Romans Class comprehensive chs 7-14

Notes

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Romans

ch and vs.

--7.1-4 Unlike the law of Moses, which was only binding with regard to earth (thus marriage was only til death do you part), the body of Christ offers that which is eternal. For we have "died to the law" (7.4), that we might bear greater fruit than obedience to the law could provide. For obedience to the law at most (and this would be only if it was perfectly followed) could provide to any one person who obeyed it earthly reward. But Christ perfectly obeyed it and went beyond it to offer and to be our Eternal Reward.

--7.6 "We serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit," hence, no longer works of the "old written code" should be perform, but rather works of "the new life of the Spirit." Hence there is no adverse dichotomy of "faith vs. works" with regard to righteousness, for true faith is a faith that works in the Spirit.

--7.9 This verse is one reason why the Orthodox Church feels very comfortable rejecting ideas such as Limbo or worse still ideas about infants being condemned under sin for electoral or some other reasons, because St. Paul Himself admits of a time when humans are "alive apart from the law," and are innocent, and after a certain point in life, at a certain age "the commandment" comes. Of course, in this interpretation, being "apart from the law" refers to being innocent of any personal violation of the commandment, not to a separation from the effects of the fall.

 Yet there is one more truth that we must get from this passage as well. This passage also refers to our potential status as being a member of the human race. "For I was alive without the Law one" says St. John Chrysostom. "When, pray, was that? Before Moses" (Rom. Hom. 12). Therefore, this passage (like many other passages of Scripture), has several layers of truth to derive from it, in this case one from the particular being applied to the general, and one from the general being applied to the particular.

7.15 St. John Chrysostom urges the reader to have extreme caution and discernment when reading these passages. For no man has sinned in complete ignorance of his actions. "Do you not see that if we do not receive his words with the proper caution, and keep looking to the Apostle's objective, that countless incongruities will follow?" (Rom. Hom. 13). This does not refer to complete ignorance, but rather a "dizziness," according to St. Chrysostom, based upon the fact that he has knowledge but acts against his innermost will.

7.17-18 When we subject ourselves to sin it is not us doing the sinning, according to St. John Chrysostom, but rather the sin doing the primary function, and ourselves slavishly following. And is St. Paul saying here that the flesh is evil? No, but rather "the fact that 'no good things dwells in it' does not show that it is evil itself. Now we admit that the flesh is not so great as the soul, and is inferior to it, yet not contrary, nor opposed to it, and it is in no wise evil; but that it is beneath the soul, as a harp beneath a harper, and as a ship under the captain." (St. John Chrysostom, Rom Hom. 13).

7.19-20 St. John Chrysostom: "Do you see how he acquits the essence of the soul, as well as the essence of the flesh from accusation, and removes it entirely to sinful actions? For if the soul does not will the evil, it is cleared; and if he does not work it himself, the body also is set free, and the whole may be charged upon the evil moral choice. Now the essence of the soul and body, and [the essence] of that choice are not the same, for the first two [the essence of soul and body] are God's works, and the other is a motion from ourselves towards whatever we please to direct it. For the ability to will is indeed natural and from God, but the exercising of the will in this particular is our own, and from our own mind" (Rom.Hom. 13). The will is a distinctive faculty of the human person, but is a faculty, not a component, of the person. For the will belongs as an energizing faculty to the human nature, whereas the soul and body, are the basic components of the human person. In other words, the will is the natural energetic possession of each human person; the soul and body are not 'energetic possessions' but are the natural components of the human person himself. This we also saw with our Lord and have the Ecumenical Councils in conjuction with the Scriptures as our lead.

--7.24-25 "Observe how he (St. Paul) shows the necessity of having grace present with us...But when you hear him say 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' do not suppose that he is accusing the flesh. For he does not say 'body of sin' but 'body of death:' that is, the mortal body--that which has been overcome by death, not that which gendered death. And this is no proof that the flesh is evil, but rather that it has undergone a certain marring...it is not the body itself that he wishes to be delivered from, but the mortal body, hinting, as I have often said, that from its becoming subject to suffering, it also become an easy prey to sin." (St. John Chrysostom, Rom.Hom 23)

 This realistic dual reality of serving with the mind the law of God but with flesh the law of sin is troublesome, and it is this that we seek to eliminate, that the flesh become subject with the mind to the same law, and not two different opposing patterns of desire, which keep us from the sanity of God and the peace of mind that each man yearns for in life.

