is no sin, but there is a transgression which
we ask God to pardon or overlook. Like many of our liturgical texts, the Trisagion Prayers, so often found in our divine services, refers to this distinction.: Lord, forgive our sins; Master, pardon our transgressions.

Eph 2: 4-7 The great uniqueness of Christian faith is not simply that God is holy or even that Christ is risen and shares in God's glory, but that in Christ we too can achieve blessedness. In these verses Paul returns to the image of the heavenly places. Now, however, he proclaims that God has joined us to Christ there, making Him the cause of our deification. As he would say elsewhere, Christ is simply the "firstfruits of those who sleep" (1 Cor 15: 20), the firstborn from among the dead. As we pray on the feast of the ascension:

"Human nature, fallen through Adam, went down to the depths of the earth, but You renewed it in Yourself, O Lord. Today You have lifted it up above the heavenly powers and principalities. Since You loved it, You seated it near Yourself ..."

(liti at vespers)

"You came down from heaven, O Christ, in order to life up through Your ascension the race of Adam which lay in the depth of Hades. Having raised it up to heaven with You, You seated it on the Father's throne with You, in Your love and mercy toward mankind."

(kathisma chant at orthros)
Thus the hymns of this feast point back to and restate the teaching of Paul in this passage: that we have been granted theosis, brought to the heavenly realm with and in Christ. We see how the Fathers’ teachings, the prayer life of the Church and the Scriptures form one continuous stream guided by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as our teacher and guide.

We already share in theosis: we already sit in the heavenly places. The fulfillment of this mystery, however, will only be in the age to come. Then, we believe, the plan of God for us will become apparent to all (verse 7). As a sign of the future glorification of us all we celebrate the feast of the dormition of the Theotokos each August 15. This festival commemorates the glorification of Mary, the type or model of the entire Church. She passes, as shall we, from life through death to life eternal. As such she has become the powerful sign of God’s ultimate purpose, symbolizing the Lord’s aim for us all. It is in this vein that even a liberal Protestant such as Harvey Cox would see the significance of her role. "If pressed to a choice between symbols," he notes, "I vastly prefer the Assumption to Ethical Culture" (Feast of Fools, p 177).

Eph 2:11 - 3:13 The remainder of this section deals with the relationship of the Jewish Christians and the Gentile converts who joined them. The running controversy which existed at the time is well documented in Acts and several of Paul’s other epistles. The Jewish Christians generally felt that Gentile converts had to accept the Mosaic law as well as to believe in Christ when they joined the Church.
The Jews Paul is speaking about here are those who have accepted Christ and become the nucleus of the Church, not the Jews who do not believe in Jesus. Read Romans 9:7-8 and Romans 11:7 to determine his belief concerning these latter Jews. For Paul's attitude toward them, read the entirety of Romans 9-11.

Paul's thought in this section is that Christ unites all who believe in Him. The Law of Moses, however, was meant to divide. At the beginning of their history, Jews were given the Law precisely to separate them from the pagans so that they could be the wedge meant to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Now, Paul is saying, the Law has attained its purpose and hence has outlived its usefulness. God's aim now is to unite, not divide, to bring all together in Christ. The purpose which the Law was meant to serve is no more. It is Christ, not the Law of Moses, who is the sole cornerstone of the New Israel, the Church.

Content Questions:

1. Why is Satan referred to as the "prince of the atmosphere" in verse three? What is our common understanding of this term?

2. In verses 4-7 St. Paul mentions three actions which God has done for us. Which of them do you feel best expresses
what the Fathers speak of as theosis or deification? Why do you think this is so?

3. In verse seven St. Paul speaks of theosis as a present reality with consequences for the future. What does he say are the consequences of theosis for the age to come?

4. What role did the Jewish Christians see for the Law of Moses in the Church? What role might it have had in the Church for these Jewish Christians with a different attitude?

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. Compare the attitude that says, "As long as you didn't mean it, it's not a sin" with the one that says, "Let us ask pardon of God even if this was not a deliberate act against Him". What might the difference in attitudes be saying about the condition of the questioner's spiritual life?
2. Eph 2:8 became central to the spirituality of Protestants during the Reformation. Which verse(s) in this chapter would we as Eastern Christians be more likely to see as central to our spirituality?

3. In verse 9 St. Paul contrasts our work (what we have accomplished) with God's (we are His handiwork). How does the Fathers' idea of synergy relate to this dynamic?

4. What secondary or passing elements have Christians elevated to a place comparable to the Jews' estimation of the Law and thus brought strife to the Church? How can we compare the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches today with that of the Jewish and Gentile Christians of Paul's day?
Resolve

Pray Paul's second prayer (Eph 3: 14-21) daily for the members of your group until your next meeting.
Psalm 132 (133)

Behold how good it is and how pleasant
where brethren dwell at one!
It is as when the precious ointment upon the head
runs down over the beard,
the beard of Aaron,
till it runs down upon the collar of his robe.
It is a dew like that of Hermon
which comes down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord has pronounced His blessing:
life forever.

The Reading: Read Chapter Four, verses 1-16 of Paul's
Epistle to the Ephesians.

Eph 4: 1 The life of theosis is precisely that: a life, not
a series of propositions. It is, however, a
lifestyle specifically based on our understanding of what
God is doing in the world. That is why the first three
chapters would be incomplete without the last three in this
epistle, and vice versa. There is a necessary unity between
what we believe and how we live. Otherwise, our approach
to life is schizophrenic. James 2: 14-26 is another New
Testament statement of this theme.
Here in Ephesians St. Paul highlights this connection of God's action and our response. He sets forth a principle of behavior which was to become the basis for Eastern Christian approaches to Christian living. Our life is to be worthy of the calling to which we have been called. We have been called to theosis, given to share in the divine nature. We have been adopted by the eternal Father. We have been brought to the heavenly realm in Christ. The way we act every day must reflect this calling.

