



# Servants' Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox  
Diocese of the  
Southern  
United States

*"For I have given you an example,  
that you should do as I have done to you"  
John 13:15*

**Coptic Orthodox  
Diocese of the Southern United States**

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**DGM 102  
SOTERIOLOGY**

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**Servants' Preparation Program  
2003**

**High School Boys (July 7 – 11)**

**High School Girls (July 11 – 15)**

**College (August 13 – 17)**

**San Antonio, TX**

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## PREFACE

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)

A few months after his arrival to the U.S., the still-adapting servant was asked to talk to the youth of the Church. He decided to talk to them about the Sacrament of Baptism. On the set date he proceeded to explain the ritual of Baptism and said that Baptism should be performed by complete immersion in water and not by sprinkling like other denominations do. At this point he was interrupted by several of the youth and a couple of servants who were attending the meeting

“*The Bible says do not judge,*” cried a young man<sup>1</sup>.

“*We really need to avoid these controversial topics,*” one of the servants suggested.

A young lady seriously wondered, “*What difference does it make if someone baptizes by immersion, sprinkling, or even by spitting, as long as they are sincere in their beliefs?*”

The servant in the above true story was dealing with at least two fundamental problems. The first is obviously ignorance. The second is a result of a pre-commitment to relativism and pluralism in relation to questions of truth<sup>2</sup>.

Some people are willing to live with inherent contradictions because they have been told that pluralism, diversity, and tolerance demand it. Pluralists tell us that it doesn’t matter what you believe about God, the Holy Bible, the Sacraments, etc.... as long as you are sincere in your beliefs. Pluralists suggest that there are many ways to reach God; Christianity might be the right way, but it is **not the only** way. In the worldview of religious diversity, all religions are equal even if they are contradictory. No one religion is truer than any other religion; no one interpretation of Holy Scriptures is truer than any other interpretation.

While this makes for happy harmony on paper, in the real world it just doesn’t work. Try to assert diversity in the following areas:

- It doesn’t matter what you believe about *Biology* as long as you’re sincere in your beliefs.
- It doesn’t matter what you believe about *Nazism* as long as you’re sincere in your beliefs.
- It doesn’t matter what you believe about *Slavery* as long as you’re sincere in your beliefs.

Something cannot be one thing (A) and another thing (non-A) at the same time and in the same sense. An object cannot be a triangle and a square at the same time. Can something be true and false at the same time and in the same way? Can the Eucharist be the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and be a symbol at the same time?

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<sup>1</sup> This issue will be discussed in the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Servants are encouraged to view the lecture about Postmodernism that is posted on the Diocese’s web site under literature at [www.suscopts.org](http://www.suscopts.org)

### Consider the following verses:

- “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.” **(1 Kings 18:21)**
- “No one can serve two masters; for he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.” **(Mt 6:24)**
- “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad.” **(Mt 12:33)**
- “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” **(Mt 12:30)**
- “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” **(Mt 7:18)**
- “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?” **(James 3:10-11)**
- “You are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.” **(Rev 3:15-16)**

### Conclusion:

There is no gray zone as far as God is concerned; there is **only one** correct interpretation of Holy Scriptures in relation to Doctrinal issues and any other interpretation is heretical. There is **only one** correct faith and any other belief is false. There is **only one** Holy Catholic Apostolic Church and any other establishment is not worthy to be called a Church.

“**Let there be light**” **(Gen 1:3)**, these are the first Divine words uttered by God that Holy Scriptures documented. Indeed “Let there be light” in our hearts and minds, “Let there be light” among our youth who represent the future of the Church, and finally, “Let there be light” in our society.

If we are truly seeking light then we need to be prepared to confront darkness because “**God divided the light from the darkness**” **(Gen 1:4)** and St. Paul wondered, “**What communion has light with darkness?**” **(2 Cor 6:14)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**“Build [O God] the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness.” (Ps 51:18)**

### **The Builders:**

Servants in the Church are like builders, as St. Paul called himself “a wise master builder.” **(1 Cor 3:10)** They are building themselves, “building yourselves upon your most holy faith” **(Jud 20)**, and also building others, “comfort each other and build one another up.” **(1 Thess 4:11)**

The true builder is God Himself as King David said, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” **(Ps.127: 1)** also St. Paul called himself and St. Apollos “God’s fellow workers” and the people “God’s building” **(1 Cor 3:9)**. Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ said it clearly: “I will build My Church.” **(Mt 16:18)**

- Therefore, always ask God to help and support you with His grace during your service and always attribute the success of the service to God’s grace. “If anyone ministers [serves], let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” **(1 Pet 4:11)**

### **The Foundation:**

St. Paul said, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” **(1 Cor 3:11)** Our Lord Jesus Christ said that He would build His Church on the rock of the Sound Doctrine that St. Peter declared concerning Him **(Mt 16:18)**. Finally, St. Paul said, “having been built on the foundation of the **apostles** and **prophets**, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone.” **(Eph 2:20)**

- The foundation that you are building yourself and others on is the Sound Apostolic Faith and Doctrine concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ **and His blessed teachings**, which is supported by both the New (apostles) and Old (prophets) Testaments.

### **The Temple & the Wall:**

The Old Testament provides us with two blessed examples of wise master builders. The first is Ezra who completed the building of the Temple of Jerusalem. The second is Nehemiah who built the wall of the city. *(Please take time to read these Holy Books)*

- Ezra represents the servant who concentrates on spiritual subjects in order to build the inner temple of the heart. While Nehemiah represents the servant who is building the walls around that temple; the walls of Sound Doctrine against heresies and false teachings in order to preserve and protect the temple (heart) and its inhabitants (virtues).

**So which one of them is more important?** Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” **(Mt 23:23)**. The Church needs servants who are **at the same time** ‘Ezra’ and ‘Nehemiah’. Providing the youth with spiritual teachings and guidance based on personal experience and practice, and also providing them with sound theological understanding of our most holy faith based on the teachings of the Church fathers and **not** their own personal opinion. It is interesting to learn that both the Books of ‘Ezra’ and

'Nehemiah' were considered one Holy Book until the third century, and today many biblical scholars consider them one complementary unit.

- The following lectures will be about building the walls of Sound Doctrine. Other lectures about building the inner spiritual temple will be provided by God's grace in the near future.

### **Lessons from the Holy Book of Nehemiah:**

- 1) Nehemiah was neither a Priest nor a Levite he was just an ordinary member of the congregation. His heart was filled with tremendous zeal and love to the Church (people of God). God used him to build the wall of Jerusalem and he became a role model for many generations of servants. Therefore, do not underestimate your position in the Church. Let Nehemiah be your role model in your service and let the following verse be your theme: **"The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build."** (Neh 2:20)
- 2) Nehemiah had a strong 'personal' relation with God. He always prayed and his prayers were straight forward and to the point. Sometimes, as he is telling the story of building the wall, we see him stop and pray to God (Neh 4:3-6; 5:19; 6:8-14). The frequency and depth of your prayer reveals how much you depend on God's help in your service.
- 3) It is written in the Holy Book of Nehemiah, "Everyone of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built" (Neh 4:18). St. Paul talked about the whole armor of God saying that the sword of the spirit is the word of God (Eph 6:17). Now we can read the verse mentioned by Nehemiah as follows: "Everyone of the **servants** [builders] had his **Holy Bible** [sword] girded at his side as he **served** [built]." As a builder of the wall of Sound Doctrine, you will need to have a stronger than average relation with the Holy word of God.
- 4) Building the wall of Sound Doctrine will provoke Satan and he will fight you the same way he fought Nehemiah:
  - He will send you messengers to distract you and waste your time in foolish arguments (Neh 6). Remember the advice of St. Paul to his disciple Titus: "Avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and striving about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless" (Tit 3:9). Repeat the words of Nehemiah: **"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"**(Neh 6:3)
  - He will try to intimidate you (Neh 6:14-19) by sending you messengers saying, 'you are judging people, and you are committing a sin'. If explaining the sound faith to the Orthodox Youth and exposing the false teachings of the heretics is to be considered a sin, **then blessed be that sin!** Remember the words of St. Paul, "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, **but rather expose (reprove) them.**" (Eph 5:11) Do they want to convince us that the Champions of Orthodoxy such as St. Cyril and St. Athanasius lived all their lives in the sin of judging others because they exposed the false teachings and excommunicated the heretics who lived during their time? Indeed Satan is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44)

## To Judge or Not to Judge?

How many times have you called a sinful behavior into question and been told (with a self-righteous attitude), “Judge not, that you be not judged”? Or have you ever mentioned to another that the salvation of heretics and unbelievers is a myth to hear, “Who are we to judge? Don’t you know the Holy Bible says, ‘Judge not’?” As a builder trying to build the wall of sound faith, you will discover that this is the only verse some people can quote. It’s always intended to stop a conversation in its tracks, shift the subject, and outweigh any other biblical evidence. After all, it’s one part of Holy Scripture that lets people off the hook! Or so they think!

In some form or another, most of us have heard the debates over this well-known verse, haven’t we? Does the Holy Bible actually say, “Judge not, that you be not judged”? Yes, it does. The only problem is, so many who quote **(Mt 7:1)** rip it totally out of context. They forget or ignore the four verses that follow **(Mt 7:1)** – verses that explain just what our Lord Jesus Christ meant when He spoke on this matter of judging.

- Take a few minutes to read **(Mt 7:1-6)**:

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces”.

Notice that we are in a succession of ‘do not’ at this point of the Sermon of the Mount:

- Do not judge.
- Do not give what is holy to dogs.
- Do not cast your pearls before swine.

If you stop and think about it, these three ‘do not’ seem inconsistent. One says not to judge, and the other two say neither to give what is holy to dogs nor to throw pearls before swine. **If you don’t judge, how are you going to know who are dogs and who are swine?** In the same chapter, our Lord Jesus Christ also tells us that we will know false prophets by their fruits **(Mt 7:15-20)**. **If I am not allowed to judge, then how am I going to ‘inspect their fruits’ to know which prophets (teachers) are false?**

Moreover, it is written, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” **(Ps 1:1)**. **How are you going to identify the ungodly, the sinners, and the scornful without some kind of judgment?** Also St. Paul said to the Corinthians, “put away from yourselves that wicked person” **(1 Cor 5:13)**. **How on earth were they supposed to do that without judging?**

Do all these questions create a problem? What is the context of this “Judge not” verse really saying to us? Let’s go back to **(Mt 7:1-5)**. According to this passage, there is a problem with



your brother's eye and your own eye. Does this passage actually forbid you to take the speck out of your brother's eye? **No, it doesn't.** This passage doesn't forbid judging, it forbids a certain kind of judging. The judgment that our Lord Jesus Christ forbids in **(Mt 7:1-5)** is wrong because He referred to those who judge this way as hypocrites. They are hypocrites because they concern themselves with a speck in their brother's eye while they are stumbling around with two-by-fours under their own eyelids!

There is another kind of judgment that our Lord Jesus Christ called for: He said, **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (Jn 7:24).** Therefore, when our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Judge not”, He was not calling us to a carefree blindness to the unrighteous behavior of others; He was not calling us to close our eyes to sin and to tolerate false doctrine and indiscriminately accept those who teach them. Irresponsible behavior, wrong doctrine, and sin must all be discerned, clearly identified, and dealt with; they are not to be swallowed, covered over, or overlooked. Do we have the right, then, to evaluate carefully a person's message and to scrutinize someone's teaching? **Yes, we do.** → Think about it, if **all** judgment were wrong, then how come we have a Holy Book called **“Judges”**?

### **Righteous Judgment:**

It's all right to judge as long as we judge with a righteous judgment; a judgment that is in accordance with the word of God. We may judge dogs and swine, false teachers, sin, wrong behavior and wrong doctrine, **but we cannot judge the motives of another person's heart.** The motivation of that judgment is the love of God and the love of the neighbor. The goal is not to condemn but to restore. **We need to exercise judgment in order to discern false teachers.**

### **How to judge with Righteous Judgment?** *(Examples will be limited to doctrine & theology)*

- “First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.” **(Mt 7:5)**
  - An Orthodox Christian who doesn't know the theological basis of his faith and yet judges non-Orthodox for their heresies needs to remove the plank of ignorance first from his own eye so that he can see clearly and guide heretics to Orthodoxy.
- “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” **(Jn 7:24)**
  - People are under the impression that judging others is only concerned with their negative aspects. But when you **praise** the heretics and unbelievers and defend their salvation (contrary to the word of God) based on their outer appearance and moral conduct, then you are not judging with righteous judgment.
- “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself: for you who judge practice the same things.” **(Rom 2:1)**
  - An Orthodox Christian is defending the belief that communion is the true body and blood of our Lord; he is refuting the Protestants' heretical teachings concerning this doctrine. Yet this same person doesn't approach communion with the due respect and preparation. This person is actually condemning himself, for his actions do not support of the faith that he is preaching.

