

The first Sermon upon the first Chapter

1 Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commission of God our savior, and of the Lord Jesus Christ our hope.

2 To Timothy my true son in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace, from God our father, and from Jesus Christ our Lord.

We must not think that this Epistle was written by St. Paul to only one man, but it is for the whole Church, as we may perceive by the contents of it. For Timothy had no need to be told many of the things which St. Paul says here. Paul speaks with others in mind also, and not just Timothy alone. And surely, it may easily be so gathered, even at the first blush, in that, Saint Paul gives unto himself the title of an Apostle, and confirms his vocation to them, which would not have given and yielded him that authority, if he had not made himself known to such a one. But when he writes unto the Churches, which did already very well know of him, he makes but short mention of this word Apostle, or barely calls himself the servant of God. Here he shows that he trusts not in himself, upon his own head, but that he was appointed of GOD, and that the charge was committed unto him by our Lord Jesus Christ. And to what purpose does he do so, unless he is writing with others in mind besides Timothy? So then we see that this Epistle was in such sort directed to one man, that it is also directed to all men, and that it ought to profit all of the children of God. As we shall see more at large, Paul's aim was to edify all those to whose hands this Epistle might come. And indeed he shows here what is the true order of the Church, how the word of God ought to be handled, and to what use it ought to be applied. He shows what every man's duty is. By this we see, that it (this letter) concerns not one man only, but that all men ought to give diligent ear unto it, because God meant to direct this doctrine by the mouth of Saint Paul to his Church.

But let us now see how Saint Paul begins his preface. He says, "Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the commission given him of GOD our Savior, and the Lord Jesus Christ our

hope.” We showed before, when we handled Thessalonians 2:13, how St. Paul shows by his own example that no man ought to be heard in the Church of God unless he is sent: for our faith must not hang upon mortal men, neither upon creatures. No one has sovereignty and rule over our souls except God only, and as for all the doctrine of our salvation, we may receive it from none but him only. However, he does not come down from heaven in visible shape to speak unto us, nor does he send his angels unto us, but he wills that we be taught by the means of men. And therefore, if we want to show our obedience to GOD, we must receive his word which is preached unto us by them to whom he has given this charge and office: for they who vaunt and brag of themselves, saying that they want to serve GOD, and yet in the meanwhile despise his word because it is brought them by the mouth of men, they show well that there is nothing but hypocrisy in them. And indeed, since we see that God wants his Church governed by the preaching of the Gospel, and wants men to be ministers of it, it is not for man to reason and strive about it. But both great and small must follow this rule which is given to them and which shall remain in place until the world’s end.

And yet Saint Paul calls himself an Apostle first of all to make plain unto us that we ought not to listen to just any men, unless they have good warrant that they speak in God’s name and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, he shows also that if we want to do homage to God, if we want to be his subjects, we must receive his word when it is preached to us by the mouth of men whom he has sent.

Yet he does not only say that he is an Apostle, but an Apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. He does so, no doubt, because he was appointed by God the Father alone to be our sovereign teacher. Therefore all they who are active in the office of teaching must speak in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for of him it was spoken, “Hear him.” (Matt. 17:6) When this voice from

heaven was heard, which wanted us to hear Jesus Christ, it was to stop the mouths of all creatures, so that no man should be so foolish as to put forth anything that was forged and shaped in his own brain, and so that no man should take upon himself to be a master or a teacher – for that belongs only to the Son of God.

What remains then? That all who teach may truly claim that Jesus Christ speaks by their mouth, as St. Paul says also in another place: Do you seek for proof of him that speaks in me, (1 Cor. 13:3) namely Jesus Christ? Behold then why he declares, namely and expressly, that he is an Apostle of Jesus Christ, that is to say, sent of him, having commission to speak, as it were in his own person, and he says further that it is done by the ordinance of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ. By saying this he wants us to understand that it does not behoove men to trust in the flesh, as it is also said in the epistle to the Hebrews (5:4-5): that no man ought to take upon himself that honor. Only he who is called by God may say that he has a lawful calling. And indeed Jesus Christ himself, who is master of the house and head of all, was appointed by God his Father with a solemn oath, as we see in the Psalms (Ps. 110). What shall we then say of those who are far beneath him, and have no authority but that which he gives them?