And so, as Eastern Christians, we have a completely different perspective by which we live the Christian life. In the Old Testaments such principles of living were commanded by God, to be obeyed because they were His will. Christ restates these commandments in a more complete context: that of response to His love. ("Love one another as I have loved you." – Jn 15:12). But it is not until the coming of the Holy Spirit that God's full plan for us becomes apparent. He does not call on us to obey Divinity on high or even to imitate the historic Jesus so much as to live in union with the Spirit of God within us! We do the same things, follow the same practices or principles, perhaps, but with a far deeper and richer motive. The Spirit is within us and sanctifies us. We are made holy, set apart for life in the heavenly realm. Because the Spirit dwells in us, our life is meant to be directed by Him. As Paul would write to the Corinthians,

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

(1 Cor 6:19)
And so we learn to live as Christians, not primarily be studying the commandments of the Old Testament, but by deepening our appreciation of the Spirit of God within. Realizing His indwelling presence, we come to know our status as partakers of the divine nature more deeply and are thereby brought to live by His lead. It is for this reason that Paul would remind the Galatians, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

Eph 4:3 In discussing the Christian's daily life, Paul begins with an area we would not expect him to start with, the unity of the Church. Yet, in a real sense, our attitude toward unity is the most revealing indication of theosis life in us. For the unity of the Church to exist on any but the most superficial level, the members must reflect a mature spiritual life. A commitment to unity presupposes that we put aside many of our own preoccupations, interests and preferences. As such it stands as the epitome of the following of Christ who calls us to live lives of self-giving.

In the same vein, our greatest expression of existence as Church is the divine Eucharist, the sacrament of union. The Liturgy in many of its moments emphasizes the unity of faith and life we proclaim the Church to be. More importantly, it is precisely the deepening of this unity which which we pray the Eucharist will bring us. We ask at every Liturgy that this sharing in the body and blood of Christ be for "the communion in the Holy Spirit", an enriching of the oneness we are meant to experience in the Church. Thus it is in the Eucharist that we best experience what it meant to be Church and it is also here that we find the Church striving its utmost to deepen the unity it has in Christ.
It is for this reason that the Byzantine Churches have set two norms or ideals for the celebration of the Eucharist. The first is that there be only one Liturgy per day in any given community to enable this unity to be manifested. The second is the ancient practice (cf 1 Cor 10:17) that the Eucharist be conducted with one loaf and one cup, representing the oneness brought about for us in Christ (cf. Eph 2: 11ff).

Eph 4: 4-6 Paul lists seven aspects of God's plan which summon us to unity: one Body, one Spirit, one Church, one Lord, etc. The Fathers also saw in another dimension of the Godhead an indication of what this unity is meant to be like. They spoke of the Holy Trinity as the model of the Church, because the unity of the Trinity is found, not in uniformity and sameness, but in the distinctiveness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each person is uniquely Himself and yet the Trinity is one.

As their unity is not uniformity, the unity of the Church, in the Eastern perspective, is based on a similar diversity. The local Church is intended to be made up of many levels of service, each with its own responsibility and function, yet with no one more essentially Church than the others. The local Church is at its best, in fact, when each level is operating in such a way as to respect the diverse gifts of the others yet work together to manifest unity. This is beautifully manifested when the Liturgy is served as intended, with bishop, priests, deacons, subdeacons, singers, readers, laity all ministering according to their distinct orders.
This same model has served Byzantine Christians as their view of the worldwide Church. We see it as a family made up of a number of local Churches, diverse in practice yet one in faith. This image has often led to controversy, especially in regard to the Roman Church, whose model for the last thousand years has stressed much more authority and uniformity than it has diversity. Diversity in the Western view has been seen rather as divisive. It is only in the few years since the Second Vatican Council that this model has begun to change, and that only in some quarters. In the East, however, the preference has been to encourage variety of local structure and observance, preferring to find the oneness of identity in the single Lord, the single baptism, the single communion of faith rather than in disciplinary or ritual sameness.

Eph 4: 11-16 Paul goes on to present a model of how unity happens in the local Church: through the mutual interplay of the gifts working there. He indicates several ministries operative at the time. Others are mentioned in Rom 12: 6-8 and 1 Cor 12: 27-28. The ones he mentions here all have a formational or teaching dimension and thus are all particularly oriented to building up the Body. They do this – and here is the heart of Paul's message – precisely by leading the body of believers to develop their own gifts and enter into service. As we might say it, the purpose of the clergy is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (v 12), not to do all the ministering themselves!

St. Paul goes on to note that it is through this process that the Church matures until it attains manhood. Ministry is the work of adults and until a community has properly developed onto this level, it has not fully matured.
A number of contemporary translations render verse 12 in a markedly different way, eliminating the enablement of ministry as the purpose of the orders listed. The "Jerusalem Bible", for example, says that this variety is "so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service". This interpretation emphasizes that all are needed if the ministry of the Church is to be fully realized.

In many parishes there is only one minister, the priest. The people see themselves as those who are served and remain without any perception that they too are responsible for the life of the community. Many clergy are content with this arrangement. Though they have the entire burden of work on their shoulders, even on a temporal or administrative level, they also have no accountability. And so the community does not grow to maturity. It remains a crown of spiritual children needing their parent to take care of them. People do not become deacons or cantors or catechists because the shepherd is doing the sheep's job instead of allowing them to mature and take it on themselves.