- “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.” **(1 Cor 4:5)**
  - We cannot judge the inner motives and feelings of heretics; we cannot say they are sincere in their faith or that they have tremendous love to God. **We simply don’t know!** It’s actually not our job to be concerned with this issue. Our job *(in these lectures)* is to explain our Orthodox faith and refute their heretical teachings.

**“He who wins souls is wise”(Prov 11:30):**

The following lectures are intended for Orthodox Youth and the concept of Righteous Judgment should be applied when these topics are explained. A different approach should be used when addressing non-Orthodox and non-Christians. St. Paul said, **“walk in wisdom toward those who are outside” (Col 4:5)**; one should be wise enough not to offend them with what we know and believe. Here is an example: St. Paul taught that idol worshipers will perish and will not enter the kingdom of God, “Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters... will inherit the Kingdom of God” **(1 Cor 6:9-10)**; “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are... idolatry.... Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” **(Gal 5:19-21)**. This same St. Paul stood in the midst of idol worshipers saying, “I perceive that in all things you are **very religious” (Acts 17:22)**. St. Paul knew very well that those ‘religious’ people would perish if they refused his message, yet this was not a reason to offend them!

There is a similar story mentioned in the biography St. Macarius: “One day the saint was traveling with his disciple who out walked him. On the way the disciple saw a pagan priest carrying wood and running to the idols’ temple. He said to the pagan, “To where are you running you servant of the devil?” The priest put the wood down and started beating the disciple then carried his wood and went on his way. Further along the road, St. Macarius saw the pagan running with his wood and said, “May strength be with you, O man full of energy!” The pagan was astonished and said, “What good thing about me did you see in order to greet me with such greeting?” St. Macarius replied, “You are toiling and working with all enthusiasm in vain”. He then explained to him the Christian faith and the pagan believed and became a monk!” (The Arabic *‘Paradise Of The Monks’* Page 33).

- The moral of this story is **“The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of the fools pours forth foolishness.” (Prov 15:2)**. Therefore, “walk in wisdom towards those who are outside” **(Col 4:5)** for “he who wins souls is wise.” **(Prov 11:30)**

**A Final Word:**

In an interview with the Daily Texan, H.G. Bishop Youssef said, “We will not build a new foundation; it’s a high-rise building of 20 centuries and on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor we have the American culture. We are building it on what we have of Traditions for these 20 centuries” (Daily Texan, October 24, 2001). Indeed, it is written, **“Do not remove the ancient landmark, which your fathers have set.” (Prov 22:28)**

- As a servant you are involved in building this 21<sup>st</sup> floor, this is both a great responsibility and honor. St. Paul said, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold,

silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **each one's work will become clear**; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; **and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is**. If anyone's work that he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, **yet so as through fire.**" (1 Cor 3:11-15)

- Are you building with gold and silver or hay and straw? Are you properly preparing for your lectures and meetings with the youth? Are you avoiding or neglecting theological and doctrinal topics? Each one's work will be tested with the fire of false teachings, temptation and sin. If the youth that you are serving endure these fires, blessed are you, you shall receive a reward. But if they don't, then you have lost your reward and you yourself will be **scarcely saved!**
- Therefore, don't depend on your personal abilities in your service but ask God to support you. Have faith, let your hands be strong and do a good job.

Say with Nehemiah, "**Let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.**" (Neh 2:17)

And don't forget your theme: "**The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build.**" (Neh 2:20)

## **Lecture I: Original Sin & Atonement**

**“The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.” (Ps 118:14)**

### **Original Sin(s)<sup>†</sup> in the Orthodox Perspective:**

It is written, “God created man **in His own image; in the image of God** He created him; male and female He created them” (**Gen 1:27**). Adam and Eve were perfect and good (**Gen 1:27**); they had a ‘good’ human nature that was created ‘in the image of God’. After the fall, this image was distorted; the moral human nature was wounded, weakened and damaged by sin. A predisposition to sin invaded the human nature. It is written that Adam begot a son **in his own likeness, after his image (Gen 5:3)**

In other words, Adam begot a son in his own ‘distorted’ image. Therefore, St. Paul said, “we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature** children of wrath, just as the others” (**Eph 2:3**). King David also said, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (**Ps 51:5**)

The sinful human nature that we inherited is sentenced to death for “the wages of sin is death” (**Rom 6:23**). Thus death reined over all humanity as St. Paul said, “Through one man sin entered the world, and **death through sin**, and thus death spread to all men, **because all sinned**” (**Rom 5:12**), “by one man disobedience many were made sinners” (**Rom 5:19**). Indeed, “The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (**Ps 14:2-3**)

In addition, the whole creation was also affected by the fall, God told Adam, “Cursed is the ground for your sake” (**Gen 3:17**). God has given dominion of the world to Adam and due to Adam’s sin “death entered the world” (**Rom 5:12**). Therefore, St. Paul said, “The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (**Rom 8:21-22**). Even the wild nature and cannibalism in the animal kingdom is said to be due to the fall of Adam since all animals were created vegetarians (**Gen 1:29-30**) (*Adam & Eve*, By H.H. Pope Shenouda III)

### **Different view on Original Sin:**

Generally speaking, the Calvinists maintain that the sin of Adam was imputed (made to count) to the whole human race. They base their belief on the following passage:

“Even Levi, who receive tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (**Heb 7:9-10**). Levi was a descendant of Abraham, but because he was still in the loins (seed) of Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi is said to have paid them also. Therefore, in their minds, Adam’s sin was imputed to his descendants; all of them are **guilty of that actual sin** in the Garden and justly deserve punishment for it.

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<sup>†</sup> H.H. Pope Shenouda analyzed the original sin in his book ‘*Adam & Eve*’ and concluded that they were guilty of 27 sins!

### **Refutation:**

First of all, St. Paul doesn't affirm that tithes were counted to Levi. He said that Levi paid tithes "**so to speak**" (**Heb 7:9**), in a figurative or symbolic manner. Secondly, this view contradicts Holy Scripture that says, "The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (**Deut 24:16**). Also, "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son" (**Ezek 18:20**)

→ Therefore, what we inherit or what is transmitted to us is Adam's fallen human nature and **not his actual sin**. Moreover, we have our own sins to contend with because all of us have sinned and deserve punishment.

### **Redemption & Atonement:**

Sin is an offense against God, King David said, "Against You, **You only**, have I sinned and done evil in Your sight" (**Ps 51:4**). This he said even though he sinned against Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba. The weight of that offense is proportional to the status of the offended party. Sin is, therefore, considered unlimited because it is committed against the unlimited God. Consequently, any sin requires unlimited atonement.

- **This atonement should be provided by a person who is:**
  - Unlimited → To be able to provide this unlimited atonement the Savior has to be unlimited.
  - Sinless → The Savior has to be free from sin to be able to redeem others, or else he would need salvation himself.
  - Human → Since human beings committed the sin, therefore, a human being should pay the price.
  - Mortal → Since the wages of sin is death (**Rom 6:23**), therefore, the savior has to be mortal.
  
- **Our Lord Jesus Christ is:**
  - Unlimited → He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty" (**Rev 1:8**)
  - Sinless → Archangel Gabriel said to the Virgin, "That **Holy One** who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (**Lk 1:35**). Our lord said, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (**Jn 8:46**)
  - Human → Our Lord was called the Son of Man several times, also, the Bible documents that on several occasions He was thirsty, hungry, tired, sleeping, etc....
  - Mortal → Even though our Lord is immortal due to His divinity, he assumed a human nature that was liable to die.

### **The Ransom:**

Our Lord said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom** for many" (**Mk 10:45**). St. Paul said, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a **ransom** for all" (**1 Tim 2:5-6**). The word 'ransom' suggests some kind of payment and someone to whom this ransom is paid.

The question is, "To whom was this ransom paid?" Origen and some early fathers suggested that this ransom was paid to the devil but the Church rejected this idea.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III clarified this issue and said, "The ransom was paid to the Divine Justice. The Old Testament sacrifices were symbols of the sacrifice of the cross. These sacrifices were not offered to the devil but were offered to God. Hence, holy fire came down from heaven and consumed them (**1 Kg 18:38**), and it is written that God "smelled a soothing aroma" (**Gen 8:21**) after the sacrifice of our father Noah. Since sin is committed against God (**Ps 51:4**) then the price of this sin should be paid to God Himself, the devil has no right to ask or to accept a ransom. The devil is just an accuser (**Rev 12:10; Job 1**). On the cross our Lord offered Himself to the Father (**Lk 23:46**) and not to the devil."

**Nature of Salvation:** (*Adapted from 'The Stages of Salvation' by Fr. Shenouda Maher*)

God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (**Gen 1:26**). The Church Fathers commented on this verse saying:

- There is a theological difference between the term 'in the image of God' and 'the image of God'. The Divine Logos is **alone** the image of God as St. Paul said, "He is the image of the invisible God" (**Col 1:15**). "Christ, who is the image of God" (**2 Cor 4:4**). "Through whom He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (**Heb 1:3**). The Divine Logos is alone the image of God because He is of the same essence and Godhead; we on the other hand were created in that image or according to that image of God.
- God revealed His will and said, "Let Us make man in **Our image**, according to **Our likeness**" (**Gen 1:26**). But when God actually created man, Holy Scripture said, "God created man in His **own image**" (**Gen 1:27**) and there was no mention of "God's Likeness"!+ **Some** of the Church Fathers concluded that the 'likeness of God' would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God, in eternal life. This likeness is an infinite goal that takes an eternity of unceasing spiritual growth and Divine Revelation; this is Eternal Happiness. St. John said, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is" (**1 Jn 3:2**). St. Paul said, "Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be **conformed to His glorious body**" (**Phil 3:22-21**)
- The likeness of God is perfected in Eternal Life but we actually start this process here on earth through the Sacramental life of the Church and the working of the Holy Spirit and God's grace. St. Paul said, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until **Christ is formed in you**" (**Gal 4:19**), "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; ... that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God**" (**Eph 3:14-19**), "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**" (**Eph 4:13**), "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**" (**Gal 3:27**), "You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge **according to the image of Him who created him**" (**Col 3:9-10**), "**we have the mind of Christ**" (**1 Cor 2:16**)
- St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Augustine consider 'the image' and 'the likeness' as synonyms that were used interchangeably in the Holy Book of Genesis. However, all the

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+ Notice that (Gen 5:1) is translated "*in the image of God*" according to the Septuagint and the Coptic translations. This is different from KJ translation, which says "*in the likeness of God*".

Fathers agree that we grow in the likeness of God and that this likeness is perfected in Eternal Life.

### **Deification:**

Deification is an ancient theological term used to describe the process by which a Christian becomes more like God. A distinction must be drawn between the idea of deification as “becoming God” (*theosis*) and as “becoming like God” (*homoiosis theoi*).

### **What Deification is not:**

When the Church calls us to pursue godliness, to be more like God, this doesn't mean that human beings then become divine. We do not become like God in His nature. That would not only be a heresy, it would be impossible. For we are human, always have been human, and will always remain human. We cannot take on the divine nature of God. God said it clearly, “My glory (of the divinity) I will not give to another” (**Is 42:8**). In (**Jn 10:34**), our Lord Jesus Christ, quoting (**Ps 82:6**) repeats the passage, “You are gods”. The fact that He was speaking to a group of hypocritical religious leaders who were accusing Him of blasphemy makes the meaning very clear: our Lord was not using “god” to refer to divine nature. We are gods in that we bear His likeness, not His nature. Moreover, the same Holy Psalm says in the next verse, “You shall die like men and fall like one of the princes” (**Ps 82:7**)

### **What Deification is:**

Deification means we are to become more like God through His grace. When the Son of God assumed our humanity in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the process of our being renewed in God's image and likeness was begun. Thus, those who are joined to Christ through Faith, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist begin a re-creation process, being renewed in God's image and likeness. We become, as St. Peter writes, “partakers of the divine nature” (**2 Pet 1:4**). These words of St. Peter and some sayings of the Fathers were taken out of context to promote the heresy of Pantheism according to which humans are gods in nature and not just as a courtesy title.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III explained this in his book *‘Many years with people's questions’* part II, q.27, p. 55-57: he said that a hypostatic (personal) union between the divine nature and a human nature only took place in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is undermined by two ways:

- a. Belittling our Lord and claiming that He was created → Arianism.
- b. Exalting creatures (humans) to His Divine Level → Pantheism.

What St. Peter means is **partaking of the divine virtues** and not the essence of the Godhead. He therefore shows us the way by saying in the same verse, “... having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (**1 Pet 1:4**). Those who misinterpret St. Peter's words fall into the deception of Satan who said to Eve, “you will be like God” (**Gen 3:5**), the devil convinced her that they would be divine!

### **In a Nutshell:**

→ The sin of Adam led to:

- A corrupt human nature with a predisposition to sin.
- We inherited this corrupt nature and have fallen in sin.

- Death gained dominion over all of humanity as a result of the corrupt nature and sin.
- All creation suffers from the sin of Adam and ours.

