

**Romans**

St Paul wrote his letter to the Romans shortly before his last trip to Jerusalem (15:25), probably from Corinth in the winter of A.D. 57 or the spring of A.D. 58. Having evangelised the eastern Mediterranean, he now looked westward toward Spain and planned to visit the Church in Rome en route. He had one further matter to attend to, however; and this concerned the taking of a collection for the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, raised by Gentile Christians in the churches of Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia. He therefore wrote to the Roman Church announcing his forthcoming visit.

He was writing to a church that he had never visited and did not know personally, but he offered to them his pastoral and theological reflections, arising from his own missionary experience. As a helpful note in *The Orthodox Study Bible* suggests:

This epistle contains the core of apostolic doctrine essential for the foundation of a local community. For this reason, the Church reads Romans immediately following Pentecost, the season in which we celebrate the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the world.<sup>1</sup>

St Paul's major theme was the possibility for salvation based on a contrast between the realm of grace and that of law. He had dealt with these matters before, of course, in his letter to the Galatians, but in that letter there was a necessary polemic; the genre of Romans was more by way of a theological treatise. With this aim and methodology, he also addressed the vexed subject of the standing of old Israel in the scheme of salvation after, that is, the division of the Synagogue and the Church (ch. 9-11).

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<sup>1</sup> *Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 1,521 on Romans 1:11 in which St Paul sought to "impart to you [i.e. the Christians in Rome] some spiritual gift, so that you may be established."

The Church in Rome had, of course, both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Unlike the Church in Galatia, however, the Roman Church seems not to have been plagued by Judaizing tendencies, but rather there were disputes concerning dietary and calendric matters occasioned by the temporary absence of Jewish Christians; and further disputes during the time of Emperor Claudius' edict of eviction and the Jews' subsequent return after his death in A.D.54 when some of them started stirring up trouble.

The main body of the letter can be divided into five sections. In the first (1:18-3:20) St Paul notes the contrast between Jew and Gentile in respect of the law but insists that both will be judged in respect of sin, to which both are subject. As 1:19 firmly proclaims,

What can be known about God is plain [to all who sin], because God has shown it to [all of] them. 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 [i.e. both Jews and Gentiles who sin] are without excuse.”

St Basil the Great offers an inspiring interpretation of 1:20 in which the creation displays God's invisible nature, providing a training place for every soul:

You will find that the world was not devised at random or to no purpose, but to contribute to some useful end and to the great advantage of all beings. It is truly a training place for rational souls and a school for attaining the knowledge of God. Through visible and perceptible objects it provides guidance to the mind for the contemplation of the invisible.<sup>2</sup>

This theme of personal responsibility “for attaining the knowledge of God” continues throughout the book of Romans (cf. ch. 2; ch. 5-8; ch. 12).

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald Bray (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, NT VI, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), with text and full source to be located by the cited Biblical chapter and verse.

In the second section (3:21-5:21) righteousness is said not to come from the Law and its observance but rather from saving faith in Christ and the benefits of His sacrificial death. Man is justified by grace through faith, not by his works. In chapter 4 St Paul corroborates his claim with reference to Abraham whose obedience in faith made him righteous in and before God. Of course, Abraham is an interesting test case in that he lived *before* the dispensation of the law.

In chapter 5 St Paul contrasts the first Adam whose disobedience led to death and sin and the second Adam, Christ, whose obedience led to the offer of the free gift of salvation for all. The 14th century Greek theologian St Gregory Palamas helps us to understand how St Paul views Adam and Christ:

There are many who accuse Adam of obeying an evil counsellor, scorning the commandment [not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as set out in Genesis 2:17], and by that scorn transiting death to us. But it is not so serious to wish to taste a deadly plant before you have tried it, as to want to eat it all knowing by experience that it is deadly . . . Thus every one of us deserves, more than Adam, to be blamed and condemned.<sup>3</sup>

This Pauline understanding of Adam and Christ has been further developed by Father John Meyendorff in his explanation of how the East and the West have divided in their perspective on sin and death:

To understand Palamas' thought about sin and death, it is necessary correctly to analyse his use of the word nature (*physis*). For him 'nature' is not a static conception, but must always be considered in one or other of its existential states. Its state before the Fall implied life in God, for which it had been made, although that life was not its own, but that of God; this was essentially the 'natural' state of nature. After the Fall, deprived of that life, it was left to rely on its own powers, a condition basically contrary to its destiny, and