Again, we can look to the Liturgy as a model. In a properly functioning community, the person with the least to say at the Liturgy is the priest! His task in our tradition is still the one indicated by Peter to the first community in Jerusalem, "the prayers and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). However if no one has been formed to enter the diaconate or to be subdeacon, the priest must take over their roles (the petitions, the readings, the manual actions). If no singers have been trained, the priest does their job too. If the congregation has not been formed to
take up its liturgical role, the priest ends up answering himself! And if that is the case in the Liturgy, it will certainly be as evident in the wider life of the Church. There would be no diakonia, for example, because no saint has been equipped for that work of service.

Paul's principle holds as true today as when he formed it: unless the clergy are committed to enabling others to minister, the Church will not mature. The whole Body cannot work properly, to use Paul's image, unless this process is taking place.

Content Questions:

1. In verse 1 Paul urges his hearers to live a life worthy of their calling. What calling is he referring to? How does this change the basis for morality?

2. In verses 7 to 10 Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and interprets it in the context of several New Testament events. What events do you think he is referring to?

3. In verse 11 Paul lists the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher (probably meant as one). What
does each of these "job-descriptions" involve? You probably need to consult a commentary or bible dictionary to answer this one.

4. Which of the ministries mentioned in Paul's three lists described above are currently operating in your local Church? What others not listed here are you aware of which developed in the history of the Church?

Liturgical Questions

1. Have you been conscious of the fact that at each Liturgy we pray for an increased experience of the Communion in the Holy Spirit? How can you make this prayer more personal?

2. How would you rate the degree of unity in your parish, the diocese and the worldwide Church?
3. If your parish has more than one Sunday Liturgy, what would be your reaction if the Liturgy you regularly attend were to be dropped so that everyone could attend the other Liturgy?

**Personal Reflection Questions:**

1. What various reasons do you feel people in your parish have for going to Church on Sundays?

2. For what motives have you followed the Christian way of life? Are these reasons connected to our call to theosis? Explain.

3. In what way has the recognition of the Spirit dwelling in you determined your behavior?
4. What elements in Church life do you feel should be uniform and in what elements do you feel there should be variety? Explain your choices.

5. What do you perceive to be some differences between the Eastern and Western styles of Church life? How basic are these differences? Do any of them prevent or hinder unity?

6. What particular area of ministry in the Church have you been led to undertake or do you feel you might be being led to undertake and why?

Resolve

The following prayer from the Divine Liturgy expresses the concept that we receive the Eucharist for, among other things, the communion in the Holy Spirit. Pray this prayer daily for the members of your group and your entire parish community every day until your next meeting.
To You, Master who love mankind, we commend our whole life and hope. We ask You, we pray You, we entreat You: make us worthy to partake of Your heavenly and awesome mysteries of the sacred and spiritual Table with a pure conscience:

* for the remission of our sins and indulgence toward our failures,
* for the communion of the Holy Spirit, the inheritance of the Kingdom of heaven,
* and for intimate confidence in You, not for judgement or condemnation.
SESSION FOUR: THE CALL TO PUT ON THE NEW NATURE

A wondrous mystery has come to pass today; nature is renewed as God is incarnate. He remains what He is, yet assumes that which He was not, undergoing neither change nor division.

Orthros Apostichon, December 27

The Reading: Read Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, Chapter Four, verse 17 through Chapter Five, verse 21.

Eph 4: 17-24 St. Paul draws a sharp distinction between the way believers are to live and the way pagans do. Christianity is not simply a cult, a form of worship which does not touch the way we live. It is an all-embracing way of life.

The distinction between pagans and believers was especially clear in the society of the first century when St. Paul lived. Every type of vice was permitted and thrived in Roman society. Believers were a small minority in a pagan world. They were a counterculture, espousing values and beliefs which conflicted with those of most of their neighbors.
Several Christian writers in these first centuries took up similar themes. There are "two ways", we read, "the way of life and that of death" (the "Didache", first century), "the way of light and the way of darkness" (Epistle to Barnabas, second century). You do not pick and choose: you follow the Lord's way wholeheartedly. Christians do not live like everyone around them, because they are not like everyone around them. Rather they are the temple of God who dwells within them, restoring the likeness lost from the beginning.

After the conversion of Constantine the Great in the fourth century, Christianity ceased being a counterculture. It gradually affected more and more of the wider society and within 200 years, the Church was the established culture. Pagans were not found except in foreign lands, and so the way of society became – at least in theory – the way of Christ.

In the Middle East, Christians were no longer the majority after the Islamic conquest. They were recognized as separate cultural "nations", however, and so, while they lived in ghettos, the gospel was the standard of those ghettos.

In either case, the dichotomy between the two "ways", so clear when Christians were an island in the sea of paganism, was less evident. It was left to sects like the Old Believers or the Amish, whose particular thinking was removed from the mainstream of Christianity, to reject the culture around them.
Today we find our society returning more and more to the way things were before Constantine. Our country, many say, is no longer a Christian nation (if it ever was one) and the prevailing ethos is a kind of secular agnosticism. The vehicles of culture (eg music, the media) no longer support Christian values but repudiate them, often explicitly. We are coming to appreciate again this sense of distinction between the Lord's way and that of the prince of the atmosphere.

