Dialogue with Heraclides

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 185–253)

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The Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and the Bishops with Him, concerning the Father and the Son and the Soul. — This English is a translation of a Russian translation, and cross-checked where possible against other online sources. Words in square brackets are the translator's; scriptural references are collected in the notes at the end. When the bishops present had raised the question of the faith of Bishop Heraclides, so that before all he might confess what he believed, and after each had made his remarks and posed his questions, Bishop Heraclides said: I too believe, just as the Divine Scriptures say: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be. Thus we hold that same faith which is contained in these words, and we believe that Christ took on flesh, that He was born, that He ascended into heaven in the flesh in which He rose, that He sits at the right hand of the Father, whence He will come to judge the living and the dead, and that He is at once God and man.

Origen: Since the hearing of the matter has now begun, and it is necessary to set out the subject of discussion, I will speak. Let the whole church present listen. The churches ought not to have any difference in doctrine among themselves, since you are not a false church. I ask you, master Heraclides: God is Almighty, uncreated, the One who made all things — do you share this teaching? Heraclides: I share it. I too believe in this. Origen: Christ Jesus, being in the form of God, being distinct from the God in whose form He existed — was He God before He became incarnate, yes or no? Heraclides: He was God beforehand. Origen: Was He God before He became incarnate, yes or no? Heraclides: Yes. Origen: Was He God, distinct from the One in whose form He Himself was? Heraclides: Certainly, He was distinct from that God, since He was in the form of the One who created all things.

Origen: So then, He was God, the Son of God, the only-begotten, the firstborn before all creation, and we ought not to fear the assertion that in one sense there are two Gods, while in another there is one God? Heraclides: Without doubt, what you say is evident. But we, we shall still call God the Almighty, God without beginning, without end, who contains all things and is contained by nothing; and His Word we shall call — the Son of the living God, God and man, through whom all things came to be, God according to the Spirit and man, since He was born of Mary. Origen: It seems to me that you have not answered my question.

Explain yourself better: perhaps I have lost your meaning. Is the Father God? Heraclides: Undoubtedly. Origen: Is the Son distinct from the Father? Heraclides: Certainly. How could He be the Son, if He were already the Father?

Origen: Being distinct from the Father, is the Son also God? Heraclides: He too is God. Origen: And are the two Gods a single whole? Heraclides: Yes. Origen: Do we confess two Gods? Heraclides: Yes. The power is one. Origen: But since our brethren stumble at the assertion of two Gods, it falls to us to set out and show carefully in what sense They are two and in what sense these Two are one God. The Divine Scriptures too have shown us many times how two can be one. And not only two, but even more than two, and even a much greater number can be a unity. Our present task is not merely to clarify the substance of the question and pass it by, but for the sake of the simple, as it were, to chew the meat, so that little by little the teaching may sink into the ears of the hearers. Indeed, in the Scriptures two are often spoken of as one. What passages of Scripture are these? Adam is one man, his wife is another. Adam is distinct from the woman, and the wife is distinct from the man. Yet in the account of the creation of the world it is straightway said that the two were one: and the two shall be one flesh. Consequently it is possible sometimes for two fleshes to be one. Note, however, that in the case of Adam and Eve it is not said that these two are to become one spirit, nor that they are to become one soul, but: the two shall be one flesh. And again. The Apostle says that the righteous man is one with Christ, but he is distinct from Christ: And he who cleaves to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Is it not true that one of them has a lower nature, transient and fleeting, while the nature of Christ is more divine and glorious and blessed? And notwithstanding this, are they no longer two? Yes, for man and woman are no longer two, but one flesh, and the righteous man and Christ are one spirit. In turn, our Savior and Lord, in relation to the Father and God of all, is neither one flesh nor one spirit, but something higher than one flesh, than one spirit — one God. When people are united with one another, the fitting word is flesh. When the righteous man cleaves to Christ, the fitting word is spirit. But when Christ is one with the Father, the fitting word is neither flesh nor spirit, but the more worthy one — God. From this we also understand the saying: I and the Father are one. Let us in our prayers hold to the duality, while keeping in mind the unity. On the one hand, in this way we shall avoid the opinion of those separated from the Church and fallen into the fantasies of monarchy, who abolish the Son by removing Him from the Father and thereby abolish the Father also. On the other hand, we shall avoid another impious teaching, which abolishes the divine nature of Christ. What then do the divine Scriptures intend to say, for example, here: Before Me there was no God, and after Me there shall be none, and I am, and there is no God besides Me? Do not suppose that in these utterances the unity is applied to the God of the universe … apart from Christ, and, of course, not to Christ alone apart from God. But let us speak of this as Jesus Himself taught: I and the Father are one.