→ The Nature of Salvation:

- The Incarnation of the Logos restored the human nature to its original state and blessed it giving it the potential to fulfill the destiny of its creation; “The Likeness of God”. As we pray in the Gregorian Liturgy saying, “Thou hast blessed my nature in Thee”. And in the Friday Theotokia, “He took what is ours and gave us what is His”.
- The death of our Lord on the cross gave us the forgiveness of our sins by satisfying the Divine Justice, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Heb 9:22**).
- The creation **is still** groaning and laboring with birth pangs until now (**Rom 8:22**), probably because people are still sinning. But it **will be** delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (**Rom 8:21**). As St. John said in the Holy Book of Revelation, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (**Rev 21:1**)

**Q. Since the death of our Lord satisfied the Divine Justice, why then do we still die?**

**A.** There is two kinds of deaths:

1. Physical death of the body:

Concerning this death St. Paul said, “**The last** enemy that will be destroyed is death” (**1 Cor 15:26**). This will take place in the resurrection “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (**1 Cor 15:53**), only then will we sing, “O Death, where is your sting?” (**1 Cor 15:55**). Meanwhile, this death is left for us as a reminder of the results of sin and we Christians don’t call it death anymore but a departure. “For there is no death for Your servants, but a departure” (**St. Basil’s Liturgy**); and a gain as St. Paul calls it, “To me, to live is Christ, and **to die is gain**” (**Phil 1:21**)

2. Spiritual death due to sin:

Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body and this death is the separation of the spirit from God. Therefore our Lord said to the Bishop of Sardis, “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (**Rev 3:1**), in the parable of the Prodigal son the father said, “my son was dead and is alive again” (**Lk 15:24**). Our Lord combined the two kinds of deaths in one verse when he said, “let the dead bury their own dead” (**Mt 8:22**)



## Lecture II: The Scope of Salvation

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Is 5:20)

### Universalism: “All will be saved”

According to this view, all people (**good & bad**) and **Satan** will be saved. The most significant early exponent of this view was Origen who was deeply suspicious of any form of dualism – that is, any belief system that acknowledged the existence of two supreme powers, one good and one evil. This belief was characteristic of many forms of Gnosticism, and was very influential in the eastern Mediterranean world in the late second century. To reject dualism is to reject the idea that God and Satan rule over their respective Kingdoms for eternity. In the end, God will overcome evil, and restore creation to its original form; being subject to the will of God. It therefore follows, on the basis of this ‘restorationist’ soteriology, that the final redeemed version of creation cannot include anything along the lines of ‘a hell’ or ‘Kingdom of Satan’.

### Refutation:

→ Hell is not Satan’s Kingdom; it is the place where he and his angels will suffer forever.

- St. John said, “The devil ... was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be **tormented day and night forever and ever**” (Rev 20:10)
- Our Lord will say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41)
- The demons themselves know their fate, they said to our Lord, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? **Have You come here to torment us before the time?**” (Mt 8:28)

→ Notice that there is no dualism here, for Satan is being punished in this fire and not ruling over it. Moreover, this fire is everlasting which makes the suggestion of restoration flawed contradicting Holy Scripture.

- Concerning evil people, St. Jude said, “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth **as an example**, suffering the vengeance of **eternal fire**” (Jude 7)
- Our Lord said about the people who refuse the faith, “It will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city” (Lk 10:12). Again this fire is **eternal** for sinners and unbelievers.

→ Therefore, our Lord said, “Fear Him who has power to cast into hell” (Lk 12:5). Indeed, “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (Prov 11:31; 1 Pet 4:18)

### Limited Atonement: “Only the Elect will be saved”.

The basis of this view lies in the Protestant heresy of salvation by grace alone. According to this heresy, people are saved through the grace of God alone without any human role. Calvinists believe in what they call ‘**Irresistible Grace**’. When these heretics could not

explain why there were sinners still remaining in the world if indeed salvation depended on grace alone, they fell into the heresy of '**Limited Atonement and Predestination**'. According to this heresy, God has chosen some people (The Elect) and our Lord Jesus Christ died only for them. All the people who perish are simply not fortunate enough to be among these elect who were predestined for salvation (by grace alone). They did not stop at this point but went so far as to say that the salvation of these elect is guaranteed no matter what they do wrong. Hence, they fell in a third heresy called '**Eternal Security**'. They argue along the following lines. Let us suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ died for all people. But not all people will be saved. Therefore, it follows that our Lord Jesus Christ died to no effect for those who are not saved. This, in their view, raises questions concerning the efficacy of His death. But if our Lord Jesus Christ died **only** for those who are to be saved, He will have succeeded in His mission in every case. Therefore, they conclude that our Lord Jesus Christ died only for those elect.

### **Refutation:**

We are dealing with three related heresies:

1. Salvation by grace alone.
2. Predestination and Limited Atonement.
3. Eternal Security.

Each one of them will be refuted separately, but now we just want to highlight the following: The principle of predestination and election implies injustice and partiality. It leads sinners to despair, feeling that their striving is in vain and useless since they are predestined to perish. As for the righteous, it leads them to slackness and negligence. This view leaves many questions unanswered, why is there a need for commandments? Why would the devil toil in tempting the elect if they will certainly be saved? On what basis would reward be given to the elect if they had no choice in their destiny? Why would God punish a person predestined to perdition? This idea leads the world into confusion and contradicts God's love and justice and man's free will.

### **Pluralism:**

Due to the rise of multiculturalism in western society, the question of the relation of Christianity to other religious traditions has assumed a new importance. Pluralists argue that if God wishes everyone to be saved, it is inconceivable that the divine self-revelation should be effected in such a way that only a small portion of humanity could be saved. For this reason, non-Christian religious traditions are valid and capable of mediating the saving grace of God. Christians, in their view, have no special access to God, who is universally available through all religious traditions. A similar approach is associated with the claim that all Christian traditions are valid despite their radically different beliefs and practices.

### **Refutation:**

→ Holy Scripture testifies that the will of God is for the entire world to be saved. God in His love and justice offers salvation to everyone:

- "I have **no pleasure in the death of the wicked ...**" (**Ez 33:11**)
- "This is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (**1 Tim 2:4**)
- God so **loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (**Jn 3:16**)

- “He Himself is the propitiation of our sins and not ours only but also for **the whole world.**” (1 Jn 2:2)
- “Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **every creature.**” (Mk 16:15)

→ Holy Scripture also testifies that there is no salvation except through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, unbelievers (non-Christians) will not be saved (i.e. will go to hell):

- “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe is condemned** already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (Jn 3:18; Mk 16:16)
- “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and **he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**” (Jn 3:36)
- “If you do not believe that I am He, **you will die in your sins.**” (Jn 8:24)
- “Having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 5:1)
- “Without [Christian] faith it is **impossible to please Him.**” (Heb 11:6)
- “**He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.**” (1 Jn 5:12)
- “**Nor is there salvation in any other**” (Acts 4:12)
- “The master of that servant will come ... and **appoint his portion with the unbelievers.**” (Lk 12:46)
- “The cowardly, **unbelieving, ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.**” (Rev 21:8)

→ Holy Scripture affirms that God gave people a free will and that He doesn't force anybody to be good or to believe:

- “I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... therefore, **choose life.**” (Deut 30:19)
- “**If anyone desires** to come after Me, let him deny himself ...” (Mt 16:24)
- “**If you want** to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt 19:17)
- “**If you want** to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor.” (Mt 19:21)
- “How often **I wanted** to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!**” (Mt 23:37-38)
- “But **you are not willing** to come to Me that you may have life.” (Jn 5:40)
- “The Kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and **they were not willing to come.**” (Mt 22:2-3)

→ Truth can be disturbing at times, therefore, truth as recorded in Holy Scripture **and not what makes us comfortable** should be our quest. Some truths are disturbing like eternal, conscious torment in fire and brimstone (Rev 20:10), but it is still true.

→ Another disturbing truth is the fact that **only a few will escape that fire!** Our Lord said, “Do not fear **little flock** for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12:32). One of the disciples asked our Lord, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” and He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for **many, I say to you will seek to enter and will not be able**” (Lk 13:23-24)

→ He also said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are **few who find it.**” (Mt 7: 13-14)

**Q.1 St. Peter said, “God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35). Does this mean that non-Christians would be saved?**

**A. No.** → St. Peter is referring to the universal saving will of God; Cornelius was from the Gentiles and yet was invited to believe by an angel in a vision (Acts 10:3-6)

→ At this point in Church history, the apostles were still under the impression that the Christian faith was for the Jews only. Hence St. Peter said, “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). And, “When Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying: You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” (Acts 11:2-3). But after St. Peter told them that the Holy Spirit fell upon them, “they became silent; and glorified God, saying, then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18)

→ St. Peter did not say, “In every nation whoever fears Him will be saved” but he said, “Accepted by Him”. There is a difference between ‘**Salvation**’ and ‘**Preparation for Salvation**’. God prepared the Gentiles to accept the Christian faith through philosophy and He prepared the Jews through prophecies and Law.

→ Did the Law save the Jews? No, St. Paul affirms, “That no one is justified by the Law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith” (Gal 3:11). All the Old Testament righteous people did not go into paradise until our Lord died on the cross because “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (Heb 11:13)

→ Our Lord Jesus Christ is the **only way** for salvation, He said, “I am **the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me**” (Jn 14:6). Therefore, even though Cornelius was a devout man and one who feared God (Acts 10:2) he had to believe and be baptized in order to be saved.

**Q.2 St. Paul said, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves” (Rom 2:14). Does this mean that non-believers would be saved?**

**A. No.** → Let us consider the words of St. Paul:

“For as many as have sinned without law **will** also **perish** without law, and as many as have sinned in the law **will be judged** by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom 2:12-16)

→ The misinterpretation of these verses leads people to false views concerning the scope of salvation. These verses do not speak of the salvation of the Gentiles if they live by their

natural law; on the contrary, they speak about their condemnation; “For as many as have sinned without the law will also perish without law”. A Gentile - who is without a written law – will perish without the law. Therefore, a Jew will be condemned according to the written law, and the Gentile will be condemned according to the natural unwritten law. **These verses are not about salvation**; they are about judgment and condemnation. St. Paul never said that a Jew would be saved by the law or a Gentile without law. St. Paul’s argument in this chapter is that there is no salvation through the written law or the unwritten one. Therefore he said in the next chapter, “We have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” **(Rom 3:9)**

*(Adapted from, ‘Dogmatic Theology’ Part VI. By Dr. Morris Tawadros).*

**Q.3 What is the fault of the people who lived before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ or those who did not hear the message of the Holy Gospel? They didn’t know!**

**A.** → **First of all**, St. Paul affirms that, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For **since the creation of the world** His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that **they are without excuse**” **(Rom 1:19-20)**. Therefore, we need to believe in the justice of God for it is written, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” **(Ps 19:9)**

→ **Secondly**, our Lord said about the people who rejected the message of the Holy Gospel, “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be **more tolerable** for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” **(Mt 10:15)**. These words imply that there are different levels of suffering and that one level is more tolerable than the other. The same applies to the reward as St. Paul said, “one star differs from another star in glory” **(1 Cor 15:41)**

→ **Finally**, assuming that they did not know, ignorance does not prevent punishment. Our Lord said, “That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But **he who did not know**, yet committed things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few**. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” **(Lk 12:47-48)**. Notice that the servant who did not know was beaten but with fewer stripes!

## **Lecture III: The Pelagian Controversy**

**You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” (Gal 5:4)**

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The Pelagian controversy, which erupted in the early fifth century, brought a cluster of questions concerning human nature, sin, and grace into sharp focus. Up to this point, there had been relatively little controversy within the church over human nature. The Pelagian controversy changed that, and ensured that the issues associated with human nature were placed firmly on the agenda of the western church.

The controversy centered upon two individuals: **St. Augustine of Hippo** and **Pelagius\***.

### **The Freedom Of The Will**

#### **For St. Augustine:**

The total sovereignty of God and genuine human responsibility and freedom must be upheld at one and the same time, if justice is to be done to the richness and complexity of the biblical statements on the matter. To simplify the matter, a denial of either the sovereignty of God or human freedom, is to seriously compromise the Christian understanding of the way in which God justifies man.

St. Augustine’s basic ideas can be summarized as follows.

First, natural human freedom is affirmed: we do not do things out of any necessity, but as a matter of freedom.

Second, human free will has been weakened and incapacitated – but not eliminated or destroyed – through sin.

In order for that human will to be restored and healed, it requires the operation of divine grace. Free will really does exist; it is, however, distorted by sin. In order to explain this point, St. Augustine deploys a significant analogy. Consider a pair of scales, with two balance pans. One balance pan represents good, and the other evil. If the pan were properly balanced, the arguments in favor of doing good or doing evil could be weighed, and a proper conclusion drawn. The parallel with the human free will is obvious: We weigh up the arguments in favor of doing good and evil, and act accordingly. But what, asks St. Augustine, if the balance pans are loaded? What happens if someone puts several heavy weights in the balance pan on the side of evil? The scales will still work, but they are seriously biased toward making an evil decision. St. Augustine argues that this is exactly what has happened to humanity through sin. The human free will is biased toward evil. It really exists, and really can make decisions – just as the loaded scales still work. But instead of giving a balanced judgment, a serious bias exists toward evil. Using this and related analogies St. Augustine argues that the human free will really exists in sinners, but that it is compromised by sin.