--8.1-2 Verse 2 mentions the same "law of liberty" mentioned in James 1.25. Contrary to what some scholars might say, St. Paul and St. James are obviously very familiar with each others' teaching and propose and uphold the very same principles:

1. Working faith which makes a person just or righteous

2. Working freely under the law of the Spirit, which is the law of liberty and freedom. St. James calls the faithful Christian a "doer of the work" of the law of freedom, whereas St. Paul calls these same people those who "walk according to the Spirit," whose law has made us free, which reminds us of the words of the Lord "the Truth shall make you free."

--8.3-4 Another issue in the talk about original sin is this: If ancestral sin (i.e. the original sin of Adam and the implications passed down through the generations) refers to more than mortality/corruption (that the Fathers have taught), but rather implies a personally inherited guilt of sin (which is a seed planted by Tertullian which later Germano-Frankish writers have emphasized), then why is Christ said to be merely "in the likeness of sinful flesh?" Our flesh is not sinful of itself, or else it would be evil, which is a heresy combatted heavily by the early Church. St. John Chrysostom reminds us again not to interpret this verse amiss, but to understand that St. Paul is "using the word flesh here again not for the essence and subsistency (of the flesh) itself, but giving its name to the more carnal sort of mind, in which way he acquits both the body and the Law of any accusation." Hence "sinful flesh" refers neither to the flesh nor to sin strictly speaking, but to the base will of man which assents to sin. We do not do away with the phraseology, even though this is an instance of St. Paul using "language contrary to usage" so that we must depend upon the whole of Apostolic teaching to come to the correct doctrines on this matter, and also so that we may know that Christ did not have a base mind even though he was truly man.

 For truly Christ was not born free from the "bondage of death," though he was Himself sinless. This He willed prior to His coming in the flesh and not after. "Okay Harry, what is your point?" you might ask. The point is that His will to be incarnate corresponds with that to undergo suffering, the breaking down of the body, and death; there is not one without the other, since the one co-incides with the other for our salvation. He was fully human except for sin, but he still took upon himself death and suffering--Christ did not make himself exempt from the state of Adam, except for sin itself, that is to say, He never personally was guilty of any sin Himself, even though He did not cut Himself off from the ancestral curse of Adam, but became the second Adam, to deify the flesh, to raise it from the mortal state to an incorruptable state. "For it was not sinful flesh that Christ had," says St. John Chrysostom, "but He was truly likened to our sinful flesh, though sinless, yet in nature the same with us. And so even from this it is plain that by nature the flesh was not evil. For it was not by taking a different one instead of the former, nor by changing htis same one in essence that Christ caused it to regain the victory; but He let it abide in its own nature, and yet bound it to the crown of victory over sin, and then after the victory raised it up and made it immortal" (St. John Chrysostom).

--8.4 St. John Chrysostom offers an explanation to the problem of trying to understand the Biblical understanding of justification and righteousness: "What does the word righteousness mean? Why, the end, the scope, the well-doing." Though this concept is slightly distinct from sanctification, it goes hand in hand. For sanctification is the purifying and hallowing presence of the Spirit cleansing us, whereas justification and righteousness both refer to the sinlessness and the well-doing of Christ working within us and us co-operating with it. Both of these, of course, refer us to theosis. All of these combined refer to the salvation process.

--8.8 "They who are in the flesh cannot please God." What does this mean? Tertullian (3rd c.) answers that "in the flesh" here applies "not, of course, to those who are in the substance of the flesh, but in the care, the affection, the work, the will, of it" (On Fasting, ch. 17).