It is necessary to reflect diligently on the teaching over which much turmoil has arisen in this Church. It often happens that both a bishop and those under suspicion give their sig-

natures in the presence of all the people, so that there might no longer be any turmoil or dispute about any question. Therefore, if it be the will of God and of the bishops, and secondly and thirdly of the presbyters and the people, I will say again what I think concerning the [disputed] question. The offering is always offered to God the Almighty through Jesus Christ, since in His Divinity He is akin to the Father. Let there be no twofold offering, but let it be offered to God by the help of God. Perhaps this will seem bold to you, but I will say that when we are in the liturgical assembly, we ought to observe the agreements. If the commands are not fulfilled: Be not a respecter of persons toward a man, and do not curry favor with the person of the great — ... If these agreements are not carried out, this will give occasion for new disputes... A bishop or presbyter, [even if he was appointed], — he is no bishop and no presbyter. If he is a deacon, he is no deacon, nor even a layman. If he is a layman, he is no layman for you, and no participant in the liturgical assembly. If you agree, the agreements must be carried out.

Some raise an objection that, when the discussion was about the Divine essence, I said that Divinity belongs to the very essence of Jesus Christ, while at the same time I confessed before the Church the resurrection of the dead body. So then, since our Savior and Lord took on a body, let us investigate what this body was. The Church alone, unlike all the heresies which deny the resurrection, confesses the resurrection of the dead body. Since the firstfruits was raised from the dead, the dead too must be raised. The firstfruits is Christ; therefore His body became a corpse. For if His body had not become a corpse, it would not have become capable of being wrapped in a shroud, of being anointed with myrrh and all that is used in the burial of the dead, of being buried in a tomb — all those things which a spiritual body could not have undergone. For it is absolutely impossible for the spiritual to become dead, just as it is impossible for the spiritual to be deprived of sensation. For if it were indeed possible for the spiritual to become dead, it would be necessary to fear that after the resurrection, when our body has been raised, as the Apostle says, the natural is sown, the spiritual rises, — we should all die... For Christ, having risen from the dead, dies no more. And not only does Christ, having risen from the dead, die no more, but also those who are Christ's, after their resurrection, will die no more. If you agree with these assertions, assertions solemnly attested by the people, then they acquire the force of rules established and confirmed.

What more must be said concerning the faith? What do you think, Maximus...? Maximus: Oh, that everyone could hold the same judgments as I! Before God and the Church I set my signature and give my oath. Yet I have a question which I would like to hear answered, so that I might no longer doubt or waver at all. And my brethren will confirm that I have said: I need brotherly support and instruction. If the spirit [of Christ] was given up to the Father, according to the saying: Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit, — and if without the spirit the flesh died and rested in the tomb, how will the tomb be opened, and how will the dead rise again? Origen: From the Holy Scriptures we are taught that man is a composite being. And the Apostle confirms it: May God sanctify your spirit and soul and body, and: may He sanctify you wholly, and may your whole being, spirit and soul and body,

be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This spirit is not the Holy Spirit, but a part of the composite man, as the same Apostle teaches when he says: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit. If the reference were to the Holy Spirit, it would not be said: the Spirit bears witness with our spirit.

And so our Lord and Savior, desiring the salvation of man, wished to do this as He wished it: for this reason He wished to save the body, just as He wished to save also the soul and the remaining part of man — the spirit. Man would not be saved entirely if he were not taken up entirely. The salvation of man's body is annulled if we declare that the body of the Savior is spiritual. The salvation of the human spirit is annulled — the spirit concerning which the Apostle speaks: no one among men knows what is in man; only the spirit of man, which is in him. Since the Savior desired to save the spirit of man, concerning which the Apostle spoke in this manner, He took up also the spirit of man. These three parts were divided at the time of the sufferings. These three parts were reunited at the time of the resurrection. At the time of the sufferings they were divided. In what way? The body in the tomb, the soul in hell, the spirit was given up to the Father. The soul in hell: Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. If it is true that He entrusted the spirit to the Father, then He committed it as a deposit. For it is one thing to give a thing as a gift, another to give it away, and another to give it as a deposit. A depositor places a thing in safekeeping, intending to receive his deposit back.