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<sup>3</sup> St Gregory Palamas, *Cap.phys.66, col. 1160D-1161A*, as cited by Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians* (Menlo Park, CA: Monastery Books, 1990), p. 167.

involving death. ... One can immediately see where these views (regarding the 'natural state' of man), basically formulated already by Maximus the Confessor, differ from the views on 'grace' and 'nature' developed in the West after St Augustine.<sup>4</sup>

With reference to Fr John Meyendorff's comment on the different trajectories of medieval doctrine concerning original or ancestral sin, Romans 5:12 is a key text. The divergences between the Latin west and the Greek east do not rest solely on this verse, but its mistranslation does encapsulate those problems caused by a fatal misconception of original sin in the late western tradition. This is a lucid summary of the problem from the catechetical section of an Orthodox parish web site.

It is pointed out that Augustine used a poor translation of Romans 5:12, ἐφ' ᾧ which means 'because of' was translated as 'in whom'. Sinned 'in Adam' is quite different than sinned 'because of Adam'. The correct interpretation teaches that Adam's sin carried death to all creation, and that although our sin is evidence to this death, it is not Adam's specific transgression that we have inherited.<sup>5</sup>

St Paul's anthropology, therefore, does not include any historical culpability for generational sin or guilt. Adam's fault is inherited, but neither his sin and guilt nor that of his progeny are transmitted with the fault. Indeed, we stand or fall by our own actions, notwithstanding the legacies of nature and nurture.

In the third section (6:1-8:39) St Paul explains the implications of his teaching concerning sin and salvation for Christian living, that is, for the life in Christ. First, he addresses the charges of those who suppose that justification by grace rather than the law allows sinful behaviour to go unchecked. St Paul replies that on no account is this the case since the believer has died in baptism and is a slave not to unrighteousness but rather he lives according to the Spirit. Because of its

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<sup>4</sup> Father John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas, II The Thought of Palamas* (Bedfordshire: The Faith Press, 1964), ch.1, p. 122; quoted by Johanna Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stgeorgegreenville.org/OrthodoxLife/Chapter4/Chap4-4.html>

importance, Romans 6:3-11 has been chosen as the Epistle for the Liturgy on Great and Holy Saturday. St Paul's linking of death and Resurrection has been explained explicitly and profoundly by St John Chrysostom:

Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross then, and Burial, is to Christ, Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For [Christ] died Himself and was buried in the flesh, but we have done both to sin. ... Here [St Paul] hints, along with the duty of a careful walk, at the subject of the Resurrection.... For if you have shared in [Christ's] Death and Burial, much more will you share in [His] Resurrection and Life.... After the Resurrection to come had been set before us, [St Paul] demands of us another, a new conversion, which is brought about in the present life by a change of habits.<sup>6</sup>

This Pauline perspective on baptism in which we are each baptised into the death, burial and Resurrection of Christ does indeed require “a change of habits” in which not only is each baptised person transformed through a personal unity with Christ, but membership in the Church as a community (both local and universal) is the first step toward living faithfully with Christ for the rest of one's life. The goal that St Paul models for us is clear: “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

Particularly in chapter 7, St Paul reflects from his own experience on the internal conflict, common to us all, of a will divided between good and evil. The law, as an external precept, is not able to deal with this internal conflict, but Christ, in particular His saving death and resurrection, guides us to victory over “this body of death” (7:24). St Ambrose set out how to follow the teaching of St Paul, resolving internal conflict between good and evil through “the gifts of grace”:

We have a physician! Let us follow His remedy! Our remedy is the grace of Christ, and the body of death is our body. Let us therefore be exiled from the body lest we be exiled from Christ. Even if we are in the body let us not follow

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<sup>6</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homily X on Romans V*; quoted by Johanna Manley, p. 924, reference 55, p. 405.

what is of the body. Let us not neglect the rights of nature, but let us prefer the gifts of grace.<sup>7</sup>

In essence then, St Paul concludes in the final verse of chapter 7, “I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with the flesh I serve the law of sin;” therefore, it is essential for St Paul (and each of us) to recognise that now “we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (7:6), and the grace that the Holy Spirit offers to each baptised Christian.

Chapter 8 contrasts life in the Spirit with life according to the flesh, by which the Apostle means a carnal life—one that is opposed to God's will. It is this self-same Spirit that bears witness to our relationship with God as Father (a theme also found in Galatians) and our participation in both the sufferings and the glory of Christ. The new creation starts with regeneration in the Church amongst the children of God, but through them extends to the whole of creation which itself “will be set free from the bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (8:19-25). Nothing can separate the believer from the love of God which in Christ is victorious over all things that may oppose it.

