**9 4 16*”THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ.”***

St. Paul in this Sunday’s epistle is talking to the Corinthians about his “rights” as an Apostle. He is saying that if he is going to be free to minister and bring the spiritual life in Christ to the community, he has a right to be supported materially by them. This “right” was not simply a human or ethical right but St. Paul makes it clear that it is God Himself who gives him this right. And yet, he does not insist on this God-given right. He does not impose it on them because he does not want them to be turned away from Christ. He supported himself by making tents so that he could earn just enough to barely survive. He sacrificed his own material welfare and comfort so that he could sew spiritual things in the people. He writes, ***“To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands.(1Co 4:11-12)”***

And for us my beloved in Christ Jesus, we also must never insist on our own “rights” if, by doing so, we will turn someone away from Christ. For instance, one of our goals as Orthodox Christians is to offer our faith and way of life to every human being who lives on this earth. Some of these people believe in a different faith, some live in moral debauchery, and some simply have no faith at all- they live their lives only in a material way. How do we approach all of these different people with the Gospel of Christ? Can we argue them into our faith by insisting on its truth- by using rational and intelligent arguments? Can we force them to live differently by castigating them and, if they do not change, condemn them to hell? Can we condescendingly label someone materialistic and hope they become spiritual?

Beloved, even if we have a “right” to say or feel such things, we should never say or feel them. They will, indeed, hinder the Gospel, and turn people away from our Lord. There is only one way to preach the Gospel. There is only one way to bring the Christian faith and way of life to people. St. Paul tells us this way.  ***“And I will show you a still more excellent way…… Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1Co 12:31; 13:4-7)***

If the Gospel is preached in this way, ***“you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1Ti 4:16)*** Amen.