#### **For Pelagius:**

Humanity possessed total freedom of the will, and was totally responsible for its own sins. Human nature was essentially free and well created, and was not compromised or incapacitated by some mysterious weakness. According to Pelagius, any imperfection in man

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\* A British Monk.

would reflect negatively upon the goodness of God. For God to intervene in any direct way to influence human decisions was equivalent to compromising human integrity.

The Pelagians argued that the human free will was like a pair of balanced pans in perfect equilibrium, and not subject to any bias whatsoever. There was no need for divine grace in the sense understood by St. Augustine. God has made humanity, and knows precisely what it is capable of doing. Hence all the commands given to us are capable of being obeyed, and are meant to be obeyed.

It is no excuse to argue that human frailty prevents these commands from being fulfilled. God has made human nature, and only demands of it what it can endure. Pelagius thus makes the uncompromising assertion that “since perfection is possible for humanity, it is obligatory.” The moral rigor of this position, and its unrealistic view of human nature, served only to strengthen St. Augustine’s hand as he developed the rival understanding of a tender and kindly God attempting to heal and restore wounded human nature.

## **The Nature of Sin**

### **For St. Augustine:**

Humanity is universally affected by sin as a consequence of the fall. The human mind has become darkened and weakened by sin. Sin makes it impossible for the sinner to think clearly, and especially to understand higher spiritual truths and ideas. Similarly, as we have seen, the human will has been weakened (but not eliminated) by sin. For Augustine, the simple fact that we are sinners means that we are in the position of being seriously ill, and unable to diagnose our own illness adequately, let alone cure it. It is through the grace of God alone that our illness is diagnosed (sin), and a cure made available (grace). The essential point that Augustine makes is that we have no control over our sinfulness. It is something that contaminates our lives from birth, and dominates our lives thereafter. It is a state over which we have no decisive control. We could say that Augustine understands humanity to be born with a sinful disposition as part of human nature, with an inherent bias toward acts of sinning. In other words, sin causes sins: The state of sinfulness causes individual acts of sin.

### **For Pelagius:**

Sin is to be understood in a very different light. The idea of human disposition toward sin has no place in Pelagius’ thought. For Pelagius, the human power of self-improvement could not be thought of as being compromised. It was always possible for humans to discharge their obligations toward God and their neighbors. Failure to do so could not be excused on any grounds. Sin was to be understood as an act committed willfully against God. Pelagianism thus seems to be a rigid form of moral authoritarianism – an insistence that humanity is under obligation to be sinless, and an absolute rejection of any excuse for failure. Humanity is born sinless, and sins only through deliberate actions. Pelagius insisted that many Old Testament figures actually remained sinless. Only those who were morally upright could be allowed to enter the church – whereas Augustine, with his concept of fallen human nature, was happy to regard the church as a hospital where fallen humanity could recover and grow gradually in holiness through grace.

## **The Nature of Grace**

### **For St. Augustine:**

We are totally dependent upon God for our salvation, from the beginning to the end of our lives. A favorite biblical text is “Apart from me you can do nothing” (**Jn 15:5**). Augustine draws a careful distinction between the natural human faculties – given to humanity as its natural endowment – and additional special gifts of grace. God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven, and restored. St. Augustine’s view of human nature is that it is frail, weak, and lost, and needs divine assistance and care if it is to be restored and renewed. Grace, according to Augustine, is God’s generous and quite unmerited attention to humanity, by which this process of healing may begin. Human nature requires transformation through the grace of God, so generously given.

### **For Pelagius:**

The term ‘grace’ is used in a very different way. First, grace is to be understood as the natural human faculties. For Pelagius, these are not corrupted or incapacitated or compromised in any way. God has given them to humanity, and they are meant to be used. When Pelagius asserted that humanity could, through grace, choose to be sinless, what he meant was that the natural human faculties of will and reason should enable humanity to choose to avoid sin. As Augustine was quick to point out, this is not what the New Testament understands by the term. Second, Pelagius understood grace to be external enlightenment provided for humanity by God. Pelagius gave several examples of such enlightenment – for example, the Ten Commandments, and the moral example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace informs us what our moral duties are; it does not, however, assist us to perform them. We are enabled to avoid sin through the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Augustine argued that this was “to locate the grace of God in the law and in teaching”. The New Testament, according to St. Augustine, envisaged grace as divine assistance to humanity, rather than just moral guidance. For Pelagius, grace was something external and passive, something outside us. St. Augustine understood grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in our Lord Jesus Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active.

### **For Pelagius:**

God created humanity, and provided information concerning what is right and what is wrong – and then ceased to take any interest in humanity, apart from the final Day of Judgment. On that day, individuals will be judged according to whether they have fulfilled all their moral obligation in their totality. Failure to have done so will lead to eternal punishment. Pelagius’ exhortations to moral perfection are characterized by their emphasis upon the dreadful fate of those who fail in this matter.

### **For St. Augustine:**

Humanity was created good by God, and then fell away from Him – and God, in an act of grace, came to rescue fallen humanity from its predicament. He assists us by healing us, enlightening us, strengthening us, and continually working within us in order to restore us.

### **For Pelagius:**

Humanity needed to be shown what to do, and could then be left to achieve it unaided.



**For St. Augustine:**

Humanity needs to be shown what to do, and then gently aided at every point, if this objective was even to be approached, let alone fulfilled.

**The Basis of Salvation****For St. Augustine:**

Humanity is justified as an act of grace: Even human good works are the result of God working within fallen human nature. Everything leading up to salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God, given out of love for sinners. Through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is enabled to deal with fallen humanity in this remarkable and generous manner, giving us that which we do not deserve (salvation), and withholding from us that which we do deserve (condemnation).

**For Pelagius:**

Humanity is justified on the basis of its merits: Human good works are the result of the exercise of the totally autonomous human free will, in fulfillment of an obligation laid down by God. A failure to meet this obligation opens the individual to the threat of eternal punishment. Our Lord Jesus Christ is involved in salvation only to the extent that he reveals, by His actions and teaching, exactly what God requires of the individual. If Pelagius can speak of 'salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ', it is only in the sense of 'salvation through imitating the example of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

It will thus be clear that Pelagianism and Augustinianism represent two radically different outlooks, with sharply divergent understandings of the manner in which God and humanity relate to one another. The Council of Carthage (418) decided for St. Augustine's views on grace and sin, and condemned Pelagianism in uncompromising terms.

**Comment: St. Augustine's anti-Pelagian views about grace were used as a springboard for many heresies\* and therefore should be understood in contrast to the views of his opponent Pelagius in order not to be taken out of context.**

This lecture is adapted from '*Christian Theology: An Introduction*' by Alister E. McGrath.

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\* Salvation by Grace Alone, Predestination, and Eternal Security.

## **Lecture IV: Grace in The Orthodox Perspective**

**“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10)**

Is a person saved by his works or by the grace of God? Many went far in defending both and were mistaken. As a general rule, the Orthodox view concerning any issue of debate is the moderate approach between two extremes. The controversy reached its peak in the sixteenth century when medieval Roman Catholicism was stressing the importance of good works to please God; as a result, people were living in uncertainty and terror. It was this vision of Catholicism that helped inspire the Protestant leadership to rebel and to define grace and justification in other terms.

The foundation for the Protestant teachings was provided by St. Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings and the misinterpretation of St. Paul’s writings to the Romans and the Galatians. Indeed, the epistles of St. Paul contain “things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction” (**2 Pet 3:16**).

### **Grace as a Gift:**

By definition, grace is a gift but St. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians “not to receive the grace [gift] of God in vain” (**2 Cor 6:1**). He said concerning himself, “His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all [the rest of the apostles]” (**1 Cor 15:10**)

→ Therefore, even though grace is a gift, we shouldn’t receive it in vain. St. Paul exhorted St. Timothy saying, “**Do not neglect the gift that is in you**” (**1 Tim 4:14**). In the parable of the unforgiving servant (**Mt 18:23-35**), notice that this servant lost the free gift of his master due to his evil deeds!

### **Example (1):**

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His disciples **the gift** of having power and authority over unclean spirits. He said, “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (**Lk 10:19**). Moreover, when the disciple said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (**Lk 10:17**), He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (**Lk 10:18**). Obviously, the weak human nature of the disciples has no power over demons but through the grace of God they were able to have authority over them.

On another occasion, the disciples failed to cast out a demon from an epileptic boy and they asked the Lord privately, “Why could we not cast him out?” (**Mt 17:19**). Lord Jesus replied, “**This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting**” (**Mt 17:21**). Now should the authority over demons be considered a free gift from God or a reward for human work (praying and fasting)? It is definitely a gift from God, but this gift should not be received in vain (**2 Cor 6:1**)

It is written, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and **the communion of the Holy Spirit** be with you all” (**2 Cor 13:14**). It is a communion between the two working together, the Holy Spirit and man, as St. Paul said, “We are God’s fellow workers” (**1 Cor 3:9**). God will not save you unless your human free will responds to His grace, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (**Heb 3:8**). Also, good works alone will not

save a person. Therefore the Church teaches us to pray in the midnight prayer saying, "In my works (apart from grace) I shall have no salvation."

The Holy Spirit is able to save and redeem you, but **He will not do it alone**. He wants you to participate with Him in managing your life. This is the communion of the Holy Spirit. Given the universal saving will of God and the rejection of the heresy of predestination, if the Holy Spirit (grace) worked alone, then why are there righteous people and evil ones? If the matter were truly confined to grace alone, there would not exist a single sinner on earth. The mere existence of just a single sinner not willing to repent is irrefutable evidence that **grace alone doesn't save anybody**.

#### **Example (2):**

Did the people defeat Amalek due to the fighting of Joshua's army or due to the prayer of Moses? Joshua was leading the army in the war while Moses stood on the top of the hill holding up his hands in prayer (**Ex 17:11**). Focusing on one of them and neglecting the other would be a mistake; Joshua alone, regardless of how hard he fought, without the prayers of Moses (God's help) would never have defeated Amalek. Nevertheless, Moses' prayer did not mean that the army would slacken before the enemy. Fighting (human work) and prayer (God's grace) went together, side by side, they are inseparable.

#### **Example (3):**

How did David defeat Goliath? David depended on God and said to Goliath, "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts ... for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands" (**1Sam 17:45-47**). Yet David chose for himself five stones from the brook and he hastened and ran toward the army to meet Goliath. He put the stone into the sling and struck skillfully, he then had to draw Goliath's sword from its sheath and kill him. All these steps are works. Nevertheless, we ascribe victory to God and not to the skill of David. There must be striving and labor, but at the end, success is ascribed to God.

#### **Grace and Free Will:**

Free will is a gift from God and salvation is also a gift from God. **God's gifts do not contradict or cancel each other**. Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit within us does not abolish our free will; we can respond to His work, participate in it with Him and be led by Him, we can also stop and refuse His work within us. St. Stephen said to the Jews, "You always **resist the Holy Spirit**" (**Acts 7:51**)

#### **St. Paul tells us:**

- "Do not quench the Spirit." (**1 Thess 5:19**)
- "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." (**Eph 4:30**)

Grace offers us help and we have the option to accept or refuse it. If we participate with the Holy Spirit in action, we will, by the grace of God, attain perfect holiness according to the extent of our response and submission. But if we refuse, grace would never force us to do well. The great divine physician is ready and willing to heal but He is asking you, "**Do you want to be made well?**" (**Jn 5:6**)

#### **Grace & Spiritual Warfare:**

In (**Eph 6:10-18**) we find wrestling, spiritual fight and striving using the whole armor of God. God's weapons have their power, but if you don't use them, you will be defeated. We notice

also that among such spiritual weapons are righteousness, prayer, supplication and being watchful, which are all works! St. Peter said, “resist him (the devil), steadfast in the faith” (**1 Pet 5:9**). Resist the devil, strive, be firm and brave but do not depend on your human abilities; you ought rather to resist him steadfast in the faith. This verse combines both sides: striving in resisting the devil and faith upon which the one who strives depends.

It is a striving but not a personal one separate from God’s work. It is rather a combination of both as St. Paul describes his preaching, “To this end I labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (**Col 1:29**). It is this striving that he called for while rebuking the Hebrews, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (**Heb 12:4**) and in his advise to St. Timothy, “Fight the good fight of faith” (**1 Tim 6:12**). H.H. Pope Shenouda III once said, “In the spiritual warfare, you conquer with your weakness not your strength”. God said to St. Paul, “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (**2 Cor 12:9**), King Solomon said, “God gives grace to the humble” (**Prov 3:34**). Therefore, resist the devil with all your power but “**do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing**” (**Mt 6:3**). In other words do not take credit for any victory but attribute all success to God.