Why then did [the Savior] entrust His spirit to the Father as a deposit? This question is beyond me, my abilities and my understanding. For I am not so sure as to assert it, but, [it seems], just as His body could not descend into hell, (even if this is supposed by those who declare that the body of Jesus was spiritual), so also His spirit could not descend into hell. Therefore He entrusted the spirit to the Father as a deposit, until He should rise from the dead. As He entrusted this deposit, so He took it back again. When did this happen? Not at the very moment of the resurrection, but immediately after the resurrection.

My witness is the text of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Mary met Him, and He says to her: Touch Me not. For He desired that everyone touching Him should touch Him in His fullness, so that from the touch he might receive complete benefit for the body — from His body, for the soul — from His soul, and for the spirit — from His spirit. For I have not yet ascended to the Father. He rises up to the Father, and is about to find the disciples. So then, He rises up to the Father. To what end? To take back the deposit. Thus all the questions about the faith which troubled us have been investigated. But it must be known that we are judged in the divine judgment not solely by our faith, as though our life were not to be examined, nor solely by our life, as though our faith were not to be subjected to investigation. The blamelessness of both justifies us. The lack of blamelessness of both subjects us to punishment for both.

There are some, however, who will be punished not for both, but for one of the two: either for their faith, on account of its unsoundness, but not because their life lacks blamelessness; or, conversely, not for their faith, but for their life, on the ground that they did not lead

their life according to right understanding. I hold that in the Proverbs of Solomon these two kinds of judgment (I speak of the one that concerns our faith and knowledge, and of the one that concerns our conduct) are presented by Solomon in the following words: Who will boast that he has a pure heart? Or who will dare to say of himself that he is clean from sins? The distinction between these questions we interpret as follows: heart refers to thought, and sins — to deeds. Who will boast that he has a pure heart, which is not defiled by the so-called gnosis, not defiled by falsehood? Or who will dare to say of himself that he is clean from sins, that he has never sinned in deed? If we truly wish to be saved, let us neglect neither faith nor the deeds of our life, nor, conversely, rely on our life alone. Let us understand, let us know, let us believe, that it is precisely on account of both that we are either accounted worthy of justification and blessedness, or receive the opposite of these.

And so the punishable acts in both spheres are not only the terrible and dreadful sins whose very name is not fit to be uttered, but also those which are commonly regarded as of little importance. This is precisely why, it seems, the Apostle set alongside these vile, dishonorable, and criminal deeds those transgressions which we most often acknowledge as insignificant. What then does he say? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate men, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor revilers — shall inherit the Kingdom of God. You see that together with such grave malefactors as the sodomite, the effeminate man, the adulterer, the fornicator, he lists the drunkard and the reviler — sins which we all acknowledge to be insignificant — in order to teach us that it is not on account of grave sins alone that we are deprived of the Kingdom of God, but also on account of those which we customarily regard as less serious. Therefore, let us neither revile, nor get drunk, nor rob, nor steal, nor do anything unlawful, even if we are deceived.

If any question remains concerning the Rule of faith, call it to mind: then we will continue to interpret Scripture. Dionysius: Is the soul really the blood? Origen: I have heard, and I say this with full confidence, that some of those here and living in the vicinity suppose that the soul, on leaving this life, becomes incapable of feeling, but remains in the flesh as in a tomb. And I recall that on this matter I had heated disputes with another Heraclides and Celer, his predecessor, so heated that I would sooner have left the question aside and gone away. But out of respect for those who have called us and for the fitting subject of discussion, we must return to it. We agreed to discuss the question; the interlocutor made his assertion..., as once his predecessor justified himself before us, as also before God, by the judgments of the right faith.

Moreover, the question posed by the beloved Dionysius is unavoidable. First of all, I will set out the difficult passages by which they are troubled, so that not one may be omitted, and, God willing, we will answer each of them according to your desire. The troubling utterance is the following: The soul of all flesh is the blood — behold an extremely difficult passage, which has shaken those who did not understand it! And also: Do not eat the soul together with the meat. Strictly observe that you do not eat the blood; do not eat the soul together with the meat. Such are the truly difficult passages, since the others, though numerous,

are less striking. As for me, according to my measure of understanding, and with prayer for help in the knowledge of the Divine utterances (since we need help, that our thought may not stray from the truth), I have observed that incorporeal things are given the same names as corporeal things, and thus corporeal things are related to the outer man, while those bearing the same names as the corporeal are related to the inner man. Scripture says that in man there are two: For though our outer man is being destroyed, yet our inner man is renewed day by day; and also: I delight in the law of God according to the inner man. The Apostle everywhere presents these two men as distinct.