In the fourth section St Paul turns to the question of the place in the scheme of salvation of those Jews who have not accepted Christ. Since the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, St Paul leaves this question open to the judgement and wisdom of God (11:33-36). However, St Paul does offer a perspective that looks into the past in that “as regards the Gospel [the Jews] are enemies of God . . . but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers” (11:28). St John Chrysostom resolves the conundrum of what is to happen to the Jews who do not accept Christ by looking to the future: “. . . even now God has not stopped calling the Gentiles. He is waiting for all of the Gentiles who are to believe to come in, and then the rest of the Jews will come as well.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> St Ambrose, *On the Death of His Brother Satyrus* 2.41, quoted by Bray, *ACCS NT Romans* 7:24, p.197.

<sup>8</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*; quoted by Bray, *ACCS NT Romans* 11:28, p. 299.

In the final and fifth section (12:1-15:33) St Paul draws out the practical implications of his teaching in terms of a sacrificial life, the use of spiritual gifts and obedience to the secular authority. A central theme is set out in 12:2 and was noted in the Biblical Template at the end of the written text of the previous lecture: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Finally, St Paul turns to the issue of food laws and calendar by urging the strong to have care for the needs of the weak and to avoid vexatious disputes. He then speaks of his plans to visit Rome. Some commentators have supposed the letter ends at the conclusion of chapter 15, since chapter 16, although undoubtedly Pauline, seems to open up a 'new' ending. The evidence for this conclusion is slim; and the best Greek manuscripts refer to Romans in a 16 chapter format.

### **The Prison Epistles - Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians**

These Epistles were written by St Paul to the churches under his care during his first term of imprisonment in Rome, sometime between A.D. 60 to 62.

#### **Colossians**

Colossians and Philemon were written at about the same time with St Paul and St Timothy being associated with both. In these two letters there are greetings from the same group of five people: Aristarchus, Mark, Demas, Epaphras, Luke and Archippus. Colossae is not far distant from Ephesus, where St Paul was based for three years, but he may have never visited Colossae, the Church probably having been founded by Epaphras, one of St Paul's converts in Ephesus. When the latter gave his report to the Apostle in Rome, he shared his concerns about a dangerous new heresy which combined certain elements of Mosaic Law and ritual with the speculative and exclusivist elitism of pagan mysticism. This Jewish Gnosticism was highly destructive of the unity of the believers in Colossae and eroded the apostolic character of the teaching that he and the other Orthodox were trying to impart.

The sufficiency of Christ was the issue here and saw St Paul firmly assert that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9). To the desire for something deeper and more mysterious St Paul enjoins that Christ is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). St Augustine proposes that these treasures were not hidden “in order to deny them to us but to rouse our desire for what is hidden.”<sup>9</sup>

To the craving for the old rites of circumcision, food laws and festivals, St Paul urges life giving renewal in baptism whereby sin has been cancelled and evil disarmed by the death and resurrection of Christ (2:11-17). St Paul then goes on to condemn false humility, the worship of angels and all sorts of puffed up notions that were part and parcel of the Gnostic package (2:18-23). In chapter 3 St Paul lists all those evil inclinations that must be put to death or cast off in order that a truly Christian character might prevail. The holy Apostle proclaims the true nature of this asceticism in terms of the indwelling word of Christ leading to all wisdom (3:16). The letter concludes with teaching on the relationships between husbands and wives and children; servants and masters.

### **Philemon**

St Paul's letter to Philemon, a wealthy Christian who hosted church meetings in his house at Colossae, concerned one of his slaves, Onesimus, who had run away but who had also subsequently become a Christian in St Paul's care. St Paul returned him to his master (as was his legal duty of the Roman law) but with a beautiful blessing to Philemon (which is also offered to each of us): “that the communion of your faith might become energised in full knowledge of every good which is in you in regard to Christ Jesus” (verse 6), as well as a request that Onesimus should be considered as a Christian brother. The institution of slavery was not something St Paul could abolish at this time, but the bonds of Christian affection would certainly radically change the character of slavery and eventually undermine it.

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<sup>9</sup> St Augustine, *Sermons 51:5*, quoted by Peter J. Gorday (ed.), *ACCS NT IX, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, p. 27.

## Ephesians

The earliest manuscripts and other variants do not have the words “in Ephesus” in in verse 1 of chapter 1. St Basil and others were aware of this issue. Moreover, the letter has no extended greeting and valediction and reads more like a theological treatise for general distribution. Although Tradition has identified the letter as being “to the Ephesians” (Muratorian Canon, St Irenaeus, St Clement of Alexandria); in all likelihood it was sent to all the local churches in the area.