Now Saint Paul might say that he was appointed an Apostle by the ordinance of God because he was miraculously called from heaven – but it does not go that way with everyone. What then? To the end that nothing should be done confusedly, but in good and seemly order in his Church, God took such a way, and gave charge and commission to them whom he would use to bear his word, that is to say, that they should be chosen and allowed of. Therefore, whenever this order is kept, as the Apostles have set it forth for us, behold a lawful calling, and how God will be acknowledged, as he was of Paul. As for Saint Paul and the other Apostles being ordained in a unique way, this was the reason for that: because they were sent to set Jesus Christ

in possession of his kingdom. But after this foundation was once laid, it was God's will that those who preach his Gospel should be chosen and allowed of. And he wills that we content ourselves with this, as the Scriptures make it plain to us in other places (Acts 1:13 and 13:1).

So we should look for two things in those who preach the word of God and are called by the name "Shepherds": the one is, that they be chosen according to the way God allows as we have set forth for us in his word. For that law may not be broken or changed. And the second is that they do their duty faithfully, which they will do if they hold themselves to the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and stand not upon their own devices, but seek only the advancement of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he may be that which God his Father made him, that is to say (as we have already shown), the sovereign and only teacher.

Behold the two things that are required in all shepherds, which will be accounted as ministers of the word of God: that they be called, I say, according to the order of the Church, and that they do their duty faithfully, striving and laboring to accomplish their charge in such sort, that Jesus Christ always reigns, and has this sovereignty and honor, that men hear him, and all obedience is given to him. And this is the reason why it is said that the Church must always remain chaste unto her spouse. (1 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27) When Jesus Christ calls them whom he means to use in his service, by his own name, they must not therefore usurp his place and his dignity; for it is all one, as if a man should introduce his wife to his friend, and he should be the first that should go about to make her lewd. If then, at any time those who have the charge to preach the word of God, will broach their own duties, what else is it, but to make the Church break her faith, which she owes to her husband, that is to say, to the son of God? For behold also wherein Saint Paul shows that the chastity of the Church consists in not straying from the simplicity of the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:3); for as soon as we listen and give ear to strange doctrines

we are like a woman who listens to a lecherous man who seeks only to defile her. So let us mark well, that men do not have the commission to govern the Church of God if doing so should lessen the dignity and honor of Jesus Christ or that his name should be damaged in the least way. Instead men should govern the Church in this way: they should conform themselves to the obedience of him who is the only teacher either great or small. And they should hold themselves fast to his word which he has brought in the name of God his Father. Indeed we should all humbly and reverently obey that doctrine which is preached to us by men. But if we take no account of it we are offending not the men who speak it but rather we show an open and plain rebellion against God and against his only son.

Next we should note the titles which Saint Paul gives here both to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ. God our Savior, and Jesus Christ our hope. True it is that this word *savior* is often given in Scripture to the son of God because it is he that has fulfilled and brought to a perfect end what was necessary for our salvation. He shed his blood to the end that we should be washed and made clean from our filth and loathsomeness. He removed the curse that was upon us. He delivered us and set us at liberty from the slavery of death. He utterly put sin to flight. We see then that we must seek our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is for good reason that he is called *our savior*.

Nevertheless, it was not without cause that in this verse Saint Paul gives this title to God the Father. Consider where Jesus came from when he came to us. He was sent from God the Father, for so the Scripture witnesses, "God so loved the world that he spared not his only begotten son, but delivered him to death for us." (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9) Therefore when we behold our salvation in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must also look to the very head and fountain from which he came to us, that is to say, from this love which God had for mankind.

And this is the reason why Saint Paul calls God *Our Savior*. He is telling us, by this word, that as often as we think upon the profit which Jesus Christ has brought us and we have received by him, we should lift up our hearts higher and know that God, having pity upon the lost state of all the flock of Adam, provided for us and gave us this remedy, namely our Savior Jesus Christ, who came to draw us out of the bottomless pit of death.

Of course, Jesus Christ is also called our hope, so we may know that he alone is our leaning stock, and upon him only can we rest. For how else could we lay hold upon the salvation which God has given us, if it were not that we are made one with him by the means of our Lord Jesus Christ? When we behold the majesty of God, it cannot be but we must tremble and quake.

And this is what caused the papists to search for so many patrons and advocates, so many ways, so many bare and beggarly paltries, to no other end and purpose but to bring them to some assurance of their salvation. But they could never come to any peace with it; for if a man once turns aside from Jesus Christ, he cannot keep from being full of doubt, tangled in the briers. Men may rock themselves to sleep for a season, yet at length they will be forced to confess and acknowledge that they have been abused with their vain imaginations. The papist does not know that which Saint Paul is here teaching us: that Jesus Christ is our hope, and (though they had already been instructed in this point) that God is the Savior of the world.