#### **Example (4):**

There is a beautiful story in the Holy Book of Judges that illustrates the last concept very nicely. Gideon was preparing to fight the Midianites and he gathered a huge army of thousands of soldiers but the Lord said, “The people who are with you are **too many for Me** to give the Midianites into their hands, **lest Israel claim glory for itself** against Me, saying, my own hands has saved me” (**Judges 7:2**). So God decreased the number of the soldiers until it reached 300 and He said, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you” (**Judges 7:7**). The same happened with St. Paul due to the abundance of revelations, lest he be exalted above measure, God gave him a thorn in the flesh (**2 Cor 12:7**). When St. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from him, the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (**2 Cor 12:9**)

→ Indeed, “we have this treasure (grace) in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (**2 Cor 4:7**)

**Q. St. Paul said, “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16). Does this verse mean that human will and striving (running) do not play a role in salvation?**

**A.** This can never be the meaning; it is impossible to say that St. Paul meant this by these words. He who said, “*not of him who runs*” said about himself “***I have finished the race***” (**2 Tim 4:7**). The same person who said “*not of him who runs*” said about himself. “***I press toward the goal***” (**Phil 3:14**). Moreover, St. Paul said to us, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may obtain it**” (**1Cor 9:24**), “**Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**” (**Heb 12:1**), St. Paul continues to say about himself, “**Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty**” (**1 Cor 9:26**)

St. Paul still ran and pressed onward though he was filled with the Holy Spirit and grace worked in him more than anyone. Yet he was in need to run, to press on, to finish the race and to fight the good fight. Indeed, as he said, “His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all” (**1Cor 15:10**). Nevertheless, St. Paul doesn’t give

himself credit for his work and says, “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10)

It is true that it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but God who shows mercy. **But toward whom does God show mercy?** It is to them who will and who run.

Consider these words of St. Paul, “**Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase**” (1 Cor 3:7). True indeed, it is God who gives the increase, but to what? It is to the plant, which is planted and watered. Therefore, we must not abstain from planting and watering saying that neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, and wait **foolishly** for God to give the increase! The right thing is to plant and water, yet attribute the increase to God.

Likewise, we must run and strive yet attribute our success to the mercy and grace of God, saying with St. Paul, “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16)

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*\* This Lecture is adapted from ‘Salvation in The Orthodox Concept’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*

## **Lecture V: Predestination in The Orthodox Concept**

**“Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.” (Rom 8:29)**

### **St. Augustine & Predestination:**

Grace is a gift, not a reward. This insight is fundamental to St. Augustine. If grace were a reward, humans could purchase their salvation through good works. They could earn their redemption. Yet this, according to St. Augustine, was totally contrary to the New Testament proclamation of the doctrine of grace (Please review the previous lecture: ‘Grace in the Orthodox Perspective’). Affirming the gift character of grace was a bulwark against inadequate theories of salvation. St. Augustine’s insight had much to commend it. However, on further inspection, it proved to have its darker side. As the Pelagian controversy became increasingly hardened and bitter, the more negative implications of St. Augustine’s doctrine of grace became clearer. In what follows, we shall explore those implications.

If grace is a gift, God must be free to offer it, or not to offer it, on the basis of any external consideration. If it is offered on the basis of any such consideration, it is no longer a gift – it is a reward for a specific action or attitude. Grace, according to St. Augustine, only remains gracious if it is nothing more or nothing less than a gift, reflecting the liberality of the one who gives. But the gift is not given to all. It is particular. Grace is only given to some (It is actually offered to all, but not all accept it). St. Augustine’s defense of the graciousness of God, which rests on his belief that God must be free to give or withhold grace, thus entails the recognition of the *particularity*, rather than the *universality*, of grace.

If this insight is linked with St. Augustine’s doctrine of sin, its full implications become clear. All of humanity is contaminated by sin, and unable to break free from its grasp. Only grace can set humanity free. Yet grace is not bestowed universally; it is only granted to some individuals. As a result only some will be saved- those to whom grace is given. St. Augustine emphasized that this did not mean that some were predestined to damnation. It meant that God had selected some from the mass of fallen humanity. The chosen few were indeed predestined for salvation. The remainder were not, according to St. Augustine, actively condemned to damnation; they were merely not elected to salvation. However, as his critics pointed out, the decision to redeem some was also a decision *not* to redeem others.

This question surfaced with new force during the predestinarian controversy of the ninth century, in which the Benedictine monk Godescalc of Orbais (c.804-c.869, also known as Gottschalk) developed a doctrine of double predestination similar to that later associated with Calvin and his followers. Pursuing with relentless logic the implications of his assertion that God has predestined some to eternal damnation, Godescalc pointed out that it was thus quite improper to speak of our Lord Jesus Christ dying for such individuals; if he had, he would have died in vain, for their fate would be unaffected. Hesitant over the implications of this assertion, Godescalc proposed that our Lord Jesus Christ died *only for the elect*. The scope of his redeeming work was restricted, limited only to those who were predestined to benefit from his death. Most ninth-century writers reacted to this assertion with disbelief. It was however to resurface in later Calvinism. (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*).

### **The Universal Saving Will of God:**

- “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (**Ez 33:11**)
- “God our Savior, who desires **all men** to be saved.” (**1 Tim 2:4**)
- “God so **loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (**Jn 3:16**)
- “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not ours only but also for the whole world.” (**1 Jn 2:2**)
- “Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **every creature**.” (**Mk 16:15**)

#### Human Free Will:

- “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore **choose life**.” (**Deut 30:19**)
- “**If you are willing** and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but **if you refuse** and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword” (**Is 1:19-20**)
- “**If anyone desires** to come after Me, let him deny himself.” (**Mt 16:27**)
- “**If you want** to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (**Mt 19:17**)
- “**If you want** to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor.” (**Mt 19:21**)
- “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him...” (**Rev 3:20**)
- “How often I **wanted** to gather your children together... but **you were not willing!**” (**Mt 23:37**)
- “**You are not willing to come to Me** that you may have life.” (**Jn 5:40**)
- “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and **they were not willing to come**.” (**Mt 22:2-3**) – “He came to His own, and His own **did not receive Him**.” (**Jn 1:11**)

#### God’s Foreknowledge:

God, through His divine foreknowledge and recognition of what would take place in the future, knows who would do the things that please Him in righteousness and goodness using their free will. God also knows who would choose to do evil and disobey Him misusing the gift of free will.

→ God’s foreknowledge does not interfere with our given free will. Moreover, the divine universal saving will of God is different from His foreknowledge in case of those who perish. In other words, God wants them to be saved but He knows that they will take the wrong decisions.

#### Predestination in the Orthodox Concept:

St. Paul said, “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose ... for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (**Rom 8:28-30**). Notice that St. Paul said that all things work together for good to **those who love God**, he did not say, **to whom God loves**. Because it depends on them not on God.

Likewise he said, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have come into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (**1 Cor 2:9**). He did not say **‘whom He loves’** because their salvation depends on their response to the grace of God.

→ Therefore, we believe that God's predestination for salvation is not due to His will (for God wants all to be saved) but rather due to His divine foreknowledge, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined". The same is clear from the words of St. Peter, "**elect according to the foreknowledge of God**" (1 Pet 1:2). The key point is to differentiate between God's will and His foreknowledge.

**Example (1):**

It is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Rom 9:13)

Both Jacob and Esau were called to salvation, for God loves all equally and He doesn't show partiality (Deut 10:17). But God foreknew how these two individuals would **freely** respond to His call: Esau was hated (rejected), only because God foreknew he would choose wrongly and be wicked. Jacob was loved (accepted) because God foreknew he would participate in the faith of Abraham and serve God's purposes. God's foreknowledge did not interfere with their free will. Therefore, St. Paul said, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? **Certainly not!**" (Rom 9:14)

Similarly, though at one time St. Paul persecuted the Church, God foreknew he would repent and had elected him before he was born, "God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace" (Gal 1:15). St. Paul's persecution of the Church is a clear manifestation of free will, for obviously God's Predestination (from the womb) did not interfere with his free will.

**Example (2):**

It is written, "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" (Rom 9:21)

The potter (God) has power over the clay to make whatever he wants from it whether a vessel for honor or dishonor. But the potter (God) is also wise and just. It is absurd that a wonderful lump of clay comes into the hands of this wise potter and he makes it a vessel of dishonor. On the other hand, if the clay is rough and not fit to be a vessel for honor, the potter, then, will be obliged, due to its bad state, to make from it a vessel for dishonor. Thus it all depends upon the condition of the clay because the potter's will is to make all the clay vessels of honor.

→ **Consider the following verses:**

"Look, **as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!** The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down. And to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good which I said I would benefit it" (Jer 18:6-10)

It is clear from the above passage that God (the potter) is even willing to revoke His judgment if a person turns from his evil way and seeks his own salvation. The story of Nineveh is a clear example.

The principle of predestination and election, as the Protestants teach it, implies injustice and partiality. It also leads sinners to despair, feeling that their striving to repent is in vain and



useless since they are vessels predestined for dishonor and damnation. As for the righteous, it leads them to slackness and negligence. Moreover, it leaves many questions unanswered:

- a. Why did God give the world His commandments, if indeed people were predestined for salvation and damnation?
- b. Why would the devil toil in tempting the elect, if they will certainly be saved?
- c. On what basis would reward be given to the elect, if they had no choice in their destiny?
- d. Why would God punish a person predestined to perdition?

The doctrine of predestination, as the Protestants (Calvinists) understand it, leads the world into confusion and contradicts God's love and justice and humans' free will.

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*\* This lecture is adapted from, 'Salvation in The Orthodox Concept' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*

## Lecture VI: Would a Believer Perish?

**“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction.” (Phil 3:18)**

According to the heresy of ‘Eternal Security’, a believer would never perish. Generally speaking, Protestants believe that salvation is by **grace alone: Salvation is understood to be God’s free gift and is therefore guaranteed.** In what follows we shall examine this teaching in light of the Holy Scriptures:

### ✦ **The example of the cut off branch:**

In the Holy Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul compares the Jews who did not believe to natural branches broken off their olive tree, and the Gentiles **who believed** to a wild olive tree grafted in instead of them: “If some branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (**Rom 11:17**). He then says to the Gentiles, “You will say then, branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off and **you stand by faith**” (**Rom 11:19-20**)

It is obvious that St. Paul is speaking to believers who are now grafted in the olive tree and are partakers of its root and fatness. Now consider what the apostle says to those believers:

“Do not be haughty, but **fear**. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, **you also will be cut off**” (**Rom 11:20-22**)

Why is there any reason for fear, if salvation was indeed guaranteed? The last words **‘you also will be cut off’** are a warning to those believers that they would perish unless they continue in God’s goodness. This example is similar to what the Lord said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” (**Jn 15:1-2**), “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (**Jn 15:6**). Therefore, **a believer** who remains unfruitful will certainly perish.

### **The example of the apostates & heretics:**

The heretics and apostates were **believers** who departed from the sound faith and perished. St. Paul said, “**Some will depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (**1 Tim 4:2**). Undoubtedly, those who gave heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons perished as mentioned in (**Gal 5:20**). However, the words **‘will depart from the faith’** show that **they were indeed believers at one point.**

In the Holy Book of Revelation, we read about the doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitans, which our Lord hates (**Rev 2:6,15**), those Nicolaitans are the followers of Nicolas who was among the seven deacons mentioned in (**Acts 6:5**). Now, Nicolas, who departed from the sound faith, was not a regular believer for he met the criteria set by the apostles for deaconship, “seek out from among you seven men **of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business” (**Acts 6:3**) yet he deviated and perished.

Another example is Demas, St. Paul's assistant, who was mentioned in his epistles, "Luke the beloved physician and **Demas** greet you" (**Col 4:14**), "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, **Demas**, Luke, **my fellow laborers**" (**Phil 23-24**). Demas, the preacher and the coworker of St. Paul, was certainly a believer. But read what happened to him, "**Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world**" (**2 Tim 4:10**). In other words, Demas became an enemy of God because "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (**Jam 4:4**)

In the parable of the sower, our Lord said, "the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, **receive the word with joy**; and these have no root, who **believe for a while** and in time of temptation fall away" (**Lk 8:13**). Certainly, those who fall away in time of temptation will have no salvation. Yet, our Lord did say that they "**received the word with joy**" and that they "**believed for a while**". This **while** may extend for years! St. Paul said, "Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless **the falling away comes first** and the man of sin is revealed" (**2 Thess 2:3**). No doubt, in such massive falling away, many believers will perish (**Heb 6:4-6**). It was said about the beast from the sea, "It was granted to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**" (**Rev 13:7**). The word "**saints**" undoubtedly means that they were believers, but they lost everything because they didn't overcome the beast, "He **who overcomes** shall inherit all things" (**Rev 21:7**)

St. Peter said, "For if, after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (**2 Pet 2:20-21**). Certainly, those who "**escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and savior Jesus Christ**" were believers; yet, they perished for they turned from the commandment.

### **Sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of truth:**

In the Holy Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul writes to the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (**Heb 3:1**), "Partakers of Christ" (**Heb 3:14**), who "after being illuminated, endured a great struggle with sufferings" (**Heb 10:32**). He even tells them, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" (**Heb 10:19**). But what does he say to them?