In the modern era, some have contested St Paul's authorship of Ephesians based on content, style and language considerations, but there are many who still defend St Paul's authorship on the grounds of consistency in theology (particularly with Colossians) and the possibility of a scribe taking St Paul's dictation. Indeed, Ephesians covers similar ground to Colossians but with an ecclesiological rather than a Christological emphasis. This is notable in the re-definition of *mysterion* (mystery) and *pleroma* (fullness) from Christ to the Church as between Colossians and Ephesians respectively. In the Protestant world these theological shifts, unwelcome of course for they exalt the role of the Church, have disposed some commentators to see Ephesians as a work penned by a Pauline disciple at Ephesus some 20 to 40 years later. The Orthodox Church sees no evidence nor reason to follow this line of self-serving argument but rather follows as always the judgement of Tradition that the author was indeed St Paul.

The teaching of the first part of Ephesians might be characterised by the proclamation that all things are gathered together in the fullness of Christ (1:10). This is the faith, the Gospel of salvation, into which the believers have been baptised and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). St Irenaeus was one of many subsequent theologians who was to take up this idea of the Logos gathering up everything into himself through the divine Incarnation. In so doing Christ brought the gift of life instead of death which was formerly associated with the darkness of the former life, the realm of disobedient evil spirits (2:1-3). The believers are now

raised on high to sit with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6). In this the Gentiles, formerly alienated, are now part of the Church's commonwealth (2:11-12). The cross has put an end to the enmity between Jew and Gentile, reconciling each to the other and to God. Their unity in the household of God is now like a building with Christ as its Chief Cornerstone, the apostles and prophets as the foundation and all the faithful with them built up into a living Temple in which the Spirit of God dwells (2:13-22).

In chapter 3 St Paul presents his apostolic commission and then proceeds to pray for the Ephesian church and for its grounding in the inexhaustible love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge and in whom (Christ) the fullness of God dwells (3:14-19). In chapter 4 St Paul then goes on to elaborate the unity of the Church in Christ and the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit whereby the Church is equipped for the building up of its members and common life in the service of God. As in the letter to the Colossians, St Paul then proceeds to explain how the believers must be renewed in their minds by putting away all that is contrary to God and instead by practising tender-hearted forgiving love after the manner of Christ.

This is the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the faithful—not walking in darkness but in light (chapter 5). St Paul has told the Ephesians, “for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, walk as children of light” (5:8). However, St Paul immediately acknowledges that this stark contrast is not easily achieved, when he urges the Ephesians to “try to learn what is pleasing to God” (5:10). St John Chrysostom offers a nuanced proposal for the present position of the Ephesians at that time (and perhaps also of our own situation today): “Insofar as you are light your goodness shines forth.”<sup>10</sup> The confrontation between light and darkness, good and evil is ongoing throughout every person and every community.

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<sup>10</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 18,5,11,-13; quoted by Mark J. Edwards, (ed.) *ACCS NT VIII, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, p. 188.

Again, as in Colossians, the implications are then spelt out in terms of the relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters (5:21-6:9). The phrase “As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands” (5:24) is immediately followed by the challenging criterion: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.” St John Chrysostom spells out in careful (and somewhat painful) detail the practical implications of precisely how St Paul is urging husbands to behave:

Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love’s high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the Church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the Church. Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still not done as much as Christ as for the Church. For you are already married when you act in this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated Him. So just as He, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging Him brought her to trust Him by His great solicitude, not by threatening lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so you must also act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you, you will be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her.<sup>11</sup>

The epistle ends on a note of sobriety and vigour by reminding its readers none of this can be accomplished without spiritual warfare in which the truth of the Gospel, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the power of the Word of God and perseverance will enable the Church to prevail (6:10-18).

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<sup>11</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 20.5.25; quoted by Edwards, ACCS NT VIII, p. 195.

## Philippians

The Church at Philippi was the first in Europe to be founded by St Paul in 50 or 51 A.D. during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). He returned there twice during his third journey in 58 A.D. (Acts 20:1, 6). The first converts seemed to have been women and predominantly Gentile. St Paul's letter from prison to the Church at Philippi is perhaps the most personal and warm of all his letters. The community was generous in its financial support of the Apostle, sending Epaphroditus to Rome with a gift. St Paul undertook to return him to Philippi on account of the poor state of his health, so devoted was he to apostolic work (2:30). St Timothy was St Paul's co-worker in the church at Philippi (2:19).