Yet they cease not to be tossed up and down hither and thither, as we see how they are carried away and constrained to say we must do a certain thing and we must have a certain means and that we must hold onto such a means, we must have such a patron and advocate in order to purchase favor with God. See in what case these poor blind buzzards are. And thus let us learn that if we want good assurance, if we want our souls to be at peace and rest, we must search both the beginning and the end of our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. We must ground

ourselves wholly upon this, that we be thus persuaded, that he is not only come to give us some little taste of everlasting life, but that he has brought us all fullness and all perfection of blessedness, to the end that in him only we might be satisfied, and have our hunger fed and our thirst quenched.

Therefore let us follow that which the son of God has here ordained for us, and let us not wander hither and thither at our own fancies. For we have a way shown to us here which will never deceive us; let us keep ourselves to it. Put simply, Saint Paul shows us here that the principle cause of our salvation is the good will of God and the fatherly love which God has given to us, without any worthiness of our own, for the very substance and marrow is found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did God love us? Yes! And this is the principle groundwork of our salvation. But how did God love us while we were yet sinners? He surely hates the evil that is in us and cannot abide it. We are strangers from God and therefore banished and shut out from everlasting life; what is more, we are given over to death and are accursed. But is it not true that we have this washing of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to acquit us before God by the sacrifice which he offered? Is not sin put out of us by the righteousness which he has purchased for us? Oh see how the substance of our salvation is in him. And therefore that is where we must look; it is there that we must focus our thoughts; and it is there, chiefly, and nowhere else, that we must have all our rest and seek all our peace. Whereof Saint Paul speaks, saying that “we have peace with God,” (Rom. 5:1) since we are justified by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So then we see now what doctrines we can gather out of these titles which Saint Paul gives here to God the Father and to our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we must join to it what follows, Grace and mercy and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. This is to set

forth better to us than that which we have already mentioned. For as Saint Paul called God our savior and Jesus Christ our hope, so is it his meaning that whatever pertains to a full and perfect joy is given to us from them jointly. For if we separate God from Jesus Christ, we can have no entrance to him, because his majesty is too high. We are here, as it were, in the bottomless pit of death. Here we are needing this means of joining and bringing us together in the person of Jesus Christ, or else God can never be merciful to us, we can never call upon him, nor look for any good at his hands, until our Lord Jesus Christ appears unto us and sets himself there to bring us to God his Father, and he come near us, assuring us that God will be near us in his person.

But before we go further, let us consider these three words: grace, mercy, and peace. We have already considered two of them, grace and peace. We have said in brief that his word “grace” suggests that God loves us and shows himself merciful unto us. The word “peace” suggests generally all prosperity. By this we should understand that we are miserable until God is made to be at one with us, and until he has received us into his love. In fact, even if we had all that were possible to be wished for and the world considered us as blessed as could possibly be, and we had everything to make us rejoice and clap our hands – yet we would still be always miserable until we could be sure that God loves us and that he receives us and takes us for his children. And why is this so? For all these benefits which we enjoy in this world would become a curse and cost us dearly, until God had received us into his love.

However, are we beloved of God? Are we grounded and fastened upon his grace? He will send us what he thinks is right. Consider how he persecuted those whom he cast off. Although he allowed them to enjoy goods according to this world, yet they do not truly enjoy them because they are always in trouble. However, he will send his children what he knows is best for them, and if they have any lack or need he will comfort them as that they may rejoice in

the midst of their miseries. Saint Paul said that when we have this assurance of the love of God, when our souls rest upon him, we may rejoice not only for the hope which he gives us of everlasting life, but also in this present life, because we know that he loves us. Though we are afflicted yet we rejoice because we know that he will use all of these for our salvation. We know this because he has already given us the assurance that he is caring for us. Indeed miseries shall serve the children of God, and so they may rejoice in them. So we see how the grace of God is the beginning all goodness and happiness. It is not without cause that Saint Paul joins them together. And thereby also we are taught not to set the cart before the horse when we ask from God that which is good for us. But notice the order which we must keep: that first of all it would please God to receive us into his grace, and then to send us those things which are profitable and necessary for us. Truly our nature will always go the other way, even as a sick man will be tormented with his pain more than with the cause of his disease. Similarly, when we pray to God, we want him to give us bread to eat and whatever is necessary for us: if we are sick, that he would heal us; if we lack anything, that he would send it to us. Notice how backwards we go when we pray to God. We forget that which is most important, namely, his love and his grace, and focus on things of baser sort which are of less account. One will crave to be rich, another wants whatever his lust leads him to. Basically, we are so backwards in our desires that we do not know what is good for us. For this reason let us follow this rule which is here set down: that when we call upon God, we crave of him especially and above all things that it may please him to be merciful to us and to forgive our sins and take us to himself; and afterwards to govern us and direct us in our ways. Truly his Holy Spirit must lead and govern us if we are to rightly pray to him, as Saint Paul shows us. However, we must not despise this order which is here set forth.