"If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (**Heb 10:26-27**). It is a warning to whoever sins of those '**holy brethren**' that he/she would perish. Therefore, a believer who sins and does not repent will perish. What else does he say?

"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant **by which he was sanctified** a common thing and **insulted the Spirit of Grace?** (**Heb 10:29**). The words '**by which he was sanctified**' prove that this person who perished was a believer and was sanctified by our Lord Jesus Christ's blood. Moreover, the words '**insulted the Spirit of Grace**' refute any claim about the so-called 'Irresistible Grace'.

→ St. Stephen said to the Jews, "You always **resist the Holy Spirit**" (**Acts 7:51**)

The Holy Book of Acts recorded the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, the two believers, who sinned willfully and perished as a result (**Acts 5**). It is written, “great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (**Acts 5:11**). If the apostles taught that once you believe, your salvation is guaranteed no matter what you do, what is the reason then for this great fear?

### **The example of the disobedient people in the wilderness:**

St. Paul continues his exhortation to the *‘holy brethren and partakers of the heavenly calling’* saying, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts **as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness**” (**Heb 3:7-8**). What happened on this day of rebellion? What does it signify here?

Those who rebelled against the Lord and provoked Him are the disobedient people in the wilderness of Sinai. The Lord said, “I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest” (**Heb 3:11**). These people, who perished and their corps fell in the wilderness, had not they been saved before? St. Paul answers, “For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?” (**Heb 3:16**)

The Lord had delivered them from the bondage, divided the Red Sea for them and they crossed it as a symbol of baptism, “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (**1 Cor 10:2**). However, in spite of all this, they perished in the wilderness and lost their salvation. The Apostle warns *‘the holy brethren’* saying, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience” (**Heb 4:11**), “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, **let us fear** lest any of you (holy brethren!) seem to have come short of it” (**Heb 4:1**)

The example of the disobedient people in the wilderness brings to mind Lot’s wife who was saved from the destruction of Sodom, yet, perished outside the city. Therefore, our Lord said, **“Remember Lot’s wife”** (**Lk 17:32**). Indeed, “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (**1Cor 10:11-12**)

### **The example of Judas Iscariot:**

Judas was one of the twelve disciples chosen by the Lord (**Mt 10:4**), he was given authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease (**Mt 10:1**), it was given to him to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (**Mt 13:10-11**), he left all and followed the Lord (**Mt 19:27**), he was a candidate to sit on a throne with our Lord in His glory and judge the tribes of Israel (**Mt 19:28**), moreover, he did not go back with the rest of the disciples who did not believe the words of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning the Eucharist (**Jn 6:66**)

This Judas, the chosen disciple, the believer, the wonderworker, who was remorseful when our Lord was delivered to death, who regretted and confessed his sin in front of the high priests (**Mt 27:3-4**), perished and the Holy Bible calls him ‘the son of perdition’ (**Jn 17:12**) not only because he betrayed the Lord but also because he lost hope and killed himself. We cannot say that Judas was not a believer because, on one occasion, the Lord called him a devil (**Jn 6:70**), for He called St. Peter Satan in (**Mk 8:33**) and also it is written that even demons believe and tremble (**Jam 2:19**)

### **The example of lack of good works:**

St. James said, “What does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (**Jam 2:14**). This brother who has faith is certainly a believer, but this believer who lacks good works will perish **“can faith save him?”** “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (**Jam 4:17**) → “The wages of sin is death” (**Rom 6:23**)

### **The example of lack of love:**

In (**1 Cor 13:1-3**): The person who, speaks the tongues of men and angles, has the gift of prophecy and understands all mysteries, has **all the faith** to move mountains, feeds the poor, and gives his body to be burned, is without a doubt a believer. This extraordinary believer, if he doesn't have love, is nothing and will perish. This should remind us of the angel of the Church of Ephesus (**Rev 2:1-7**); he was certainly a believer compared to a star in the right hand of Lord Jesus (**Rev 1:20; 2:1**), He labored, had patience, and could not bear evil (**Rev 2:2**), also he has preserved and has not become weary (**Rev 2:3**). Nevertheless, because he left his first love (**Rev 2:4**), even though he was still a believer, he needed to repent and do the first works (**Rev 2:5**), or else he would perish (**Rev 2:5**)

**Obviously the doctrine of ‘Eternal Security of The Believers’ is flawed contradicting Holy Scriptures, for all the elect are indeed believers but not all the believers are elect!**

**“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2Pet 1:10)**

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*\* This lecture is adapted from ‘Salvation in the Orthodox Concept’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*

## **Lecture VII: Confidence in Salvation**

**“A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.” (Prov 14:16)**

Salvation depends on the grace of God, **“by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:8)**, and it also depends on the response of our free will to the call of God’s grace, **“have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph 4:1)**, **“If you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:8)** Therefore, when we speak of confidence in salvation we ought to speak about confidence in God and about self-confidence.

### **Confidence in God:**

A believer should have an unlimited trust and hope in God. Since God’s mercy is unlimited, hope in such mercy should likewise be unlimited. Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned in **(1 Cor 13:13)** and, like any other virtue, grows in a person until it reaches its relative perfection in him/her. Perfect hope is void of any doubt and is confirmed with all certainty. It is founded on faith in God’s attributes, His previous dealings with us, the unlimited atonement of His precious blood and His true promises. God’s mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and love are unlimited. The atonement of His blood is sufficient for the remission of the sins of the whole world from the beginning of the ages to the end of time, not only once but an unlimited number of times.

### **Self-confidence:**

Although we should have an unlimited trust in God, we should not trust our free will, which may deviate towards evil, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” **(1 Jn 1:8)**. It is foolish **(Prov 14:16)** to think that one had done away with sin and that he/she is renewed and sanctified leading a new life in which he/she **can never sin**. We are not stronger than those who fell before, but perhaps we are in a lower level than they before their fall. St. Paul said, “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and power of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance” **(Heb 6:4-6)**. Did you, who trust that you will attain the Kingdom, reach this high level that those have reached? However, those who received such gifts fell away and perished being compared to a land that is “rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned” **(Heb 6:8)**. St. Paul said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” **(1 Cor 9:27)**. This great saint, who was chosen from his mother’s womb and was called through grace **(Gal 1:15)**, who was caught up into Paradise **(2 Cor 12:4)**, disciplined his body lest he himself should be disqualified and we are talking about self-confidence!

### **Conditions for self-confidence:**

St. John said, **“If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence towards God**, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, **because we keep His commandments** and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” **(1 Jn 3:21-22)**. The condition is that our consciences have nothing to blame us for, in other words we do not do anything wrong for which our hearts might reproach us.

St. John also said, “Little children, **abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence** and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” **(1 Jn 2:28)**. What does abiding in our Lord Jesus Christ mean? St. John said, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself

also to walk just as He walked” (1 Jn 2:6), “Whoever abides in Him does not sin” (1 Jn 3:6). Who dares, after reading these verses, to say that he/she is abiding in the Lord? Now if we cannot say this, how could we say that we have confidence?

Finally, St. John said, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that **we may have boldness** in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in the world” (1 Jn 4:17). Let us ask ourselves, have we attained this perfect love? Do we love the Lord from all our hearts, minds, power, and thoughts? Are we in the world in the same way our Lord was? **If so, blessed are we. We can have confidence!**

### Passages that require clarification:

#### (1) Our Lord said,

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand**” (Jn 10:27-28)

- First of all, these people were called ‘**sheep**’, which means that they are among those who will be set on our Lord’s right hand in the day of judgment, since the ‘**goats**’ will be set on His left (Mt 25:32-33) They hear the Lord’s voice and follow Him (i.e. keep the commandments), and “they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him” (Jn 10:5). Certainly, this kind will never perish. Secondly, being in the hand of the Lord doesn’t mean that the sheep lost their free will. In the Holy Book of Revelation, we read about the seven angels (bishops) of the Churches being in the Lord’s **right hand** (Rev 1:16; 20). The term ‘**right hand**’ represents the Lord’s power (Ps 118:15-16). Yet, one of these angels fell and needed repentance (Rev 2:5), another had a name that he is alive but he was dead (Rev 3:1), the third was lukewarm and the Lord was about to vomit him out of His mouth (Rev 3:16), he was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). Indeed, no one can snatch the sheep out of the Lord’s hand, but the sheep are free to depart, “Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls” (1 Cor 10:12)

#### (2) St. Paul said,

“Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is **the guarantee of our inheritance**” (Eph 1:13-14)

- St. Paul also said to the Ephesians, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), and to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1Thess 5:19). Moreover, one can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (refuse repentance) and never receive forgiveness (Mk 3:29), because he/she “insulted the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29). Therefore, the Church teaches us to pray humbly with King David saying, “do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11).

#### (3) St. John said,

“There shall by no means enter it (Heavenly Jerusalem) anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only **those who are written in the lamb’s Book of Life**” (Rev 21:17). Our Lord said to His disciples, “Rejoice because **your names are written in heaven**” (Lk 10:20). St. Paul said, “...my fellow workers, **whose names are in the Book of Life**” (Phil 4:3)

- Having our names in the Book of Life is not a guarantee for salvation. The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My Book” (**Ex 32:33**). Notices that Judas was among the disciples whose names were written in heaven (**Lk 10:20**) and likewise Demas, St. Paul’s fellow worker (**Phil 24**), both of who perished! We need to overcome in order to keep our names in the Book of Life, “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life” (**Rev 3:5**)

**(4) It is written**

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for **He who promised is faithful**” (**Heb 10:23**)

- Indeed God is faithful in His promise of salvation. Therefore we should have confidence in such promise. But concerning ourselves, it is written, “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it” (**Heb 4:1**). Truly, “If we deny Him, He also will deny us” (**2 Tim 2:12**). Therefore, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (**Phil 2:12**), and “Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (**1 Pet 1:17**). Finally, have all the confidence in God and at the same time “do not be haughty, but fear”(**Rom 11:20**)

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*\*This lecture is adapted from, 'Salvation in the Orthodox Concept' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*



## **Lecture VIII: Salvation in The Orthodox Perspective**

**“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.” (Heb 2:3)**

### **The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ & Salvation:**

Salvation is **only** available **through the blood** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Heb 9:22**). The Passover lamb was a symbol of our Lord, “For indeed **Christ, our Passover**, was sacrificed for us” (**1 Cor 5:7**). Through the blood of the lamb, the Israelites were saved from death, “Now **the blood** shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see **the blood**, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (**Ex 12:13**)

Through this precious Blood sins are remitted and we enter in a new covenant with God, “This is My **blood of the new covenant** which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (**Mt 26:28**)

### **Some Biblical References**

- “ Shepherd the Church of God which He purchased **with His own blood.**” (**Acts 20:28**)
- “Having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (**Rom 5:9**)
- “In Him **we have redemption through His blood.**” (**Eph 1:7**) & (**Col 1:14**)
- “In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near **by the blood of Christ.**” (**Eph 2:13**)
- “Having made peace through **the blood of His cross.**” (**Col 1:20**)
- “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with **His own blood** He entered the most Holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” (**Heb 9:12**)
- “...How much more shall **the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (**Heb 9:14**)
- “Therefore brethren having boldness to enter the Holiest **by the blood of Jesus.**” (**Heb 10:19**)
- “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will be thought worthy who has trampled the son of God underfoot, counted **the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified** a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (**Heb 10:29**)
- “...To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to **the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel**” (**Heb 12:24**)

→ The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ *speaks better things than that of Abel* because the blood of Abel was seeking revenge as God said to Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (**Gen 4:10**). On the other hand, the blood of Lord Jesus Christ was seeking forgiveness of sins, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” (**Lk 23:34**)

- “Now may the God of peace ... **through the blood of the everlasting covenant**, make you complete in every good work to do His will.” (**Heb 13:20-21**)
- “You were not redeemed with corruptible things ...but with **the precious blood of Christ** as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (**1 Pet 1:18-19**)
- “There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and **the blood**; and these three agree as one.” (**1 Jn 5:8**)

- "... The **blood of Jesus Christ** His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn 1:7)
- "... To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins **in His own blood** ..." (Rev 1:5)
- "... You were slain, and have redeemed us to God **by Your blood** ..." (Rev 5:9)
- "These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white **in the blood of the lamb.**" (Rev 7:14)
- "And they over came him **by the blood of the lamb** ..." (Rev 12:11)

#### **Application of the above concept:**

1. The sins of the people in the Old Testament were not forgiven until the day of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. All the sins of the Old Testament were merely "put away" as Nathan the Prophet said to King David, "The Lord also has **put away your sin**; you shall not die" (2 Sam 12:13). He didn't say '*has forgiven your sin*' because "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb 9:22). Hence, the Paradise was closed in front all the righteous people of the Old Testament until the day when our Lord Jesus Christ shed His Blood on the cross and sins were remitted. The term "put away" means that the sin is transferred from one's account to the account of the Savior.
2. When our Lord said to the paralytic "your sins are forgiven you" (Lk 5:20), He merely gave him a promise of forgiveness or a check so to speak, which would be cashed on the cross. This applies to all the instances where forgiveness and salvation were mentioned before the crucifixion (the sinful woman, the tax collector, Zacchaeus, and others...)