--8.9-10 "you..are in the Spirit...And if Christ be in you..." "Now this he says, not affirming that the Spirit is Christ, far from it, but to show that he who has the Spirit not only is called Christ's, but even has Christ Himself. For it cannot but be that where the Spirit is, there Christ is also. For wheresoever one Person of hte Trinity is, there the whole Trinity is present. For it is undivided in Itself, and has a most entire Oneness" (St. John Chrysostom, Hom.Rom 8).

--8.11 The Trinity's unified action in salvation.

--8.15 Just as with an earthly father, so also (and much moreso) with the heavenly Father, we have a certain fearful respect that in no way does away with an intimate and loving relationship. These two things are not contradictory but are co-requisite.

--8.16 How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit? In many ways.

--8.17 Suffering (by which we mean undergoing a process that is trying, yet draws us closer to God) is part of God's plan for bringing about of the salvation of the human race. Suffering to the Christian should not indicate misery but rather joy. If you undertake misery that leads to despair, then you murder hope and faith and love right along with it. God has already given us our yokes and our duties. The passion of Christ included the last supper and the praying in the garden. And though there will be spots of character-growing agony, joy must not pass from us. We can agonize over periodic earthly torments and sufferings (8.22-23), but never despair over this life, which to the Christian means a prayer-filled and charity-filled life in the Holy Spirit.

 As St. Paul said in an earlier passage "suffering produces character." This is certainly true with the martyrs. But what about the many Saints who did not undergo martyrdom. They still had character, and yet many of them did not undergo suffering like the martyrs did. The holy Fathers distinguish between the distinct kinds of suffering and martyrdom. One is "red" martrydom. The next kind is that of the monastics, by which they renounce the world, and suffer a lack of possessions, stripping themselves of all except for Christ. The next kind is that of the warrier in the world. Labor and direct struggle with constant and immediate temptation is the cross that the person in the world must bear. Marriage is a shield of Christ by which the Christian family, the champion of God, is able to battle Goliath, with the stone being little, yet "he who is faithful in little is faithful in much," and Goliath falls. And what is the stone that makes Goliath fall? The Truth of the Spirit. And who is Goliath? The wickedness of the world and the sinful passions that we must combat every day, as well as the powers of the air that stir them: the legion in the possessed man.

8.21 Theosis!

8.26 Here again is another example of where, contrary to many modern scholars, St. Paul and St. James are obviously "on the same page" as we say. "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought," says St. Paul, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss" says St. James (4.3). "Instead," he advises, "you ought to say 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" (James 4.15). In other words, though sometimes we speak (as did the ancients, and even the Apostles) using assumptive phrases such as "I'll see you tomorrow" or "see you later," which is a natural way of expressing God's creative ordinance, we should never think such phrases as being absolute or apart from God's will, and must also realize that God could change any situation, and we must be prepared to accept that. In either case, then, we should always approach life with the prayerful state of mind of thankfulness for God's normal ordinance, thankfulness for the changes he brings about, and in either case a willingness to say in our hearts: "nevertheless, Thy will be done."

--9.3 We should likewise wish to be accursed for the sake of those who hate us. Are you willing in this life, as Christ demands, to be cut off from blessings and praise and benefits, heavenly or earthly, for the sake even of those who hate you and despise you? Do you react as Jonah did to call Ninevah to repent and to rejoice when it happens? If not, then you need to repent and soften your heart. How do you do this? Begin keeping regular prayer times. But not only this: but for the first Thirty-three consecutive nights in the middle of the night awaken yourself to say a simple prayer three times: "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages," and your heart will soften. Why? Because you have chosen a time to sacrifice thinking of anything but the glory of God. During this brief time, you break your sound slumber and ask nothing for yourself, but only glorify our Blessed God. And once you have gotten into the thoughtful practice of not thinking about effects upon yourself, the lines between friend and enemy fade away and your sun will begin to shine on the just and the unjust, as it is with your Father in Heaven.

--9.6-8 The Israel of God is the Church. As we read in chapter 4.13, it is the faithful who are the spiritual seed of the first-faithful Abraham.