Eph 4:25-5:7 We tend to conceptualize religious values (eg "Church" or even "sin") as if they were abstractions. All these terms, however, refer to relationships: how we are tied to one another, how we treat one another, how we affect one another. The way we conduct our relationships is, in fact, the criterion of the reality of our faith. If our relationships do not reflect the gospel, our faith is not Christian but cultic: placating God with religious rites so that we can be free to go about our business.

St. Paul puts forth several criteria for Christian relationships in this section. First of all, relationships in Christ are meant to be honest (verses 25,26). Both overt dishonesty (lying) and covert dishonesty (not dealing with anger) are mentioned. This latter problem is a common one among families, in churches, in the workplace. We do not deal with issues honestly, but allow resentment to build up and take over our emotional life until we reach a breaking point. This kind of behavior, Paul notes, hardly makes for an honest relationship.
Relationships are also meant to be just (verse 28), mutually upbuilding (verses 29-32) and chaste (chapter 5, verses 3-7). We are called to support one another, forgive one another, edify one another (verse 19) - in other words, to be the cause of others' being more aware of God's love because we are around.

The opposite behavior, sin, is described in 4:30 as grieving the Holy Spirit. From our perspective as Eastern Christians, this is the most illuminating verse in the passage. As we saw in Session One (Eph 1: 13-14), we have received the Holy Spirit as the guarantee or pledge of the fullness of deification awaiting us in glory. We were personally brought into relationship with the Spirit when we were sealed (chrismated) at our christening. Here again we see clearly the rationale for Christian morality according to St. Paul: we live a unique way of life because we are the temple of the Spirit. When we fail to live according to this calling, we grieve the Spirit who dwells within us to deify us.

Eph 5: 19-20 Before discussing specific states in life, St. Paul concludes his general observations with a call to constantly voice our awareness that God is in our midst. In many historically Christian countries, conversations are dotted with expressions of thanksgiving and provision. In Arabic, for example, "Thank the Lord" or "Praise God" spring naturally from believers' lips. "Inshallah" (God willing - taken directly from Jas 4:15), "Allah ma'ak" (God be with you) or "Allah yusallmak" (God give you peace) sound "normal" in Arabic. We often feel a strain, however, when we hear these same expressions in English. Then they become "protestant" or "holy roller".

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What this kind of talk does, in fact, is to remind us that God's presence is not restricted to the sanctuary, but is sustaining us at all times. To express praise for His presence is the most natural thing imaginable for those with the eyes of faith.

In verse 20 Paul tells us to give thanks "at all times" and "for everything". Does he really mean it?? How can we take this call seriously? Can we be expected to give thanks in hardships?

Paul's reasoning is clarified in Rom 8:28. "We know," he says, "that God works for good in all things for those who love Him, who have been called according to His decree." This does not mean that whatever happens is "God's will", as many have been taught, especially in the West. Suffering and death are never God's will. Neither are sin and infirmity. But God can - and does - work in the midst of them to bring about good for those who love Him.

Often this "good" is not in harmony with the ways of society, as when a person is brought through death to eternal life. Often the good is not apparent at all, but the person of faith trusts God anyway. He knows deeply that God is present and working in the midst of hardship and even tragedy, and so he can thank Him. We do not thank Him for the circumstances, but for His active presence in the midst of them. His presence gives us reason for gratitude, even if the evil in the circumstances doesn't. To the degree, then, that we are people of faith, we will recognize His presence to us at all times. We remain
in the heavenly realm, in theosis, no matter what happens: and thus can be thankful people. As Paul said in Rom 8:38,

"I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

Content Questions:

1. In verses 18-19 St. Paul describes the character of pagan society in his day. How does this compare with our contemporary culture?

2. Verses 22-24 describe the activity necessary to fully restore the new man in us as "laying aside" and "putting on". What liturgical action recalls this imagery? What specifics might it mean for us to comply with his teaching?

3. In Eph 5:15-20 St. Paul contrasts a characteristic pagan stance with a characteristic Christian one. Using the
qualities Paul mentions here, write a "definition" of a believer by completing the sentence "A Christian is ...".

4. Does Paul's direction in verse 20 describe how Christians should react in difficult circumstances? How does this strike you?

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. Do you feel that our society is a Christian society? Explain.

2. In what is your life different from that of your unbelieving neighbors? In what ways might it be different?
3. In the past, where have you put the question of relationships in your personal ranking of priorities for a Christian? Do you think St. Paul would agree?

4. How have your fellow parishioners built you up in terms of Eph 4: 29-32 and 5:19. How have you built them up in the same areas?

5. How do you react in inconveniences? hardships? tragedies? How have you seen God in these events?

Resolve

Cultivate the habit of offering a brief prayer of praise, such as "Glory to You, Lord: Glory to You!" whenever you find yourself in a difficult situation.
SESSION FIVE: THE NEW NATURE IN FAMILY LIFE

Psalm 127 (128)

Happy are you who fear the Lord,
who walk in His ways!
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
happy shall you be, and favored.
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
Your children like olive plants
around your table.
Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life;
May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

The Reading: Read St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 21 to chapter 6, verse 4.

Eph 5: 21-33 Having established that relationships are the stuff of Christian life, Saint Paul goes on to present some principles for the most basic of relational settings, the nuclear family. Paul knows well that the most intimate areas of our lives are precisely the ones where it is most difficult to serve the Lord. The more intimate and personal the area, the more we want to keep it
for ourselves, to maintain control over it. It is much easier
to be a "pillar of the Church", for example, than to be the
Lord's servant in terms of family living, or in other elements
of our personal lifestyle (relationships, finances, sexuality).
For the Christian, however, everything is meant to be in the
Lord: "Let us commend ourselves, one another and our whole
life to Christ God".