It seems to me that he does not presume to invent this teaching for himself, but rather, releasing what is expressed obscurely in the Scriptures, he sets it forth openly. Some see only a repetition of the narrative when, in the history of the creation of the world, after the creation of man, they read: God took dust from the earth and created man. According to such an interpretation one must conclude that the following, after the image, refers to the flesh, and that a human likeness is attributed to God, or that the image of God is like the human outward appearance. But we will not be so mad as to speak of God either as composed in His fullness of a subordinate and a governing element — because that which is created after His image is two-fold — or that the creation after the image was effected preferentially in the subordinate element, but not in the governing one.

These questions are exceedingly delicate, and therefore I need hearers capable of subtle thinking. Therefore I call upon the hearers to attend to themselves, lest I become a cause of accusations against myself of scattering what is holy to the dogs, to shameless souls. For the loud-mouthed, the shameless, the abettors of debauchery and slander, are able only to yelp like dogs, and it does not befit me to scatter holy things before such brood. I earnestly ask the hearers about this, so that they may not in the future reproach me; for the beautiful pearls that I have gathered as a successful merchant, I shall put on display before people immersed in the impurities of their flesh, and therefore called swine. I would say that a man who is constantly immersed in the filth of life and wallows in it and does not try to live a pure life, a holy life, is simply a swine. And then, if I seek good pearls (for the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking good pearls) and, having bought them at the cost of labor and vigils, cast them before pleasure-loving souls, and before those who are immersed in fleshly filth and impurity, then I too become a sinner, because I cast pearls before swine. But if the swine receive the pearls, then, not seeing their beauty and not understanding the advantages of possessing them, they trample them underfoot, speaking evil of what is good, and not only trample them, but, turning upon the servants of the pearls, tear them apart.

Therefore I beseech you: be transformed! Resolve to acknowledge that it is in your power to change and to cast off the image of the swine, which is in the impure soul, and the image of the dog, which represents the man who is loud, a barker, and a foul-mouthed person. It is also in your power to cast off the image of the serpent as well. Indeed, Scripture calls the evil man a serpent and a brood of vipers. But if you seek confirmation that we are able to change and to cease being serpents, swine, or dogs, let us turn to the words of the Apostle,

that the transformation depends on us. For he speaks thus: And we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into His very image. If you were like a barking dog, and the Word molds and changes you, then you will cease to be a dog and will be a man. If you were unclean, and the Word touched your soul, and you have handed yourself over to the transforming Word, then you will cease to be a swine and will be a man. If you were a raging beast and heard the Word, which will tame and domesticate you and which at Its own discretion will turn you into a man — you will never again hear said of you: serpent, brood of vipers. Because, if it were impossible to be rid of these serpents, the serpents residing in the soul on account of its wickedness, then the Savior (or John) would not have said: Bring forth then fruits worthy of repentance! Having turned, you will no longer be serpents, broods of vipers.

And so, since we were to speak about man and to determine whether man's soul is the blood, it was necessary for us to examine in detail the teaching of the two-fold nature of man. At last we have reached the turn of the mystical interpretation, and I beseech you, do not expose me either to accusations of casting pearls before swine, holy things to dogs, divine things to serpents, or of allowing the serpent to have a share in the tree of life. That I may escape this accusation, change, laying aside malice, discord, wrath, strife, fury, vexation, disagreement, so that there may no longer be divisions among you, but that you may be firmly of the same disposition of mind and thoughts. It is dreadful both to speak and not to speak. For the sake of the worthy, I wish to speak, lest I be reproached for not letting the word be heard by those able to understand it. Because of the unworthy I waver, as I have already said, lest I cast holy things to the dogs and pearls before swine.