#### **Conditions for Salvation:**

→ Our Lord said that His blood is shed for **many** (Mt 26:28) but in reality only **few** are saved (Mt 7:13-14)

→ This sad reality is due to the fact that there are certain conditions (prerequisites) for salvation:

- a) Faith.
- b) Saving Sacraments:
  - i. Baptism.
  - ii. Confirmation.
  - iii. Repentance & Confession.
  - iv. Eucharist.
2. Good Works.

→ Each of these conditions will be discussed separately after we clarify certain points:

1. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist don't apply to the people of the Old Testament because they acquire their saving efficacy from the blood of our Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit, which pertains to the New Testament. Nevertheless, the people of the Old Testament had symbols of these Sacraments like Circumcision being symbolic for Baptism (Col 2:11-12)
2. The above conditions for salvation apply to normal responsible adults. Whenever these conditions are mentioned, people come up with all sorts of scenarios to question them. For instance, mentally challenged individuals and infants don't possess the intellectual ability to understand and believe and therefore the condition of faith doesn't apply to them.
3. The Sacrament of the Priesthood administers to us the saving Sacraments and therefore plays a major role in our salvation and even though we don't have to become priests to be

saved, we do need them for our salvation as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (**1 Cor 4:1**)

### **Salvation is the story of the whole life:**

St. Paul said that, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God” (**1 Cor 1:18**). Salvation in the Orthodox concept is seen as comprehending all of life; it is not a historical event that took place during a moment in the past. As the subject of salvation is addressed in Holy Scripture, the Orthodox Christian would see it in at least three aspects:

- a) I believe that I **have been** saved, having put on our Lord Jesus Christ in baptism.
- b) I believe that I **am being** saved through the sacramental life of the Church.
- c) I believe that I **will be** saved, by God’s mercy in the Last Day of Judgment.

The story of salvation starts by faith, repentance and baptism, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (**Mk 16:16**), “Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (**Acts 2:38**), this remission includes the original sin as well as all actual sins committed before baptism. Baptism provides us with salvation, forgiveness and regeneration. In baptism we are buried with our Lord Jesus Christ (**Col 2:12**), we die and rise with Him in the newness of life (**Rom 6:4**), “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (**Rom 6:6**). Through baptism, we become children of God and members of His body (the Church). Moreover, St. Paul said, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (**Gal 3:27**)

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, “you have an anointing from the Holy One” (**1 Jn 2:20**), and we become a temple of the Holy Spirit, “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” (**1Cor 6:19**). As a result of our response to the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we grow spiritually and bear the fruits of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22-23**)

Unfortunately, we still sin after being baptized and confirmed, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (**1 Jn 1:18**). Even though our nature was renewed, we did not become infallible. The nature we receive in baptism is pure, yet liable to sin, as was Adam’s nature before the fall. The gift of regeneration that we receive in baptism does not cancel the gift of free will. Nevertheless, there is a difference between people who sin without being baptized, while living the life of wickedness and those who sin after baptism. The later have the Holy Spirit to rebuke and lead them to repentance, sin is temporary unless a person, with his/her free will, decides to reject repentance insulting the spirit of grace (**Heb 10:29**) and thus blasphemes against the Holy Spirit (**Lk 12:10**)

Through repentance and confession we are being saved, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (**Lk 13:3, 5**), “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1 Jn 1: 9**). Additionally, we obtain salvation during Holy Eucharist, as the priest says in the Divine Liturgy, “... given for us salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it”, “whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (**Jn 6:54**)

Our life on earth is a test of our faith, “Now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7). Indeed, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Moreover, we are subject to spiritual warfare, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12), “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a raring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8)

Our Lord said, “He who endures **to the end** will be saved” (Mt 10:22), “He **who overcomes** shall inherit all things” (Rev 21:8). St. Paul said, “Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27), therefore, he also said, “Work out you salvation in fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12) and St. Peter exhorts us, “conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet 1:17). The outcome of our life and struggle will be revealed in the last day, “...you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” (1 Pet 1:5). Therefore, our Lord said, “Be faithful **until death**, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10)

**Since the spiritual struggle and warfare takes up our whole life, therefore salvation is indeed the story of the whole life.**

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*\* This lecture is adapted from 'The Heresy of Salvation in a Moment' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*

## Lecture IX: Faith in The Orthodox Perspective

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1)

For Orthodox Christians, justification by faith is dynamic, not static. Faith is living, continuous, never static or merely a point in time. Faith is not something Christians experience only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of their lives. **True faith is not a decision; it's a way of life.**

(The Orthodox Study Bible)

**In what follows we shall examine the characteristics of the saving faith:**

- Sound Faith: → Apostolic Faith.  
→ One Faith  
→ Biblical & Traditional Faith
- Loving Faith.
- Working Faith.
- Faith that endures to the end.

### **Sound Faith**

→ The Holy Bible states clearly that whoever follows a heresy<sup>+</sup> **will not be saved:**

- “The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, ..., **dissentions<sup>\*</sup>, heresies**, ...and the like of which I tell you before hand, just as I told you in time past, that those who practice such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God.**” (Gal 5:19-21)
- “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies.**” (2 Pet 2:1)
- “Whoever transgresses and **does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God** ...If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for **who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**” (2 Jn 9-11)
- “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, **contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**” (Rom 16:17)
- “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, **knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.**” (Tit 3:10-11)

→ The following verses also illustrate the importance of sound doctrine:

- “Rebuke them sharply, that they may be **sound in faith.**” (Tit 1:14)
- “Speak the things which are proper for **sound doctrine.**” (Tit 2:1)
- “In doctrine showing **integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech.**” (Tit 2:7-8)
- “Hold fast the pattern of **sound words** which you have heard from me.” (2 Tim 1:13)
- “**Take heed** to yourself and **to the doctrine.** Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (1 Tim 4:16)

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<sup>+</sup> A religious belief opposed to the Orthodox doctrines of a Church (Webster's New World Dictionary).

<sup>\*</sup> To reject the doctrines of an established Church (Webster's New World Dictionary).

- “For the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.” (2 Tim 4:3)
- “A bishop must be blameless... holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, **by sound doctrine**, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Tit 1:7-9)
- “... You will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of **good doctrine** which you have carefully followed.” (1 Tim 4:6)

### Characters of Sound Faith:

- **Apostolic Faith:**

Our Lord said to the apostles, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me” (Lk.10: 16). In other words, he who rejects the sound apostolic faith (found in the Orthodox Apostolic Church) rejects our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. St. Paul defended this sound apostolic faith saying, “If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we (the apostles) have preached to you, **let him be accursed**. As I have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, **let him be accursed**” (Gal 1:8-9)

The direct connection between the sound apostolic faith and salvation is obvious in the Holy Book of Revelation from St. John’s description of the heavenly Jerusalem, “Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and **on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the lamb**” (Rev 21:14). St. Paul said, “Having been **built on the foundation of the apostles**, and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20). In short, without the sound apostolic faith there is no salvation! ←

- **One Faith:**

The saving apostolic faith is **one** as St. Paul said, “One Lord, **one faith**, one baptism” (Eph 4:5). Unity is an important characteristic of the sound faith. Therefore, we believe in **one** Holy, Catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church. Salvation is available **only** through this Church where the one sound faith is practiced, “The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47), “If he refuses to hear the Church, let him be to you like a **heathen** and a tax collector” (Mt 18:16)

- **Biblical & Traditional Faith:**

The sound apostolic faith is based on Holy Scriptures and on the Holy Tradition of the Apostolic Church. (Review first section about Holy Tradition)

### Loving Faith

Faith is the first step toward salvation and is a great virtue, St. Paul said, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:9). Nevertheless, Love is greater than faith, “Now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but **the greatest is love**” (1 Cor 13:13). St. Paul said, “Though I **have all faith**, that I could remove mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing**” (1 Cor 13:2)

→ What is the nature of this love that is greater than faith?

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own; is not provoked; thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity; but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all

things (from God), hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7). It is not a surprise that **true love is basically good works** as St. John said, “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 Jn 5:3)

→ Consider the following verses:

- “Let us consider one another to stir up **love and good works.**” (Heb 10:24)
- “Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, labor of love.**” (1 Thess 1:3)
- “God is not unjust to forget your **work and labor of love.**” (Heb 6:10)
- “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but **faith working through love.**” (Gal 5:6) → This last verse will take us to the next character of the saving faith → Working Faith.

### **Working Faith**

→ Without good works, faith is considered dead

- “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (Jam 2:17)
- “Faith without works is dead.” (Jam 2:20)
- “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (Jam 2:2)

**Remark → Dead faith will not save anyone!**

→ Faith is made perfect by good works

- “By works faith was made perfect.” (Jam 2:22)

→ Faith is manifest by good works

- “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (Jam 2:24)

→ Justification is by faith & works

- “You see that a man is justified by works and **not by faith only.**” (Jam 2:24)

**Remark: The last verse is irrefutable evidence that the Protestant teaching of salvation by faith ‘alone’ is fatally false.**

### **Faith that endures to the end**

→ The Sound (Apostolic, One, Biblical & Traditional), Loving, and Working Faith should endure to the end or else **we may loose salvation:**

- “He who endures **to the end** will be saved.” (Mt 14:13)
- “We have become partakers of Christ **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast **to the end.**” (Heb 3:14)
- “Be faithful **until death**, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev 2:10)
- “Whose house are we, **if** we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm **to the end.**” (Heb 3:6)
- “For we have become partakers of Christ **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast **to the end**” (Heb 3:14)
- “We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope **until the end.**” (Heb 6:11)

### **In a Nutshell:**

As an Orthodox Christian, when you read in your Holy Bible about “Faith”, understand that the Holy Bible is referring to the Sound, Loving, Working faith that endures to the end.

**Example**

It is written, "Without **faith** it is impossible to please Him." (**Heb 11:9**)

This verse should be understood as follows:

- Without **Sound Faith (Apostolic/ One/ Biblical & Traditional)** it is impossible to please Him.
- Without **Loving Faith** it is impossible to please Him.
- Without **Working Faith** it is impossible to please Him.
- Without **Faith that endures to the end** it is impossible to please Him.



## **Lecture X: Faith Vs. Works**

**“Without (Sound, Loving, working) faith (that endures to the end) it is impossible to please Him.” (Heb 11:9)**

For most of Church history, salvation was seen as comprehending all of life: Christians believed in Christ, were baptized, and were nurtured in their salvation in the Church. Key doctrines of the faith centered on the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the atonement.

In Western Europe during the sixteenth century, however, and even before, justifiable concern arose among the Reformers over a prevailing understanding that salvation depended on human works of merit, and not upon the grace and mercy of God. Justification by faith alone (*Sola Fides*, Lat.) became the slogan of salvation for the Protestants.\*

The Reformation debate in the West was late breaking news for the Orthodox East: why this new polarization of faith and works? It had been settled since the apostolic era that (final) salvation was granted by the mercy of God to righteous men and women. Those baptized into our Lord Jesus Christ were called to believe in Him and do good works.

A discussion of faith *versus* works was unprecedented in Orthodox thought. For Orthodox Christians, faith is living, dynamic, continuous – never static or merely point-in-time. Faith is not something that a Christian exercises only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of his (her) life. True faith is not just a decision; it’s a way of life.

This is why the modern evangelical Protestant question, “Are you saved?” gives pause to an Orthodox believer. A final difficulty for Orthodox Christians is the word **alone**. Justification by faith poses no problem. But justification by faith **alone** brings up an objection. It contradicts (Holy) Scripture, which says: **“You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (Jam 2:24)**  
(Orthodox Study Bible)

### **Faith as the first step to salvation**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (**Jn.8: 24**), “He who believes and is baptized, will be saved” (**Mk 16:16**). Faith is indeed the first step toward salvation, but it is not the only one. Sometimes, the first step is used in the Holy Bible to signify the whole matter or process that starts by it. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is the only step.

#### **Example 1**

Simeon the elder took the Child Jesus up in his arms and said, “Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for **my eyes have seen Your salvation**” (**Lk 2:29-30**).

→ St. Simeon did not see the Lord’s salvation, which took place through the shedding of His precious blood on the cross thirty-three years later!

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\* Two more foundational teachings were Scripture Alone (*Sola Scriptura*) & Grace Alone (*Sola Gratia*), both of which were discussed and refuted in previous lectures.

→ He only saw the Incarnation and Birth of the Lord. But because this Incarnation was the first executive step leading to salvation, he said in confidence, “*my eyes have seen Your salvation*”.

→ Here the Incarnation of the Lord being the first step of salvation was used to signify the whole process. But does this mean that we are saved by merely the birth of our Lord? Certainly not, for it is written, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22**)

### Example 2

St. Paul and St. Silas said to the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you **and your household**” (**Acts 16:31**)

→ How could his family be saved merely by his faith? Does the faith of a person save another?