These opening verses of the section on
family life is prescribed to be read in Byzantine Churches in
the rite of a first marriage. Our wedding service expresses
ritually all that the Church believes Christian marriage to
be about. Thus, marriage is meant to be eternal, symbolized
by the endless rings. It is to be a union in all things,
expressed by the drinking of the common cup. In marriage
the couple is given to share in the Lord's creative role, with
dominion over a corner of creation, represented by the
crowning. They exercise this kingship as a priesthood in
Christ, proclaimed by their participation in the ordination
procession around the sacramental table, through the
children they are given and the hospitality with which they
make their home a place of sharing, as indicated in the
nuptial prayers. And so the inclusion of this passage from
Ephesians in the rite is an indication that our Church sees
the principles which it contains as basic to a Christian
understanding of marriage.

The fundamental groundrule for
marriage is laid out in verse 21: mutual deference. Without a
joint commitment to this principle, there can never be a
marriage in the truest, fullest sense of the term. If one is
willing to defer and the other is not, an "arrangement" may
result (although this is less likely today, as society no longer
expects it), but is it a marriage? The one party applying this principle may act heroically, as in the case of the spouse of an alcoholic, but they know deeply that their marriage is less than the norm for Christians. Learning to put this principle into practice is the great task given to Christian couples.

To the casual reader the next verses may seem to contradict verse 21. If a couple is supposed to defer mutually, how is one to be the head? To comprehend this teaching we must avoid two misunderstandings of what it means to be a "head".

Our society, preoccupied with individual rights as it is, often fails to distinguish between headship, authority and authoritarianism. Our experience of authority in the world has often been one of despotism: sometimes benevolent, most often not. Christ Himself insisted that authority among Christians must be exercised in a different manner. He told His disciples,

"You know how those who exercise authority among the Gentiles lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you. Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest..."

(Mt 20: 25,26)

He did not abolish authority: He put forth a new way of exercising it.
When Paul insists on headship, then, he is not talking about authoritarianism, but authority as exercised in the way that Christ would have it. Too often Christian husbands have taken their idea of authority from the village sheik or baron rather than Christ: which is the exercise of authority without the principle of mutual submission.

A second misunderstanding of this teaching occurs when we confuse headship with leadership. The head is not the only leader in any society. Each person has their particular gifts, which include leading in one or another area. The true task of Christian headship is to see that each person is exercising leadership in their own area of expertise while maintaining a harmonious and unified vision with the others in the group. This is as true for the family as it is for the Church. While the bishop or pastor holds the undisputed headship of the local Church, he certainly is not the only leader in it. If he chooses to concentrate all leadership in himself, he dooms his Church to infantilism (see Session Three, above). Likewise the husband must be, in a Christian context, considered the head of the household, but will undoubtedly fail in that responsibility if he insists on being the only leader.

Christians early pointed to the equality of husband and wife. Both are given rings (vs. the earlier practice of only the woman wearing this mark of "ownership"), and both are crowned as sovereigns. The fact that one is head does not belie this equality. Any human community - be it parish, business, club or government - needs a head for good order. How the head exercises the
headship is what determines whether or not the Scriptural principles are being heeded.

Why is it the man who is the head? Is it "only" cultural? In some primitive societies it is the woman who is the head of the family. Whether this order could be reversed is, for us a largely hypothetical question. We live in our culture, not outside it. If we try to live outside it, it should be for clearly Christian moral reasons. Otherwise we are romantics devising our own utopias. In this case such a moral reason does not seem to be evident. The headship of a husband and father in a family seems to be so integrated into our cultural ideal of the family that when a father is absent, every child instinctively "knows" something is wrong. Likewise, when a wife is not subject to her husband's headship, the children almost instinctively lose respect for him. The inevitable result seems to be both disorder in the household and, more deeply, in the minds of the young people being formed there.

Often when there are adult offspring living in the home, there tends to be confusion concerning the parents' headship in the running of the household vs. the parenting role of caring for children. Parents sometimes fail to realize their children are adults and responsible for their own lives. Offspring, on the other hand, fail to realize that the parents' headship of the household has not ceased because their children turned eighteen! The head of a Christian household has the duty to insure that Christian values are honored in the home and that includes the values and lifestyles of the members insofar as they are expressed in the home. Adult offspring, just as any adult living in the home, are bound to recognize the headship of the father (or
surviving mother) as regards the good order of the home. As Paul said in another context, "God is not a god of confusion, but of peace" (1 Cor 4:33).

Paul then compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and His Church. Both are one body and in both there is a clear demarcation of roles. The Church knows itself deeply as the Body of Christ; the wife in a truly Christian marriage should know deeply that she and her husband are one. The husband for his part is given Christ, who "emptied himself and took the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7) for His Church as his "role model". That Paul would use such imagery points to the great esteem in which he had come to hold marriage as well as the absolute oneness he knew to exist between Christ and His Church.

In the early Church there were several heresies which downgraded marriage because it had to do with the body and therefore was not "spiritual". Some of this thinking found its way into Western thought, such as in the idea that celibacy was higher than marriage. This seems to reflect Paul's earlier thought, expressed in 1 Cor 7:7, but the more positive sentiments expressed in Ephesians, written later, suggest that Paul himself had become more open to the Spirit of God on this matter.

In the Eastern tradition, marriage has still another dimension related to this image. It has never regarded marriage as a private affair, something concerning only the couple. It is a social sacrament, a ministry within the Church. It is, as St. John Chrysostom said, a domestic church, witnessing to the love of the Lord and His people for one another. There is no greater "preacher" in the
Christian community than the couple who have truly grown into one body. Seeing them we see the Church and Christ, faithful to one another forever. They are, as Paul indicated, loving witness to the Lord's way for us: to be in relationship to Him for all eternity.

