*I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray, save my life!” What shall I return to the Lord for all His bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones. O Lord, I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the child of Your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!* Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

*If you invoke as Father the one who judges impartially according to each person’s work, live in fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.* *He was destined before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.* *Through Him you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your trust and hope are in God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual affection, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.* 1 Peter 1:17-23

*A very successful lawyer parked his brand-new Lexus in front of his office, ready to show it off to his colleagues. As he got out, a truck passed too closely, and completely tore off the door on the driver's side.*

*Within minutes a policeman pulled up. Before the officer had a chance to ask any questions, the lawyer started screaming hysterically. His Lexus, which he had just picked up the day before, was now completely ruined and would never be the same, no matter what the body shop did to it.*

*When the lawyer finally wound down from his ranting and raving, the officer shook his head in disgust and disbelief.*

*"I can't believe how materialistic you lawyers are," he said. "You are so focused on your possessions that you don't notice anything else."*

*"How can you say such a thing?" asked the lawyer.*

*The cop replied: "Don't you know that your left arm is missing from the elbow down? It must have been torn off when the truck hit you."*

*"My God!" screamed the lawyer. "Where's my Rolex?"*

Praise Be to God

1. Freedom is probably the most precious gift a man can think of. The history clearly shows that the lack of freedom led people to all sorts of revolts and wars. In the name of freedom, humanity has even justified various acts of violence. Yet, in many cases, especially in our times, this freedom is very much abused and exercised inappropriately. It is happening because the choices we the people make but unfortunately nothing that we as humans do, may even slightly resemble the perfection of the creation. Upon creation as part of that precious gift of freedom. God has also given us another gift: *“the free will.”* This is the ability to decide our own fate and distinguishes us from the other forms of life created by God. We must however remember that freedom, including the freedom of choice, comes with a price. Eventually, the whole humanity will face the moment, whether sooner or later, in which God will demand from us a report of how and what we have done with His precious gift. This report is what I would call the “bill of life,” and as every bill we will have to pay for this one too.

2. While in the Divinity College, one of my favorite books we studied was called: *“What the Bible Says About God the Creator.”* Although the book focused on the attributes of God, I especially liked the aspect of God as the “Creator.” God has indeed created all the worlds and all the living creatures us including. The Bible, which is God’s Word, tells us how great He is and what He wants us to be like in our relationship with Him. He is the Great and the Only God, unfortunately, especially today, most people do not want to pay Him the respect, the praise and the glory He deserves. People would rather forget what He has done for them because we do not like the concept of obedience to God and His control. The Bible tells us that long ago Satan, called by the prophet Isaiah *“A Morning Star, Son of the Dawn,”* wanted to ascend to the throne of God and to be like God: *You said to yourself, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend to the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”* (Isaiah 14:13-14) As the humanity, the society today wants to be greater than God, but no matter what we do and achieve, in the end we will achieve only what Satan achieved. Again, quoting Isaiah 14:15: *“But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.”*

3. Adam and Eve, deceived by Satan also wanted to be *“equal”* with God and possess the knowledge of the *“good and evil”*: “*But the serpent said to the woman: ‘You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”* (Genesis 3:4-5) For their sin of disobedience to God, sin that since has spread all over the world, they were punished and expelled from the Garden of Eden. The Bible tells us something else though, something that no other religion offers; God’s grace and love. Despite the sinfulness of a man, God brought us the remedy and this remedy is found in Jesus Christ. Just as Peter writes in his letter: *“He was destined before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through Him you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your trust and hope are in God.”* God’s love of the humankind brought us hope and assurance of eternal life, not through our efforts but through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

4. As Christ’s Church we chose to exercise the gift of freedom as offered by God and have freely accepted Jesus’ sacrifice. Every time we worship Him we recall His gift of sacrifice, and we recall that we are truly His chosen people, His Church. In the Old Testament we read that to keep His people from idolatry God prohibited the Hebrews to enter into the so-called *“mixed marriages.”* These were the marriages where the other person would bring their *“god*” into the marriage, and the reason was simple. God knew that such marriages will sooner or later replace God with the idols or would make God one of many idols worshipped. People however kept on disobeying God, and even Solomon, the proverbial *“wise man,”* has fallen into that trap introducing idols to his home through his many wives and concubines. In the end, even he worshipped other gods. As Christ’s Church our worship belongs only to Him!

5. The Book of Revelation tells us that the time will come when all the people of the earth will worship the beast (13:8) *“all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it”* (the beast*).*The book of Acts records that Herod wanted to receive the same glory as the one which belongs to God only: *“Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted: This is the voice of God, not a man. Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”* (Acts 12:21-23) True worship belongs only to God. Yet today people worship many *“gods”* with a lower case “g.” Sometimes this is the wealth, the position, the social status, these are only three samples of “gods” modern society worships, and they include politicians, entertainers, journalists, or the so-called *“influencers.”* Unfortunately, among these people who are worshipped by many are also the prominent religious leaders, including the Church leaders. How different was Jesus, the “One,” Peters writes about: *“Through Him you have come to trust in God.”* Being one with His Father Jesus never desired to receive the same glory. Quite opposite, He humbled himself, *“and became obedient to death”* to glorify God. With His life and actions Jesus clearly proved that only God deserves the glory and honor.

6. As Christians we find ourselves in the same position as the Hebrews. As I see it Christians to often enter into the mixed *“marriage”* with the ideology of the modern world. We call it *“progressiveness,”* I call it *“regressiveness”* though. This is clearly seen in the ways the modern Christians often accept the worldly ways of living, behaving and compromising to the point that the difference between the Christian and a non-Christian way of life is not only “murky” but often practically non-existent. How often the glory which belongs to God only is being given to the other gods of the world? The modern world embraces the idea of *“individual freedoms”* to the point that biology has been replaced with the whimsical views of the “fools,” attempts to unite people has been replaced by divisiveness in all such forms as: social, political, religious, racial, gender differences, medical knowledge reduced to ending lives rather than saving them, and the list only grows. In so many of these situation the Church and the world embrace the same view even if this position opposes God’s message.

7. When God tells us to be separate from the world He does not want us to separate ourselves from the world as some extremist insist we have to, but to be different from the ways of the world and yet be a part of this world, the part that brings moral, ethical, and social balance to the world spiraling out of control. He also does not want us to compromise our fellowship with Him and our worship of Him. The fact that the majority of people, even Christians do exactly opposite to what God wants, does not justify them doing so. Just because the world says so, we are not to compromise ourselves and our service to God. Just like Matthew writes in his Gospel 22:37: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*Add to this what that great “Apostle of Love” John writes in his letter: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world.”* (1 John 2:15a) His words remain us that only *“to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of His glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”* (Jude 24-25)