Jesus alone was empowered to distinguish among the hearers His own from the outsiders, so as to speak to the outsiders in parables, but to explain the parables to those who entered with Him into the house. The outsiders and those who entered into the house have a mystical meaning. For why should I judge outsiders? Every sinner is an outsider. This is why the outsiders are addressed in parables: so that they might be able to leave the outer and enter the inner. Entering the house has a mysterious meaning: he who enters the house of Jesus becomes His true disciple. He enters through the mind's assimilation of the teaching of the Church, through following the rules of church life. Outsiders and insiders are to be understood spiritually. You see how [I prepare] the hearers? I do not dare to begin speaking, putting off the discussion. What am I aiming to achieve by the lengthy introduction that I have offered? I wish to construct my discourse so that it may act healingly upon the souls of the hearers.

When man was created, this was originally man created after the image. In him there was nothing material. He who is after the image is not from matter. And God said: Let us make man after Our image [and] after Our likeness, and let them have dominion... and so forth. And when God created man, He took not the dust of the earth, as the second time, but created him after the image of God. That which is created after the image of God is understood as immaterial and surpassing every corporeal substance not only by Moses, but

also by the Apostle, as is clear from the following words: ...having put on the new man, who is renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him who created him. Therefore in each of us there are two men. Why does the Holy Scripture say that the soul of all flesh is the blood? This is a difficult question. Just as the outer man is homonymous with the inner one, so also with respect to the parts of the body. One may say that each part of the body of the outer man is homonymous with the corresponding part of the inner man.

The outer man has eyes, and of the inner man too it is said that he has eyes: Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. This refers neither to these eyes of mine, nor to bodily sleep, nor to the death common to all. The commandment of the Lord is bright, enlightening the eyes. By keeping the commandments of the Lord we do not become more sighted bodily, but by keeping the divine commandments we become more keen-sighted spiritually. The eyes of our inner man see with greater clarity: Open my eyes, and I shall see the wonders of Thy law. Does this mean that his eyes were covered with a veil? No. But our eyes are our mind. To Jesus alone it belongs to remove this veil, so that we may be able to understand the Scripture and to grasp what is obscurely expressed.

The outer man has ears, and it is said that the inner man too has them. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! All [who heard Jesus] had bodily ears, but not all succeeded in keeping their inner ears pure. The possession of the former does not depend on us; the possession of the latter — depends on us. And since the keenness of the inner hearing is in our power, the prophet says: Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see. Who is so deaf as My servants, and who is so blind as those who rule over them? Even the servants of God are blinded. That to lose the hearing is in our power... (I ask for attention — my words concern all present; in order to clarify what the blood is, one must first describe the inner man in detail) — that to lose the hearing is in our power, if we speak of the inner hearing, is asserted also by the prophet, who says: From their very birth the wicked have gone astray; from the mother's womb they err, speaking lies. Their venom is like the venom of a serpent, like a deaf asp that stops its ears and does not hear the voice of the charmer, of the enchantments of the enchanter most skilled in enchantments.

You too, when you are aware of your guilt, but having heard the word and the incantation of the enchanter, the one most skilled in enchantments, and having heard the charming words directed to quell your fury and your malice, and even then stop up your ears and do not listen to what is offered you — then it will be said of you: Their venom is like the venom of a serpent, like a deaf asp that stops its ears and does not hear the voice of the charmer, of the enchantments of the enchanter most skilled in enchantments. The outer man has nostrils, to smell, and by means of them to distinguish fragrance and foul odors; so too the inner man, in order to distinguish the fragrance of righteousness from the stench of sinfulness, has other nostrils. Concerning the fragrance the Apostle teaches us in the words: We are the fragrance of Christ to God [in every place], among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: to some an odor from death and unto death, to others an odor from life and unto life. And Solomon too says in the Song of Songs through

the mouth of the daughters of Jerusalem: We will run after you, to the fragrance of your perfumes.

Consequently, as with our nostrils we perceive fragrance and stench, so too the inner man, if his gracious sensations are sound, has a perception of the fragrance of righteousness (as with the Apostle) and of the stench of sinfulness. And what does sin smell of? Concerning this the prophet says the following: My wounds stink and fester because of my folly. The outer man has a sense of taste; and the inner man too has a spiritual taste, of which it is said: Taste and see how good the Lord is. The outer man has a sense of touch; and the inner man has it too. With such a touch the woman with the flow of blood touched the edge of Jesus' garment. She truly touched Him, as follows from His question: Who touched me? Yet a moment before, Peter says: The crowd presses upon You, and You say, who touched Me? He imagines that the one who touched did so fleshly, not spiritually. Those who surrounded Jesus did not touch Him, since they did not touch Him with faith. Only the woman, who had a kind of touch-by-grace, touched Jesus, and through it was healed. And after she touched Him, power went out from Jesus at her touch-by-grace. Therefore He says: Who touched me? For I felt power going out from me. Concerning this more gracious touch John speaks: ...and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.