Eph 6: 1-4  

Turning to a second major relationship in family life, that of parents and children, Paul again points to a distinctively Christian concept in terms of childrearing. He advises fathers against provoking their children to resentment, the ultimate sin in relationships (cf Eph 4:26). So often it is harsh treatment or abuse which causes such provocation, but equally liable are the parents who ignore their children, not taking a direct and positive role in their upbringing. The parent immersed in the job, in a social life, even in parish activities to the exclusion of the family is certainly not using the Lord's "paideia" or style of formation (verse 4). Because of our diversified lifestyles, many today are insisting with a renewed emphasis that the Lord's paideia for us includes a consistent investment of time in all one's children and in each individually, to establish a solid relationship with them and thus to contribute directly to their development as persons and as Christians.

Paul uses two words in verse 4 to indicate what is expected of the Christian parent: the Lord's "paideia" and "noustheia", which have been variously rendered in different translations of the Bible. The first word signifies the positive aspect of formation or training; the second has the negative meaning of discipline or correction. The parent is responsible for both aspects of childrearing, not simply discipline (as in authoritarian models...
of parenting) or simply indicating positive values without controls, as in some contemporary approaches. In addition, both must be the Lord's way, not the way of society: a way infused with the realization that our Christian children too have been given a share in the divine nature and that the first goal of Christian parents must be to help them develop in the awareness of the divine presence within them.

Content Questions:

1. How does the comparison with Christ and the Church make clear the relationship of the Christian husband and wife?

2. What Christ has done for His Church is described in verses 25-27. List below the ways Paul mentions in these verses, then apply these ways to how a husband should love his wife.

3. The Byzantine Churches see marriage as an eternal relationship of the couple in Christ. What might the passage studied here have contributed to this line of thought?
4. Paul describes the marriage relationship in terms of mutual deference or submission, but the parent-child relationship in terms of obedience. What is the difference between these two concepts?

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. In what areas does the husband in your family generally exercise headship without opposition? In what areas are there more likely to be conflicts?

2. If you are not married, how does headship work in your household? How might it work if you were living with one or more other adults?
3. If you are the head of your household, how do you think you would react if you became a dependent in someone else's household (eg as a senior citizen)?

4. The following describes the route one family took to reestablish their home after having neglected giving their children positive formation and corrective discipline. What are your reactions?

"A Decision to Change

"The breakthrough came one day as one of the two leaders I was working with, after much prayer, counselling, teaching and repentance, agreed that his family was headed for ruin. His older children denied the gospel, were taking drugs, and had friends who were in trouble with the law. He was much to blame for not believing clearly revealed truth about his responsibilities. He committed himself to reform and went about it with great love and dedication.

"Building on decisions he and his wife had agreed on, he gathered his family together and repented to them for not taking leadership and condoning serious wrongdoing. He asked for forgiveness and announced the changes that were going to take place in their home: daily family prayer, no rock music, no alcohol for the children, no wild parties, and controlled TV.

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"As he and his wife met with resistance from the children, he decided that in order to regain control, and to remove the children from bad peer influences, they had to move to another area of the state. Some of the older children refused to move with them and instead moved out on their own. The move reestablished this man as the head of his house and gave him and his wife a fresh start with the children who had come with them. Gradually over the past six years all but the two oldest children have accepted Jesus as their Lord and are now living righteous lives."

Bob Gallic, "From Teenage Kids to Young Adults", Pastoral Renewal, July/August 1984

Resolve

Until your next meeting pray for the families in your group, that the Lord grant them the wisdom and strength to follow Him in the circumstances of their family life.
May the Lord rebuke you, satan: the Lord who came into the world and who dwelt among us in order to overthrow your tyranny and to deliver mankind from it, the Lord who upon the Tree triumphed over the adverse powers when the sun darkened, the earth trembled, the graves were opened and the bodies of the saints arose — the same Lord, who by death destroyed Death and overthrew the one who had dominion over it, namely you, O satan!

(First Baptismal Exorcism)

The Reading: Read St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 10 to the end.

One of the elements in historic Christian teaching which is most out of favor today is that concerning the Enemy. The devil, satan, the evil one or — as Paul calls him in Ephesians — the prince of the power of the air is thought by many, including Christians, to be merely a primitive bogeyman, a concept we have outgrown. While the medieval period certainly delighted in depicting demons in this way, their exaggerations do not belie the reality of the Church's conviction that the evil one not only exists, but "goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pt 5:8).
Commenting wryly on the contemporary era's denial of the devil, C.S. Lewis in his famous *Screwtape Letters* laid the blame for it on the enemy himself. It is, Lewis writes, the devil's own idea that we stop acknowledging his existence. That way, Lewis suggests, he can do his work unnoticed.

In any case it is the clear teaching of both the New Testament and the Church's Tradition that the evil one exercises power in the world, although the lasting quality of that power has been annulled in Christ. The divine services of our Church openly admit his presence and power. In the baptismal rite, for example, there are several exorcisms or expulsions of satan, in rejection of his rule. Two of these, including the one quoted above, are actually phrased as curses addressed directly to him. Finally the catechumen is called to renounce satan's ways and spit on him. You can't get a more realistic recognition of his influence than that.