Concerning “mercy,” Saint Paul does not use it in all the other epistles. So why else has he used it here except that he has poured out his heart more abundantly in this place than in others? Yet so it is that this word, “mercy,” carries nothing more in it than a plain and evident setting forth of what was meant by the word “grace,” because God’s mercy is the reason why he loves us. And why is this? What else can God find in us but misery and wretchedness? If he would love us for our worthiness we would have to be different from what we are. Well then, let this be well marked, when God receives us into his love, there is nothing that moves him to it, but our wretched and miserable state. In fact, God’s mercy, pity, and compassion on us shows that there is on our parts a wretchedness and misery to be pitied. The ones demonstrate the others. So then, do we want him to love us? Then we must begin by feeling how wretched creatures we are, and that we are castaways and damned. Anyone who would hope for salvation but has no taste and feeling of his wretchedness is like a man who would hope to leap above the clouds. Let us learn the way to come to this grace of God, namely, that we be aghast at our wretchedness, and be ashamed and cast down within ourselves, since there is nothing in us but all evil and wickedness. Then let us fly to that infinite mercy and pity by which God is moved to love us, although we are too unworthy. Notice why Saint Paul adds this word *mercy* in this place. True it is, as we have said, that grace comes from mercy. Yet how marvelous that Saint Paul sets it in the second place. And why so? To show that we cannot be acceptable and well pleasing to God unless it be because he is merciful to us. As he says in another place, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father be with you.” (2 Cor. 13:14) Truly the love of God is first in order, as we have said before, that we only have salvation because Jesus Christ was sent to us from God his Father. But Paul, having spoken of the grace which has been

shown openly to us, and of which God has made us daily partakers in the person of his son by the Gospel, shows that it comes to us because it pleased him to love us of his own free goodness.

Let us now return to what Saint Paul says next. He calls Timothy his natural son in the faith. It may seem strange at first that a man may be called a spiritual father since our Lord Jesus Christ has forbidden it, saying “You must have no fathers on earth, because there is no other father than he who is in heaven, who defers that honor.” (Matt. 23:9) But even as God being Father of both souls and bodies, gives this honor to mortal men, that he makes them partakers of his name, to be called fathers. Similarly, when it pleases him to send men to bring us to the faith, they are our spiritual fathers. Truly this seems to disagree with what is said in the epistle to the Hebrews. (Heb. 12:9) For there is a comparison made between fleshly fathers and the Father of our souls, (which is but one) as though they were things one contrary to another: but all this will very well agree together if we once understand how God is our Father and how men are as well. This name “Father” is so honorable that it belongs to none but God alone. This is true in respect to our bodies. And therefore when we say that they which have begotten us according to the flesh are our fathers, it is an improper kind of speech, for no mortal creature defers this so high and excellent dignity. Yet so it is that God, of his singular goodness advances men, to this so high a step, that he wills that they be called fathers. And he does this so that they should acknowledge themselves to be so much more bound to him. Well, there is great doubt as touching this present life, but call those who have begotten children fathers according to the flesh. But it seems that God is the only Father of the souls, in such sort that it cannot be given to men. However the reason is all one. Why? It is true that God alone begets us by his word, which is called “the seed of life,” yet notwithstanding, he calls the Church “our mother.” For even as a mother conceives and brings forth her children and nourishes them, so God, having his