Thus we possess other hands, of which it is said: The lifting up of my hands is an evening sacrifice. For if I lift up these hands of mine, while the hands of my soul remain hanging down, and not raised to holy and good deeds, then the lifting up of my hands will not be an evening sacrifice. I also have other feet, concerning which Solomon gives me an injunction when he says: Your foot will not stumble. In Ecclesiastes there is a curious saying. To the undiscerning it will seem meaningless, but it is precisely for the wise man that Ecclesiastes says: The wise man's eyes are in his head. In what head? Every man, even a madman and a fool, has fleshly eyes on his fleshly head. But the eyes of the wise man, of which it is said that they are enlightened by the commandments of God, are in his head, in Christ, because the head of the man is Christ, says the Apostle. The capacity to think proceeds from Christ.

My belly! my belly aches! — cried Jeremiah. What belly of his aches? That belly aches which we too have, and which aches when it brings people into the world. But the feelings cause pain of a different order: they are the pain of my heart. Even if one turns to the lesser fragments of the body, one can discover their incorporeal correspondences in the soul. O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy fury, and chasten me not in Thy wrath. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are shaken. What bones of the prophet were shaken? The harmonious state of his soul and the strength of his mind were shattered, and therefore he asks God for the restoration of his bones. Our bones are scattered into the netherworld. What bones, according to the word of the one speaking, are scattered into the netherworld? Imagine, I beg you, a sinner; imagine his condition in the dwelling of sin, in the dwelling of the dead, in the dwelling of evil — and you will say of such a man that his bones have been scattered. All my bones will say: 'Lord, who is like Thee?' Behold, bones that chatter, reason, hold forth, feel God — and this despite the insensitivity to which the

physicians testify who saw through the bones of a patient, without his feeling anything under the action of the saw. All my bones will say: 'Lord, who is like Thee?' It is precisely the inner man who possesses all these bones.

The inner man possesses a heart. Listen to Me, you who have lost heart! Those to whom the prophet is speaking have a heart by the flesh: it cannot be lost. But when a man is careless about the cultivation of his intellectual being, then, on account of much idleness, the faculty of thought evaporates from him, he loses his heart, and it is precisely of such people that it is said: Listen to Me, you who have lost heart! But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. What hairs? Those by which [the hearers of Jesus] were Nazirites in a spiritual sense. And so, everything that is in the sentient flesh you can find also in the inner man. Do not doubt, then, also concerning the blood, homonymous with the sentient blood, which, like the other parts of the body, the inner man has. It is precisely this blood of which the soul of the sinner is deprived. For it is said: The blood of your souls will be required. It is not said your blood, but the blood of your souls. And: From the hand of the watchman I will require your blood. What blood does God demand from the hand of the watchman, if not that of which the sinner is deprived? So the heart of the foolish one is destroyed, according to the saying: Listen to Me, you who have lost heart! — because the sinner is deprived of the blood and vital force of the soul.

If one grasps what the soul is, and that it belongs to the inner man, if one understands that it is precisely here that lies that which is in man according to the image, then, evidently, Paul has grounds to say: for this is far better — to be released and to be with Christ. Before the resurrection the righteous man abides with Christ, and in his soul he lives with Christ. This is precisely why it is better — to be released and to be with Christ. According to your words, the soul remains in the grave together with the body, not leaving the body, not resting, not abiding in the blessedness of God, not reposing on the bosom of Abraham. According to such words of yours, it is not at all better — to be released and to be with Christ. Since to be released does not mean to be together with Christ, for the soul is the blood. If the soul remains in the grave, how can it be with Christ? But in my view, and according to the word of God, the soul, released from labors, released from sweats, has been deprived of the flesh and can say: Now Thou lettest Thy servant depart, O Master, according to Thy word, in peace. It goes forth in peace and reposes with Christ. So too the soul of Abraham heard these words: You will go to your fathers in peace and will be buried in a good old age. He departed to his fathers. To what fathers? Those of whom Paul speaks: Therefore I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every fatherhood receives its name. In our opinion, in the same way Aaron departed. For in Ecclesiastes too it is written of the righteous man who successfully struggled and conquered, having freed himself from the bonds of the flesh: From the prison he will go forth to a kingdom.