--9.11 God's sovereignty stands. And each is given gifts beforehand, not according to any good or evil that is accorded to him, for up to that point they had done nothing good or evil.

--9.16 If it depended upon man's will or exertion, then no one would be saved, for all have fallen short. And if man's will were able to save a man, then the Law and Prophets would not have needed to fortell of a Messiah who would be the deliverer of mankind. Nevertheless, though salvation is not dependant upon works, nevertheless works of faith (not of the OT Law) are an integral part of salvation. Not in that they produce salvation, but in that they enable one to participate in the Mercy of God. It is upon the mercy of God that salvation is dependant, but we still need acts of love to participate in that upon which salvation is dependant.

--9.19-23 One of the most mis-interpreted passage of Romans. We know from earlier that St. Paul said that we should not let evil abound simply because more glory abounds as the result. St. Paul is letting us know that the justice of mercy under the incarnation of Christ is very different from justice under the Law of Moses. Mercy is freely given by God according to His knowledge. "who are you to reply against God" says St. Paul. "He says this" St. Chrysostom says, "to take down the objector's unseasonable inquisitiveness, and excessive curiosity, and to put a check upon it, and teach him to know what God is, and what man is, and how incomprehensible His forknowledge is, and how far above our reasoning, and how obedience to Him is in all points binding...for our business is to obey what God does, not to be curious even if we do not know the reason of them." We have no right to question "why have you made me thus" because our salvation is not dependant upon our will, but on Christ's mercy. St. Paul says this "not to do away with our free will, but to show, up to what point we ought to obey God." Now the fact that He gave us from the beginning free will, and under the New Covenant the ability to practice to virtues of mercy, is itself a form of mercy.

--9.25-27 One large argument in opposition to Christianity from the anti-Christian Jews was that if Christ was the true Christ (i.e. the true Messiah), then why didn't the Messiah's own people follow after them? St. Paul points out the prophecy fortelling here that only a remnant would accept him.

--9.30-31 The Gentiles did not seek righteousness as did the Jews. But the Jews sought to earn it of themselves, not seeing the Messianic and prophetic purpose of the Law, which directed the saints of old to Christ the Lawgiver.

--9.32 Again, 'works' here refers, as St. Paul gave reference to earlier, to works attempting to fulfill the (Mosaic/Old Covenential) Law. Christ already did this, so there is no need to try to fulfill the law again since Christ already did this. This is one reason why St. Paul emphasises Christ as the fulfillment of the Law so much to the Romans, to underscore the fact that we are to rest our hope on Christ in His grace, and not try to do something that was already done. Now, we seek not to do works in order to fulfill the law, but to do the works which are the fruits of the Spirit of Grace in order to abide in Him and allow Him to abide in us, not to receive judicial merit.

--9.33 How so a "stumbling block and rock of offense?" St. John Chrysostom says that "We must not mind insulting men, if by respecting men we offend God" (On the Priesthood, 2.7). This refers to atheists or others who reject the Apostolic Christian faith. On the other hand, we are not to do anything which is an offense to our brethren in Christ in their walk of faith (Rom. 14.23). Also, God Himself has established kindness as prerequisite to winning others over to Christ. This St. Paul says differently in another place when he states "Brethren, do not be children in understanding, however, in malice be babes" (1 Cor. 14.20). And so, if someone is offended by God, then let them be offended. But let nothing in the ordinary of life not be accepted for the sake of humankindness and the absence of malice.

--10.3-4 "...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes." "And how is Christ the end of the law," says St. Irenaeus, "if He is not also the final cause of it? For He who has brought in the end has Himself also wrought the beginning; and it is He Himself who says to Moses, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them;' it being customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction" (Against Heresies, 4.12.4).

 Part of the theology of salvation is premiss that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, and that we obtain freedom from the Law in this fulfillment. Yet in Orthodoxy, though this has a primary place in the doctrine of salvation, it is not the primary focus of the salvatory work of Christ. For though it is true that he delivered us from the account that the law brought against us, what good is that if we still remain in bondage to death and sin in practice, even if legally we are freed? We still would remain separated from God in synergy, even though legally we are delivered from guilt. And so this deliverance, though great, is not the greatest deliverance that Christ gained for us.