In addition to these baptismal exorcisms, our euchologion or sacramental book contains a number of similar prayers of exorcism for any circumstance. In these prayers the Church calls for the liberation "of the image created and fashioned by the hand of God" (exorcism of St. John Chrysostom) from whatever form or force the power of the enemy may take. Even the ordinary prayers of the daily offices of the Church recognise these forces and ask the Lord for deliverance from them.

**OUR WAR WITH SATAN**

The evil one certainly exists and is
assaulting humanity. This is the basis of St. Paul’s teaching here. Using the imagery of his day’s military science, St. Paul gives us a picture of the Christian armed to withstand the assaults of satan. Even though we have put aside the claims of the enemy by putting on Christ (Eph 2: 1-6), still we are under attack by the deceiver who seeks to claim us in his grasp again.

Unlike the battles of temporal armies, the conflict with satan does not occur on an external field of battle. It takes place within our hearts. The same place where the Spirit of God dwells and transfigures us is the battlefield on which the enemy’s assaults are mounted. Thus, as the Fathers would say, the antechamber of heaven – the inner chamber of our hearts – is like a garden made ripe for the harvest. But this same rich and luxuriant garden is the place on which many enemies – weeds, insects, foragers – have set their sights (cf. Christ’s parable of the sower, Mt 13: 4-23).

This is why St. Paul indicates that the place where we contend against the principalities and powers is the “heavenly realm” (verse 12): the same phrase used earlier to describe our deification, in other words, our spirit which is in Christ. To extend Paul’s military imagery, it is as if the enemy is making a last ditch offensive against the ground taken by the Lord.

DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

It is a truism in the spiritual life that the more a person attempts to follow the Lord, the more he or she is tempted. However, here – as in all things – God
can be seen at work for the good of those who love Him. Through temptation we can come to see again and again what we are capable of when we ignore the Spirit of God within us to follow the ways of the enemy.

It is clearly no sin to be tempted; that's the enemy's problem. For the person with eyes of faith, temptation can help in self-understanding. When tempted, we realize that we are always sinners in need of the mercy of God. We are always capable of denying or ignoring the presence of God within us and following another lead. This is why the most common ritual action in our Byzantine tradition is the metany, the bow of humility accompanied by the prayer, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner". We make a metany as we enter the church, approach to kiss the cross or an icon, take Communion or touch any sacred object, because there is not a time when we can be sure that we will not yield to the enemy and succumb to temptation. Our contact with the Holy One in the divine services might blur in our minds the distinction between God's holiness and our weaknesses. The metany is meant to be a constant reminder that our intimacy with God is not the product of our own righteousness, but is the gift of God.

The evildoer's assaults are an even more constant reminder of our frailty. They also trigger a choice in us, provoking us to a definite stand. In temptation the Christian life ceases to be a question of religious facts or information: it becomes a matter of action. if we resist the enemy - and God's promise is that, if we resist, the devil will flee (Jas 4:7) - we are strengthened. If we do not, we fall into sin. Yet even here we can learn to see God working in the midst of our sin, if through it we come to
confront our own sinfulness and ever-present need for God's mercy.

Many times believers who fall into sin become remorseful and guilt-ridden. This, too, is the enemy's work. God does not allow us to become aware of our weaknesses in order to condemn us. Rather He is providing us with another opportunity to deal with the old nature in us so that the divine nature granted us may have fuller sway.

CHRIST'S POWER OVER THE ENEMY

One of the things we learn from our struggle with the enemy is that our own strength is unequal to the challenge. We are powerless to free ourselves from the lure of what we know intellectually to be sin. St. Paul saw this continual conflict and his powerlessness in the face of it:

"My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind: this makes me prisoner of the law of sin in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body under the power of death?"

(Rom 7: 22-24)

and he also saw the solution:

"All praise to God! <It is done> through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

(Rom 7: 25)
Christ has annulled the ultimate power of sin and death by his crucifixion and resurrection. "By His death He has trampled upon Death" (paschal troparion). He faced sin and temptation in every form and did not submit to it. He overcame the sinfulness of the world by not responding sinfully to it. "For this reason God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above every other name" (Phil 2:9).

This victory is the constant subject of our Christian worship. Every Sunday we proclaim Christ's victory as the core of the Christian experience. As it was in the early Church, the Lord's Day in our Tradition is primarily a celebration of the resurrectional triumph of Christ over the power of sin and death, a feature obscured in the West to a great extent.

Our resurrectional faith is that Christ's victory is ours as well. The Byzantine icon of the resurrection shows Christ raising the human race, personified by Adam and Eve, from the tomb. Our faith is not simply that Christ is risen from the dead, but also that He "has given life to those who were in the tomb" (paschal troparion). We are in union with Christ and that is a union in His victory over sin and death. This is graphically portrayed in the rite of baptism when we are buried with Christ (immersed in the water) and also rise with Him (come out of the water), just as St. Paul described it in Rom 6:4. The ultimate power of sin and death over us has been destroyed by this sharing in Christ's victory.

To the degree that we remain conscious of our baptismal relationship to God through Christ who has
given us His Spirit to dwell in us, we can also be daily victors over sin. Our customary way of speaking about sin and temptation — and even the military imagery of this chapter — may tend to make us feel that morality is an impersonal thing, a code, rules or the like. In fact it is very personal. We have been given a relationship with the Trinity which deifies us, making us sharers in the divine nature. What we call sin is actually an ignoring or outright rejection of that extraordinary relationship. What we call "earthly cares" (cf. the Cherubic Hymn) amount to a minimizing of the relationship, taking it for granted and giving more time and energy to other things. They may not be sinful, but weigh us down and deflect us from progressing in the relationship and, ultimately, of obtaining the victory over daily temptation which we have in direct proportion to the regularity of our relationship with God.