Therefore I am persuaded to die for the truth; therefore I despise the so-called death that awaits me. Therefore, bring on wild beasts, bring on crosses, bring on fire, bring on tortures! I know that as soon as I breathe out my spirit, I shall be freed from the flesh and shall repose

with Christ. Therefore let us struggle, let us fight! Let us groan under the burden of the flesh, not as though we would find ourselves again in the tomb, in our flesh, but because we shall be freed when our flesh is changed into a more spiritual one. Destined to be released and to be with Christ, how we groan while being in the flesh! When Bishop Philip entered, Demetrius, another bishop, said: Brother Origen teaches that the soul is immortal. Origen: Master Demetrius's remark redirects us to the resolution of another question. In his opinion, we said that the soul is immortal. To this assertion I will reply that, on the one hand, the soul is immortal, and on the other, it is not immortal. Let us begin with a definition of the word death and all the meanings that flow from the concept of death. I intend to investigate not what it means among the Greeks, but all its meanings in the Divine Scripture.

Perhaps someone more skillful than I will find still other meanings, but as for me, I know of three kinds of death. What are these three kinds of death? According to the Apostle, man lives for God and dies for sin. When a man dies for sin, such a death is a blessed thing. By this death my Lord died. For he who has died has died to sin. I know also another kind of death, in which a man dies for God; of it it is said: The soul that sins shall itself die. I know also of a third kind of death, which we usually suppose in those released from the body. For example, Adam lived nine hundred thirty years and died.

Taking into account these three kinds of death, let us investigate whether the human soul is immortal in all three kinds of death, or, if not in all three, is nevertheless immortal in some of them. By the death that is morally indifferent all people die. This is what we call dissolution. By this death no human soul dies. For if it did die, it would not be punished after death. They will seek, it is said, death and will not find it. The souls being punished will seek death. They will rather desire not to be than to endure punishment. Therefore they will seek death and will not find it. In this sense all human souls are immortal. But in other meanings, the soul is in a certain sense mortal — and blessed, if it dies for sin. It was precisely of this death that Balaam spoke, when he prophesied, praying in the Divine Spirit: May my soul die among the souls of the righteous. It was precisely of this death that Balaam prophesied wondrously, and in a word that came from God, wished for himself the most beautiful thing, for he wished to die for sin, in order to live for God. And therefore he said: May my soul die the death of the righteous, and may my seed be as their seed! There exists another death, in respect of which we are not immortal, although we have the power, if we exercise vigilance, to avoid death. And perhaps what is mortal in the soul is not forever mortal. For inasmuch as it yields to sin, so sin makes it a sinning soul, and it will itself die; the soul is mortal and dies a real death.

But if it turns out to be strengthened in blessedness so that it is inaccessible to death, then, possessing eternal life, it is no longer mortal, but in this sense even becomes immortal. How is it possible for it to be said by the Apostle concerning God: the Only One who has immortality? Let us investigate, and we shall discover, that Christ Jesus tasted death for everyone, except for God. This is how the one God has immortality.

Therefore, let us acquire eternal life. Let us acquire what is available to us. God does not give it to us; He offers it to us: Behold, I have offered you life. It is available to us to stretch out our hands to good deeds, to take possession of life and to keep it in our soul. This life is Christ, who said: I am the life. This life is now present [for the righteous] only as a shadow, but then — face to face. The breath of our countenance, the anointed of the Lord, of whom we said: under his shadow we shall live among the nations. If so many goods are offered to you in the life which is only a shadow of life — and it was by this life that Moses lived when he prophesied, by it Isaiah lived when he saw the Lord of Hosts sitting on a throne high and exalted, by it Jeremiah lived when he heard the words: before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you came forth from the womb I sanctified you, by it Ezekiel lived when he saw the Cherubim, when he saw the wheels, the ineffable mysteries — then what will our life be, when we shall live no longer in the shadow of life, but in life itself! Now our life is hidden with Christ; but when Christ, your life, shall be manifested, then you too shall be manifested with Him in glory.

Let us hasten to this life, groaning and lamenting that we are in this tent, that we abide in the body. As long as we dwell in the body, we are away from the Lord. Let us prefer to leave the body and take up our dwelling with the Lord, so that, living with Him, we may be united with the God of the universe and see His only-begotten Son, obtaining full salvation and blessedness, in Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.