 Rather, since man's worst enemy is separation from God (whether it be in the form of death, hell, fellowship with Satan, etc. all of which tie together), Christ's primary act is to trample down this separation but undergoing the means of the separation, death. Thus He emerges as Christ the Victor, the Conqueror, the Life-Bestower and thus the God-Bestower. Though He delivered us from the edicts against us as written in the Law of Moses, more importantly he delivered us from the realm of Satan, darkness, and death into that of God, Light, and Life.

 The ransoming comes in that the disobedience from the Law gives Satan free reign over us as the result of an initial inclination of our own free will. Therefore, so that Satan could not claim anymore dominion over those who would choose God, Christ came to ransom. This is a contrast from one Protestant view which sees the work of the cross as what Orthodox can only see as a fictitious ransom paid by a loving god to his vindictive father. But we see it as Son, together with Father and Holy Spirit rescuing the captives by paying as ransom the greatest treasures of Heaven: God Himself for the love of mankind undertaking everything that is human (birth, joy, saddness, growth, suffering, death) so that we might be able to undertake that which is divine, and not only that, for he did not choose death alone, but that which is the worst so that He could fully empathize with all, and so that the accuser could have nothing to say against mankind anymore, but only seek to deceive Him. For the Son by recapitulating mankind in Himself nailed the edict of sin against mankind to the life-bearing cross, for He was perfect, and we partake of His perfection in the Eucharist and by having a living faith in Him.

 How is it then that our sins have been nailed to the cross? In this sense, that the Incarnate God was nailed to the cross, and the 'nails' that killed Him were the sins of men, which were typified in Judas the betrayer. But the Lord has allowed the sins of men to be the thing that crucified Him, so that He could erase the edict against us by a short sentance: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Who were the sins against? Our Creator, who is the same Christ on the Cross. Do we not know that everytime we sin that we crucify Christ afresh? Therefore, Christ had to die, and He chose the cross. The ancestral sickness within mankind due to the original sin of Adam, perpetuation and increased illness from subequent generations required man to die and thus Christ to die since He willfully and fully undertook humanity. But Christ did not die a natural death that only was the cause of ancestral sin as the nails, but died a death due to the murderous and hateful personal sins of mankind due to the hate within (such hate as would cause mankind to kill its own God). Since this was this reason, these sins are called the 'nails' in the Cross. Orthodox Theology therefore upholds the idea of "ransom" so long as what is central to the salvation act is Christ the Conqueror Himself. This is more expressly seen in St. Paul's other works such as Colossians and Ephesians, but is found in all of St. Paul's texts and in all of New Testament Scripture, though most explicitely in the Gospel of St. John.

--10.5-6 St. Paul contrasts the righteousness/justification based upon the Law of Moses and that which is based upon faith in Christ who is the Law-giver.

--10.11 Distinctions based upon ethnic lineage have no place in the Christian order.

--11.1-5 God has not rejected the physical descendants of Israel with the ingrafting of all races into the body of the New Israel, but has kept a remnant for Himself. A majority of the Apostles and first Bishops were Jewish by descent, to show us the both ancestral Jews and Gentiles have an equal place in the New Israel and equal access to it, or as St. Paul says "full inclusion" (.12).

--11.19-20 This is a warning to all who have excessive ancestral pride, that at anytime due to "unbelief" and "pride" such "branches" can be broken off and others "grafted in." It is evident here that St. Paul is writing to a fairly "mixed" and integrated Church of Rome consisting both of Jews and Gentiles. He is telling the Jews here not to be prideful or to separate themselves from the Gentile converts. Likewise, in the following verses, he warns the Gentiles not to be prideful nor to separate themselves from those who are "ethnically" Jews and Israelites. As he will tell us later, "in Christ there is no distinction."