In the first chapter St Paul reflects on the providential character of his own sufferings in prison and then strengthens the Church to follow his example. He appeals to humility as the characteristic Christian virtue, modelling this on Christ Himself in the famous hymn that he quotes in 2:5-11. Verses 12 and 13 expound most succinctly the synergy between human effort and God's grace that is characteristic of Orthodox ascetical theology. In urging the Philippians (and us) to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” St Paul stresses that “God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” St John Chrysostom offers immense encouragement with a calm reassurance: “If you have the will, then He works out the willing. Do not be afraid or weary. He gives us both zeal and performance. For when we will, He will henceforth augment our willing.”<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding the faithfulness of the believers at Philippi there are of course still challenges, most notably those presented by the Judaisers. In addressing this issue St Paul once again resorts to his own experience in faith. He was blameless concerning the Law but for all that upon encountering Christ forsook all to find Him and know Him. St Paul's goal for all humanity is bold: “That at the name of Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homily on Philippians* 9.2.12-16; quoted by Mark J. Edwards, (ed.) *ACCS NT VIII, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, p. 258.

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:11). Theodoret of Cyr has pointed out that: “In these few words . . . the divine apostle has subdued every heresy, among those who blaspheme the divinity of the Only-Begotten, and those who deny His humanity and those who misconstrue the hypostatic union of the two natures.”<sup>13</sup>

St Paul points out in chapter 3, verses 8-11 that he has “suffered the loss of all things . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death” that he might attain the resurrection from the dead (3:8-11). In the greetings that conclude the letter he encourages the community to be anxious for nothing but rather to pray with thanksgiving, reflecting upon and doing all that is good: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (4:4). His warm personal affection for this Church that continues to support him so much in prison is unmistakable. In St. Paul’s words, the Christians of Philippi are “brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown” who he urges to “stand firm in the Lord, my beloved” (4:1). Clearly this regard is reciprocated.

The advice and blessing that St Paul offers throughout this letter to the Philippians is also offered to each of us if we too “stand firm in the Lord”: “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:6-7). This closing encouragement is considered further in the Biblical Template at the end of the written text of this second lecture on St Paul.

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<sup>13</sup> Theodoret of Cyr, *Epistle to the Philippians 2.11*; quoted by Edwards, p. 256.

## A Template for the Orthodox Interpretation of Biblical Texts

In accordance with the proposal of Fr. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos that Orthodox biblical interpretation ought to have a three-level approach, the following template is offered for preachers, teachers, bible study leaders, catechists and students of the Scriptures generally:<sup>1</sup>

**Philippians 4:6-7; 12-13:** “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. . . . I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Level	Process	In Tradition / Fathers (Theoria)	Applicable Now (Praxis)
<b>Exegetical</b>	<b>Historical / Contextual</b>  <i>(using the full range of critical tools)</i>	The Church Fathers understanding of both anxiety and peace is considerably more comprehensive than most modern perspectives. Marius Victorinus, a 4th century grammarian who became Christian, wrote: “Do not be anxious about anything.” This means: Do not be concerned for yourselves. Do not give unnecessary thought or be anxious about the world or worldly things. For all that is needful for you in this life God provides. And it will be even better in that life which is eternal” (Quoted in <i>Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture [ACCS] NT VIII</i> , p. 281).	The Greek word for peace <i>eirēnē</i> means peace in the sense of unity and concord, while the Hebrew word for peace <i>shalom</i> designates completeness. In both the OT and the NT peace is a blessing from God as set out in Psalm 28 (29): 11: “The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.”
	<b>Allegorical / Typological</b>  <i>(as derived from Tradition)</i>	St John Chrysostom offers a profound guide to Phil 4:6-7: “Here is a medicine to relieve every bad circumstance and every pain. What is it? To pray and to give thanks in everything. He does not wish that a prayer be merely a petition but a thanksgiving for what we have received.... How can one make petitions for the future without a thankful acknowledgement of past things? ... So one ought to give thanks for everything, even what seems grievous. That is the mark of one who is truly thankful. Grief comes out of the circumstances with their demands. Thanksgiving comes from a soul that has true insights and a strong affection for God.” ( <i>ACCS, VIII</i> , p. 282.)	St. John Chrysostom’s focus on prayer is taken up by a modern Biblical commentator who reflects on these verses: “Anxiety and prayer are two great opposing forces in Christian experience.” The practice of accepting one’s situation and learning how to be made strong through Christ is essential to gain the peace that passes understanding (4:12-13). As one Biblical scholar