HE STANDS WITH US IN BATTLE

This is why, after developing the image of the Christian's armor, Paul completes his arsenal with the ultimate defense: continual prayer in all circumstances in the Spirit, i.e. in terms of our deifying relationship (verse 18). Unceasing prayer, in that it makes us ever more conscious of God's presence and our relationship with Him in the Spirit, is our most secure bulwark against sin. As we become people of continual prayer, it becomes more and more "natural" for us to refer every thought to our ever-present Lord and, ultimately, every temptation as well. This is also why the Eastern ascetic Fathers stress the development of continual prayer through the Jesus Prayer as a central practice of Christian spirituality. We are called to continually recognize the presence of the Spirit within us.
through unceasing prayer. This in turn develops a more constant awareness of His presence which, in turn, makes us more ready to see temptation to sin or to a diversion of energy as a lessening of this relationship. The more unceasing prayer makes us aware of God's presence, more will we see sin in its interpersonal context.

In some translations of Ephesians verse 18 is placed with the following section on intercession for the saints, but it rather belongs in this section on combatting the enemy. Remember that the punctuation, chapter headings and paragraphing in our modern editions are translator's interpretations, not found in the original text.

STANDING VIGILANT

The spiritual warfare, besides being real, is also lifelong. As long as we are living in this world, we will find ourselves pulled by its values and its ways of behavior. It is something we must deal with if we expect to grow in theosis. We must get used to it, because it's not going away! This is why Christ's theme of vigilance found such a home in Byzantine spirituality. Christ's tale of the ten virgins, five who kept themselves ready to meet the bridegroom and five who did not, is a popular image in Eastern piety. It is the basis for the watch services for the first days of the Great Week and of the daily midnight service prayed in the monasteries, as well as of a number of popular prayers.

This theme of "keeping awake" for the Lord has also found expression in the way we celebrate the
festivals of the Church. Preparation through vespers and orthros for the climax of the Divine Liturgy is tied to these ideas. In many places, at least on Great Feasts, these services take the form of an all-night vigil in which the participants spend the night in prayer awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom in the Liturgy. All of these rites represent a value which is meant to be part of our regular, personal spiritual life: that we be continually in a state of readiness to stand for the Lord.

In terms of lifestyle, this value found its most intense expression in monasticism. The people who left the secular society of the third and fourth centuries to found monasticism did so to concentrate on the spiritual warfare, so that they might be ready to withstand the enemy's attacks. Some became hermits to test themselves in solitude away from the "earthly cares" of society. Others lived in monasteries to test themselves by submitting their individuality to a common life. In either case they aimed to discern their inner resources - strengths and weaknesses - to better stand in the unseen warfare which takes place in the heart.

This epistle, however, was not written for monks, but for people living in the world, and the Eastern Tradition has always seen the unseen warfare as something every believer must face. This is why there is no basic distinction in the East, unlike the West, between monastic and non-monastic spiritualities. The circumstances of the battle differ, but the warfare is the same.
NEED FOR AN EXPERIENCED "SCOUT"

Many books have been written in the Christian East on the topic of the spiritual warfare, and we may be tempted to dive into one or another of them, looking for direction on how to proceed with the struggle in our own lives. In doing this, however, many have harmed their spiritual life by using approaches which were wrong for them or for which they were not ready. When a person starts jogging, serious dieting or any form of physical regimen, they are advised to do it under supervision, as not everyone is ready for just any general principle or exercise. In the same way the Tradition of the Church insists that people enter the spiritual struggle only under the direction of a Spiritual Guide, a person experienced in the Christian life and gifted with the ability to guide others into it.

The unavailability of spiritually experienced guides in our Church is a present-day reality and accounts for the hit-or-miss approach many of us have to the spiritual life. We need to begin regularly interceding with the Lord to raise up spiritual fathers and mothers for the Byzantine Churches well grounded in the Eastern spiritual approach so that our tradition of Christian lifestyle can find full expression again. In lieu of this, we must at least continue to come together to grow in the Lord as a community as best we can.
Content Questions:

1. What images does St. Paul use to describe the enemy in verses 10-12? Which of these images best relates to the state of secular society we discussed in Session Four?

2. Why does Paul continually use the word "stand" to describe our relationship with the enemy (vs fight, for example)?

3. Why is the inner chamber of our heart the heavenly realm? Why is this also the battleground against the enemy?

4. In what does our share in Christ's victory over sin and death consist?

5. One author has summed up this entire Epistle with three
verbs, "sit", "walk" and "stand". If we group our sessions in this course in the following way: sessions one and two, sessions three, four and five, session six, how might we understand that author's description?

**Personal Reflection Questions:**

1. What do you think the comedy expression "The devil made me do it" says about our society's perception of satan and his influence? Do Christians have the same perception?

2. What do you see as the difference between the inclination to sin, temptation and sin itself? Are they the same or different?

3. How can the monastic values of quiet, regular prayer, solitude and community life find a place in our daily lives?
4. How can you deal with the question of spiritual guidance in your life? in your community?

Resolve

Cultivate the habit of praying regularly that the Lord provide our community with Spiritual Guides who can lead us closer to Him.
IN CONCLUSION

Reflect on your experience in this group so far: the readings and reflections you have done on your own as well as the meetings, prayer and sharing you had together.

1. What aspect of this experience did you find most enriching and fulfilling and why?

2. What aspect of this experience did you find hardest to take and why?

3. If you were expected to repeat the experience, what would you change and why?

4. Are you interested in extending your commitment to the next mini-series?