--11.22-25 Thus all the Gentile nations who were engrafted into the body of Christ were not "naturally" so by ancestry, but by "adoption" as it were, but even these should not gain a new kind of pride for they can be cut off too. Likewise, those who were seemingly "cut off" except for the remnant can in a majority be grafted back in. So we must wish for all men to come to repentance, or else we will be cut off.

--11.26 "All Israel will be saved," in that Christ is the true Israel through the Incarnation, and the recapitulation of mankind in Himself.

--11.32 "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all." This is a summery statement of all that St. Paul has talked about up to this point, relating what he said in recent previous verses to that which he talked about in the early chapters of Romans.

--11.36 St. Paul ends with a doxology that summarizes the theological meaning of the chapter. St. John Chrysostom likewise concludes his 19th homily with a summation of what St. Paul talked about all through this chapter: "Let us also imitate him (St. Paul) then by glorifying God in all things, by a heedful way of life, and let us not feel confidence in the virtues of our ancestry, knowing the example that has been made of the Jews. For this is not, certainly it is not, the relationship of Christians, for theirs is the kinsmanship of hte Spirit. So the Scythian becoms Abraham's son: and his son on the other hand more of an alien to him than the Scythian." (take note of the resemblance of this statement with that of the declaration of the Patriarchs on Phyletism).

 St. John continues by saying that all who are Christians are now "related to the Saints." "For of Adam we all have sprung, and no one can be more a relation than another, both as regards Adam and as regards Noah, and as regards the earth, the common mother of us all. But the relationship worthy of honor is that which distinguishes us from the wicked...Nor do we call them brothers who come of the same birthline as ourselves, but those who display the same zeal. This is the way that Christ gives men the name of children of God, and so on the other hand children of the devil..." (Rom Hom. 19)

--12.1 "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Many have wondered what the 50th Psalm (51st Masoretic) is referring to when it says "then they shall offer young bullocks upon Thine altar." The priest also makes mention of this with reference to the oblation. St. Augustine says that it refers to us offering ourselves as sacrifices unto Christ who is the true and everlasting Sacrifice, which gives all sacrifices meaning. "A broken and a contrite heart Thou will not despise." Thus, we offer ourselves and all that is ours, including the earthly gifts on the altar which are truly God's in the first place and merely on loan to us. Hence "Thine own of thine own, we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all, and for all."

--12.3 Whenever we call ourselves the greatest of sinners we can truly mean it. For all are consigned under sin. And the closer one is too God, the worse sin becomes in that we should know better. Our sin is greater than that of the wretched sinner who does not know God. Therefore, the more we are apt to say that we are the greatest of sinners, the closer to God we are and the worse the sin within us and the more it counts against us because we have the greater knowledge and should know better and act all the better. The good news is that the more we confess and recognize ourselves to be sinners the more we move into sainthood. But God has allowed this paradox so that we may remain humble, so that the last will be first and the first, last.

--12.5 In the Body of Christ, we are all "members of one another," and though many comprise one.

--12.6 We all have gifts and must use them

--12.10 Do we see our parish, diocese (or even, as is the case in America, our Pan-Orthodox region) as being filled with "brotherly affection"?

--12.16 "Live in harmony with one another" and don't dissociate from some just because they are not as of high estate, or of different social class. This is conceit and is not accepted by God nor by the order of the Church.

--12.17,21 Don't repay evil for evil but rather "overcome evil with good" (12.21)

--12.20 It is clear that at the time of this writing that St. Paul had the words of Jesus as recorded by the Evangilists fresh in His mind, for there are quite a few near-direct quotes.

--13.1ff Paul expands upon the principle of rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. St. Paul expressly says here that the governing authorities are established by God. It is for this reason that we pray for them so much in the Litanies of Orthodox worship. Many criticize Orthodox worship for being so repetative, instead of noticing the preoccupation of Orthodox worship with being obedient to recognizing expressing active and prayerful concern with the priorities established by God as expressed in Scripture.

--13.2 It is for this reason that certain civil accusations can incur canonical penalties.

--13.4-5 The government does not "bear the sword in vain," but is the servant of God to "execute His wrath upon the wrongdoer." This is a very important verse with regard to the death penalty in defending the Orthodox Church's practice through much of history. The execution of the state's authority upon the violent criminal is seen by St. Paul as being equivalent to "God's wrath" upon the evildoer.