		Prayers of thanksgiving need to precede prayers of petition. Then concerns from the past will not interfere with finding God’s peace in the present.	wrote: “Released from fears about tomorrow, we can concentrate on doing God’s will today.”
<b>Interpretative</b>	<b>Spiritual / Ethical</b>	Philippians 4:4-9 is seen by the Church as so important that this text is the Epistle on Palm Sunday. St John Chrysostom advises: “If we will be at peace with each other, God will be with us ... Therefore, we must make a beginning on our part, and then we will draw God towards us” (quoted by Manley, <i>The Bible &amp; the Holy Fathers</i> , p. 859). It is equally valid to say that God draws us toward Him, if we peacefully let Him.	A modern Biblical commentator warns that “the peace of God” is “not merely a psychological state of mind, but an inner tranquility based on peace with God—the peaceful state of those whose sins are forgiven” (cf. Rom 5:1; John 14:27).
	<b>Personal / Social</b>	Reflecting on the meaning of “He is our peace” (2:14), Marius Victorinus notes that: “The work is not ours. We are not called to set ourselves free. Faith in Christ is our only salvation” [ <i>ACCS VIII</i> , p.138).	Although self-help books might encourage change in personal habits, it is faith in Christ that brings us peace through a new relationship with God.
<b>Transformative</b>	<b>The Call to Holiness</b>	Marius Victorinus has linked peace to spiritual and community harmony: “When the peace of God has come upon us we shall understand God. There will be no discord, no disagreement, no quarrelsome arguments, nothing subject to question. This is hardly the case in worldly life. But it shall be so when we have the peace of God, wherein all understanding shall be ours. For peace is the state of being already at rest, already secure” ( <i>ACCS NT VIII</i> , p. 282). Learning how to rest in God’s will is essential to become holy.	Hebrews 12:14 urges: “Pursue peace with all people and holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” As Hebrews 12:15 states, “any root of bitterness springing up” stops the peace of God. Therefore, the note in the Orthodox Study Bible is sound in urging: “Our two clear choices for life are bitterness or blessing.”

	<p><b>The Call to Witness</b></p>	<p>St John Chrysostom views peace as a gift from God: “The peace which will preserve us is the one which Christ says, ‘My peace I leave with you; my peace I give you’ [John 14:27]. For this ‘peace passes all human understanding’ [Phil 4:7]. How? When He sees that we should be at peace with enemies, with the unrighteous with those who display contentiousness and hostility toward us, how does this not pass human understanding? ...This peace transcends every human intellect and all speech” (ACCS VIII, p. 282). Such peace is a bold witness to others that Christ is present in the life of a committed Christian. In this text from Philippians, St Paul is saying that it is through prayer that “the peace of God which passes understanding” empowers us to “keep [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus,” thus strengthening us (Phil 4.7, 13).</p>	<p>The two main Greek words used to mean “witness” in the NT are <i>martus</i> signifying martyrdom and <i>marturia</i> signifying testimony. When one receives the call to witness, that call is often a call to give testimony, but the testimony often leads to martyrdom, as those who give witness are aware. The call to witness can lead to family tension or loss of job or loss of friends. One must listen carefully to the Lord, witnessing only at a time when He offers the peace to make the witness.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> In “*The New Testament, An Orthodox Perspective, Volume 1: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics,*” (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, Ch. 7), Fr. Theodore sets out three levels serving a sound Orthodox hermeneutical process. These are: **1. Exegetical** - using all critical, contextual, textual and literary methods to determine “the level of understanding of the biblical text in its historical context of literary form and conceptuality ...” (p. 190). **2. Interpretative** – evaluating means derived from the exegetical stage as applicable contextually to the reader’s contemporary issues and concerns (p. 197). **3. Transformative** – experiencing life changing practical applications of insights derived from the previous two stages.

In ALL of these three levels, the Orthodox context must be the Church as the locus of divine revelation and inspiration. Here the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth as manifested in the biblical text, the teachings of the Fathers and the liturgical context. In Ch. 4, p. 115 f., Fr. Theodore explains the historical and spiritual exegetical approaches which, following the Fathers, must be applied throughout. Classically these have concerned the Antiochian emphasis on the “literal” or historical approach and the Alexandrian emphasis on the allegorical and typological interpretations that reveal the inter-connectedness of all Scripture in Tradition at deeper levels of understanding.