word always in his Church, wills that we have our being, and be begotten by it, and nourished and brought up with it, until we come to the age of a mature man, as Saint Paul says. (Eph. 4:13) Notice, then, that the Church is called our heavenly mother, and Scripture is full of it. And Paul declaring that which was spoken to the Prophets, shows that we are made the children of God by the word of the Gospel, which is the seed of life. For this reason the Church is called our mother (Gal. 4) Now, by the same reason, they to whom charge is given to bear the Gospel are called fathers when they beget souls in Jesus Christ by the seed of life which does not corrupt, and which nourishes them and brings them up until they come to maturity. How are we made the children of God? Surely by the word of the Gospel. And who brings us that word, but men? So then, seeing that men are sent from God, who brings them as it were into his place to win men to salvation, and with the word, adds also the sacraments, mark as it were a new birth. And God shows by this that, whereas we were born the children of Adam, and that we remain in his curse while we live to the world, yet this curse is removed from us by the means of his free adoption. Therefore, since men are placed in God's name, and by their means, souls are called to everlasting life, it is not surprising if they be called fathers also. And this is the reason Saint Paul does not hesitate to call himself father, both here and in his other Epistles, especially to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 4:19) He does do so to advance himself, and take anything away from God, or to disregard the rights that belong only to God. Rather Saint Paul mightily sets forth the grace of God, who has begotten believers by his own means. To summarize, Saint Paul is not trying to darken the glory of God or trying to claim anything for himself that belong to him (for that would be detestable sacrilege), but rather, so that God would be acknowledged as a sovereign Father, Paul shows that the believers were drawn to everlasting life by the means of Paul's preaching. It is as if Paul said, "My friends, we have altogether one Father of all, both for

you and for me. It is he that has born us anew by his virtue, it is he that maintains us. However, the seed of incorruptible life is in us since we have received through faith the doctrine of the Gospel. And it pleased God to use me to do this. Therefore I am your spiritual father, not in place of God, not to take away the dignity that belongs to him, but instead under him, so to speak, bearing his word which he committed to me.”

All of this is why Saint Paul calls himself the Father of the faithful. From this we are instructed that, if we want God to acknowledge us and take us for his children, we must also be children of the Church, and not do as these backsliders, and these rebels, who want to believe that Christendom is only a fantasy, whose imagination is indeed devilish. They will say, “But as for me, I am a Christian, I believe the Gospel.” However they cast aside the order of the Church. They want to be under no yoke. They oppose those who have been given the charge to preach in the name of God. Instead of opposing these men they should esteem them as fathers (if they were not children of the devil). Yet they are impudent and past all shame, willing to profane the Church of God. You swine, you swine, why don't you just stay in your filth and infection so that you won't infect others?

Therefore, if we want to be known as the children of God, the Church must be our mother, and the ministers must be our fathers. And all they that will not submit themselves to this, let them go (as I have said) and seek their abode in hell with Satan. For they are not part of the Church of God. What is more, since there are these types who act like they are believers and pretend to be reformed by the Gospel, yet have nothing in them but hypocrisy, this is why Saint Paul calls Timothy his natural son in the faith. Paul adds this to show the difference between Timothy and those who are illegitimate children in the faith. For the word which Saint Paul uses here is difficult to translate. It is referring to a natural son in the sense of a rightful, lawful, true

son. So does this mean that Paul had false sons in the faith? No doubt, yes. Not that there was any fault on Paul's behalf in this, but because many by their words made a convincing outward show of having received the Gospel, yet afterwards there was nothing to be seen in them but malice and hypocrisy. Paul denies that these are his children and claims that they are false and illegitimate children. Let us learn, therefore, that it is not sufficient that we have been instructed in the Gospel, and that we have made profession to stick to it, and that we have heard from the mouths of men that which God has commanded us. We must remain true children and take good heed that we always follow the right way without turning aside even a little. For as soon as a man begins to run off course and leaves the straight line this will inevitably lead to his becoming an illegitimate child, even though he had previously been among the children of God and had exalted himself to this inestimable honor.

Paul is using the person of Timothy to instruct us that, if we have received the Gospel, we ought to continue in it, so that the good seed that was planted in us will continue to grow and bring forth fruit instead of becoming worthless and marred. And when will this be? When God takes us out of this world and allows us to experience the fruit and the joy of our redemption in his heavenly kingdom.

Now let us fall down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults, asking him to be pleased to clean us and cut us to the quick so that we may learn to renounce whatever is of this world, and of ourselves; and that we make take pains to come to him, so that, in this way, he may receive us as his children. And seeing that it has pleased him to bring us to faith, by the knowledge of his truth, that it would please him to guide us even to the end, and hold fast to us by the hand so that we are never turned away from his holy calling. And so let us all say, Almighty God, heavenly Father, etc.