--13.8-10 Love is the fulfilling of the law. St. Irenaeus says that faith and the understanding of the mysteries and all else is void and empty of meaning without love. It is certainly the pinnacle of virtues. "Love makes man perfect" says St. Irenaeus. "As in the law, therefore, and in the Gospel, the first and greatest commandment is, to love the Lord God wit hte who heart, and...to love one's neighbor as one's self; the author of the law and the Gospel is shown to be one and the same." He goes on to say that God "certainly has promulgated particular laws adapted for each; but the more prominent and the greatest commands, without which salvation cannot be attained, He has exhorted the same in both." (Against Heresies, 4.12.2,3)).

--14.5 "One man esteems one day upon another...let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." St. John Chrysostom sees this as giving us a message about fasting. He says that St. Paul here makes the specifics of days a matter of "indifference," which can be equated with the "doubtful matters" that St. Paul elseware in the book of Romans urges against. "For it is not unlikely that some who fasted were always judging those who did not...And so also he said 'let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' And in this way he released those who kept the observances out of fear, by saying that the thing was indifferent, and he removed also the quarrelsomeness of those who attacked them, by showing that it was not a very desirable task to always be making trouble about these things" (Rom.Hom. 15.5). Hence, the general command to fast (i.e. the ascetical fast) applies, but it is according to ability in conjunction, as much as possible, with the calander or the day. This was especially applicable since the calander and fasting practices were not solidified yet, and so there was a call for more tolerance since at this point it was almost completely a matter of personal discression. Now, of course, the days are planned more strongly and on a more common basis (although, throughout the history of fasting, it has never been absolutely uniform. Even today the "Slavs" and the "Greeks" have differences, though much more subtle than the regional differences in earlier times). Thus, the uniformity of fasting practices did away with some of the temptation to quarrel about which day to fast and which not: the Church selected these through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, there are still those things which are subject to personal discression, and that is the general and universal point here, even though specific applications might change as history changes.

 But not all things are subject to our individual persuasion of mind. Some things are in the realm of opinion, but not doctrine, which is in the realm of absolute truth. For St. John Chrysostom says in the same homily "Let us not therefore apply the phrase, 'Let every man be persuaded in his own mind' to all subjects. For when he is speaking of doctrines, hear what he says, 'If any one preaches to you any other gospel than that which you have received, let him be anathema.'...he had been speaking of fasting [and not of all subjects]."

--14.6 With regard to fasting or not fasting, "the thing requisite is, if this person or the other is acting for God's sake, the thing requisite is if both terminate in thanksgiving. For indeed both this man and that give thanks to God [in different manners]. If they both give thanks to God, the difference is no great one." (St. John Chrysostom, Rom. Hom. 15.6). "For it is not the eating which makes the man unclean, but the intention with which a man eats" (Rom.Hom. 16.20). St. John makes it clear in an earlier passage that mortification refers to mortification of the works of the flesh, not to the detriment of the body. "let us keep continually mortifying it in its works. I do not mean in its substance--far be it from me--but in its inclinations towards evil doings." He says that it indicates the virtuous struggle to avoid being a "slave to pleasures" (RomHom 8).

 In his work *On the Priesthood*, St. John has this to say: "Prayer and fasting, vigils and sleeping on the ground are a great help to someone shut up in a cell and concerned only about his own soul. But when a man is distracted by such a huge multitude and inhertis all the private cares of those who are under his rule, what appreciable help can these practices contribute towards their improvement, unless he has a healthy, robust soul?...for it would not harm the common life of the Church if a prelate should neither starve himself of food, nor go barefoot, but a furious temper causes great disasters both to its possessor and to his neighbors. There is not threat from God against those who omit these ascetic practices, but those who are wrathful without a cause are threatened with hell and hell fire" (3.12).

--14.20,21 "Do not for the sake of food undo the work of God..." Tertullian (3rd c.) has this to say on these verses, that "The apostle reprimands those who 'bid to abstain from meats;" but he does so from the foresight of the Holy Spirit, precondemning already the heretics who would enjoin perpetual abstinence to the extent of destroying and despising the works of the Creator; such as I may find in the person of a Marcion, a Tatian, or a Jupiter...Two weeks of xerophagies in the year (and not the whole of these--the Sabbaths, to wit, and the Lord's days, being excepted) we offer to God; abstaining from things which we do not reject, but rather defer" (On Fasting ch. 15). Xerophagy refers to 'dry' eating where the food is simply prepared and the quality of the drink is correspondant to that of the eating. Hence it is the sign of heretics either to reject fasting altogether or to insist upon it so strictly that one shows himself to despise the works of the Creator by destroying the body. Thus the Church has always stood against those groups (ancient and new) which had an extreme asceticism and despised the creation, just as it has always rejected those who completely reject the Spiritual duties.

The early Fathers from the late 2nd century distinguished between the "dry diet" xerophagy fast (belonging to a fast) and a full meal which is "rich and carefully prepared" belonging to a feast (On Fasting was written around 208 AD and Tertullian makes this distinction based upon an earlier tradition). Hence, fasting is turning away from the sin of Adam, who fell because he "yielded more readily to his belly than to God, heeded the meat rather than the mandate, and sold salvation for his gullet!" (On Fasting ch 3).

--14.21 St. John Chrysostom says about this verse "Again, he requires the greater alternative, that they should not only not force him, but even condescend to him [i.e. come down to his level for his sake]. For he often did thid himself also, as when he circumcised (Acts 16.3), when he was shorn (Acts 18.18) and when he sacrificed that Jewish sacrifice (Acts 21.26).... And what are his words? 'It is good not to eat flesh.' and why do I say flesh? if it is wine, or any other thing of the sore besides, which gives offence, refrain, for nothing is so important as your brother's salvation...hence St. Paul says 'it is good not to eat flesh,' not because it was unclean, but because the brother is offended and is weak" (Rom.Hom. 26.21).

--14.22 What is St. Paul talking about here? "Here he seems to me to be giving a gentle warning to the more advanced on the score of vanity...and...even if no man see [your faith], you are able to be happy in yourself" (St. John Chrysostom, Rom.Hom. 16.22). But St. John warns that it does not mean that we are to hide our faith, but rather we are to hide anything that can make any of the brethren who are weaker in the faith feel belittled; but that general confession of faith we must proclaim boldly to the glory of God. And so we are not to seek recognition for our 'great faith,' but rather to hide what can cause a weaker brother or a neighbor who lacks faith to stumble with vicious envy, and in such cases to be content with the gift we have been given within ourselves, not provoking them to anger because they do not have it. In terms of those who are of a reasonable strength in the faith, it is not a concern or an issure, for they are reasonable.

--14.23 Anything by which our brother can stumble away from the Christian faith we must avoid, "For if it were a grievous act of iniquity to throw down a church [building], much more so is it to do so to the spiritual temple. Since a man is more dignified than a church [building, temple]: for it was not for walls that Christ died, but for these temples." (Rom. Hom. 16). St. John Chrysostom is not saying here that the temple/church building is not holy, but rather that when our flesh is merged with that of Christ, we become attached to the one who is Holy in a manner that a building, even the holiest of buildings, can never be. For the purpose of the altar is to offer that sacrifice which will go into the people, not simply to stay on the altar or in the Church, but to carry Christ in us out to the world as temples of the living God. Christ died for us, "not for walls." On the other hand, we tend to think of the building as always holy in a way that we are not because the building does not sin, and thus cannot defile itself. But this still shows the greatness of the human being, for Christ became man to deify matter, and thus it is only through man that the rest of the universe can find its restoration.

 How then is the church building so important? The church building finds its importance and magnificence in this: that therein is the collection of the people and clergy and thus the Church building becomes the temple, the container, of the one true Church in each Eucharistic locality meeting communaly with God whereby they are unified fully and mysteriously in the Sacrament of the Church.