→ The proper meaning is that the faith of the jailer serves as the first step toward his own salvation. Then this first step may convince his family to enter into the faith as well and be a good start that will lead the whole household to salvation.

→ This is evident in the following verses, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him **and to all who were in his house...** And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (**Acts 16:32-33**)

→ The faith of the jailer was the first step toward the salvation of his household and the Holy Bible used it to signify the whole process but that doesn’t cancel the other steps that were required (their faith and baptism).

### Example 3

Our Lord said to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to this house” (**Lk 19:9**). This He said when Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times what he had taken from others.

→ The words of our Lord mean that Zacchaeus’ repentance was the first step toward the salvation of the whole household, but it was not the only step. Each individual in that house had to repent and believe.

→ Moreover, this was merely a promise of the salvation that would be later available through the blood of Our Lord on the cross.

### Example 4

St. Paul said, “Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God” (**Rom 5:1**).

St. James said, “You see then that a man is **justified by works** and not by faith only” (**Jam 2:24**)

→ St. Paul used the first step (faith) to signify the whole matter that starts with this step (justification). On the other hand, St. James explains that this first step (faith) is not the only one.

### Example 5

St. Paul said that our Lord appeared to him and told him, “... that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified **by faith in Me**” (**Acts 26:18**)

On a different occasion, St. Paul said that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (mentioned above) and that he declared to everyone, “that they should **repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance**” (Acts 26:19-20)

→ In the first account of the heavenly vision, the first step (faith) was used to signify the whole matter of sanctification but in the second account of the **same** vision it is clear that faith is not the only step and that it must be followed by other steps (repentance/ turning to God/ good works)

### Example 6

St. Paul said, “**Whoever** calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10: 13)

Someone may read this verse and think that **anyone** who believes will be saved, but our Lord said, “**Not everyone** who says to Me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mat 7:21)

→ It is obvious that faith is the first step and should be followed by keeping the commandments.

### Example 7

After the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, our Lord said, “**Watch** therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Mt 25:13)

→ Let’s apply these words to the foolish virgins: **To watch** is the first step for salvation but it is not the only step, even though it is the only one mentioned by our Lord.

1<sup>st</sup> step → Watch

2<sup>nd</sup> step → Realize that they don’t have oil.

3<sup>rd</sup> step → Ask the wise virgins for help.

4<sup>th</sup> step → Take their advice and go quickly buy oil.

5<sup>th</sup> step → Return before the bridegroom arrives and closes the door.

→ Suppose these virgins considered the first step (to watch) to be the only step for salvation and they didn’t do anything else but stay awake and watch, **wouldn’t they still be called foolish?**

→ Likewise the person who considers faith to be the **only** step toward salvation is called **FOOLISH**: “But do you want to know **O foolish man**, that faith without works is dead?” (Jam 2:20)

→ Separating works from faith is like separating the spirit from the body, the result is **DEATH**: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead also” (Jam 2:26)

→ It is very interesting that St. James likened the good works to the spirit and faith to the body and not vice versa!

### Conclusion

Anyone who preaches faith **alone** with no works as the way of salvation is a **FOOL** and is in fact **preaching DEATH**, “Do you not know O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jam 2:20) Indeed, “what does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith (alone) save him?” (Jam 2:14)

In fact, faith is in itself work! → The Jews asked our lord, “What shall we do that we may **work the works of God?**” He answered them saying, “This is **the work** of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent” (Jn 6:28,29)

## Lecture XI: Works in The Orthodox Perspective

**“But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!” (2 Chron 15:7)**

Due to their misunderstanding of the meaning of grace, Protestants teach that salvation is by faith **alone** and that good human works play no role in the process of salvation. Moreover, they teach that evil works will not cause a believer to perish! These heresies are primarily supported by the misinterpretation of the Holy Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. In what follows we shall, by the grace of God, examine the types of works mentioned in Holy Scriptures:

### **Types of Works:**

#### **Evil works:**

Such as murder, adultery, idol worshipping, robbery, etc....Holy Scripture calls them ‘works of the flesh’ (**Gal 5:19**). This type is obviously condemned and if a believer commits any evil work **and does not repent**, he/she will be punished more than the unbeliever who does the same, “Of how much worse punishment do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (**Heb 12:29**), “He who does wrong will be repaid for the wrong which he has done, and **there is no partiality**” (**Col 3:25**)

#### **Dead works:**

- A.** These are good works **done by believers** for the wrong reasons. These are works, which are good in themselves, such as fasting, praying, giving alms, etc.... but are done to call attention to oneself and to be praised by people. Selfish motivation turns good works to dead works. The solution is not to cease fasting, giving or helping but to turn from the sin of self-glorification, “when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret” (**Mt 6:3-4**) Also fasting and praying (**Mt 6:5-18**). Likewise, good deeds void of love are considered dead, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (**1 Cor 13:3**). Again the answer is not to stop the work but to repent, “**You have left your first love**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and **do the first works**” (**Rev 2:4-5**)
- B.** The ‘good’ works **of the unbelievers** are considered dead because they are void of faith. Some of the Gentiles were actually doing very good deeds before becoming Christians, like Cornelius (**Acts 10:1-2**). St. Paul did not want those Gentiles to boast and think that God offered them salvation as a reward of their righteousness, he said, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest anyone should boast**” (**Eph 2:8-9**), “Not by works of righteousness which we **have done** (before believing), but according to His mercy He saved us” (**Titus 3:5**). Directly after the above verses St. Paul said, “We are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God has prepared **that we may walk in them**” (**Eph 2:10**), “... these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should **be careful to maintain good works**” (**Titus 3:8**). There is no contradiction here because St. Paul is talking about two different types of works.

- C. The works of the Law: Some of the Jews who became Christians were obsessed with Judaism and developed themselves as teachers, they taught that the Gentiles **must** keep the works of the Law of Moses; circumcision, Sabbaths, new moons, etc.... “And some men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘**unless you are circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved**’” (Acts 15:1), “Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘it is **necessary to circumcise them** (the Gentiles), and to command them to **keep the Law of Moses**’” (Acts 15:5)

The first Church council mentioned in (Acts 15) rejected this heresy. St. Paul, being the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 15:12; 18:6; Gal 2:7), took it upon himself to clarify this point in his Holy Epistles:

- “A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Gal 2:16)
- “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Rom 3:27-28)
- “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Rom 4:2,3). → St. Paul also used the life of our father Abraham as an example of justification without the works of the Law of Moses in (Gal 3)

Interestingly, St. James who was not trying to refute any Judaic attitude in his Holy Epistle, uses **the same example** of the life of our father Abraham to stress the importance of good works, “Was not our father **Abraham justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the alter? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him righteousness’. And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only” (Jam 2:21-24). → St. James also uses the example of Rahab (Jam 2:25)

There is no contradiction between St. Paul who said that our father Abraham was **not** justified by works and St. James who said that he was indeed justified by works because each apostle is referring to **a different type of works**; St. Paul is talking about the works of the Law and St. James is referring to the good works of the believers. Noticed that both of them quoted the same verse from the Old Testament (Gen 15:6) to make their point.

It is important to distinguish the outer works of the law from the spirit of the Old Testament commandments, for our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17), He also said, “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20). Therefore, St. Paul said, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish the law**” (Rom 3:31)

### **Good Works:**

These are deeds which are both good in themselves and done for a good purpose: to glorify God, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16). These works play an important role in our justification (Jam

**2:24-25)** and are strongly related to faith (**Jam 2:14-26**). We can quote literally hundreds of Holy verses that speak about the importance and efficacy of good works like prayer, fasting, loving, giving the poor, etc.... actually, the whole sermon on the Mountain (**Mt 5; 6;7**) is a strong refutation to those who preach salvation by faith 'alone'. **In fact there is an entire Holy Book called the Book of Acts (Works)!**

#### **Good works are evidence of being children of God:**

- Our Lord said to the Jews who boasted vainly of being children of Abraham, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (**Jn 8:39**), therefore, works are evidence of son-ship.
- "If you know that He is righteous, you know that every one who practices righteousness is born of Him." (**1 Jn 2:29**)
- "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." (**1 Jn 3:9**)
- "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." (**1 Jn 5:18**)
- "He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." (**3 Jn 11**)

#### **Good works are fruits necessary for salvation:**

- "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (**Jn 15:8**) → "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (**Mt 5:16**) **Fruits = Works.**
- "Let our people also learn to maintain good works to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful." (**Titus 3:4**)
- "... That you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work..." (**Col 1:10**)
- "If I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor" (**Phil 1:22**)
- "... That I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles" (**Rom 1:13**)
- St. Paul called giving to the poor a fruit, "Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain." (**Rom 15:28**)
- St. John The Baptist said, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" (**Lk 3:7**). So the people asked him, "What shall we do then?" He answered, "He who has tunics, let him give to him who has none, and he who has food, let him do likewise" (**Lk 3:11**) **Fruits = Works.**
- There is no salvation without these fruits of good works, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (**Lk 3:9**), "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away" (**Jn 15:2**)
- "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life." (**Rom 6:20-22**)
- "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." (**Rom 7:4-5**)
- "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (**Eph 5:11**)

- (Lk 13:6-9) → The parable of the barren tree
- (Lk 8:11-15) → The parable of the sower
- (Mt 25:14-29) → The parable of the talents
- (Lk 19:12-27) → The parable of the Minas

#### Judgment will be according to works:

- “You are great in counsel and mighty in works, for Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of man, to give everyone **according to the fruit of his doing**” (Jer 32:19)
- “... You render to each one **according to his work.**” (Ps 62:12)
- “God will bring **every work** into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.” (Ecc 12:14)
- The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who **have done good**, to the resurrection of life, and those who **have done evil**, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (Jn 5:28-29)
- The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each **according to his works.**” (Mt 16:27)
- “Every idle word men speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” (Mt 12:37)
- “We must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one** may receive the things done in the body, according to what **he has done**, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor 5:10)
- “... in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one **according to his deeds.**” (Rom 2:6)
- “If you call on the Father, who without partiality judges **according to each one’s work**, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear.” (1 Pet 1:17)
- “I will give to each one of you according to your works.” (Rev 2:23)
- “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give everyone **according to his works.**” (Rev 22:12)
- “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ‘yes’, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors and **their works follow them.**” (Rev 14:13)
- “... The dead were judged **according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books.” (Rev 20:12)
- The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them and they were judged, each one according to his works.” (Rev 20:13)

→ If salvation depends on faith ‘alone’, then how come God’s judgment is according to works? Why isn’t judgment in the last day according to faith ‘alone’?

#### The relation between Faith & Works:

- a. Faith is dead without good works → (Jam 2:2,17,20)
- b. Faith is made perfect with good works → (Jam 2:22)
- c. Faith is manifest by good works → (Jam 2:18)
- d. Justification is by both Faith & good works → (Jam 2:21-24)

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have (good) works? **Can faith (alone) save him?** ... Thus also **faith by itself, if it does not have**



**works is dead.** But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works (if you can), and I will show you my faith by my works. ... Do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead**? Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and **by works faith was made perfect**? ... You see then that **a man is justified by works and not by faith only**. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also **justified by works** when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead also**" (Jam 2:14-26)

### **The essence of good works:**

Good works are actually a gift from God; "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which **God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them**" (Eph 2:10), "For it is God who works in you both **to will and to do** for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). If we accept the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we may say with St. Paul, "**we are God's fellow workers**" (1 Cor 3:9)

In this case, our Lord will say to us, "come you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me" (Mt 25:34-36)

### **→ St. Paul encourages us to do good works saying:**

- "Whatever you do, do it heartily **as to the Lord and not to men**, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." (Col 3:23-24)
- "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that **your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**" (1 Cor 5:58)
- "Each one will receive his reward according to his own labor." (1 Cor 3:8)
- "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." (Heb 6:10)
- "These things I want you to affirm **constantly**, that those who have believed in God should be **careful to maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable to men." (Titus 3:8)
- "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not loose heart." (Gal 6:9)
- "**Do not forget to do good** and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb 13:16)

If we are deceived and believe that faith 'alone' will save us and as a result slacken and are not zealous to do good works, the Lord will say to us, "depart from Me you cursed, in to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angel; For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not cloth Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me" (Mt 25:41-43). Notice that those people did not do any evil deed but their problem was the **lack of good works**. Indeed, "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin" (Jam 4:17)

**In a Nutshell:**

Our Lord emphasized the importance of works when He said, seven times, “I know your works” (**Rev 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15**)

There are several types of works:

- a. Evil works
- b. Dead Works (for self glorification, w/o love or faith, outer works of the Jewish law)
- c. Good Works
  - Evidence of being children of God
  - Fruits necessary for salvation
  - Basis for Judgment
  - Response to the grace of God

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*\* This lecture is adapted from 'Salvation in The Orthodox Concept' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.*

## **Lecture XII: The Salvation of The Thief ✠**

**“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” (Lk 15:7)**

### **Introduction:**

Protestants, in their attempt to emphasize that salvation is not dependent on human achievements, say that good works play no role in our salvation, and to stress the point that salvation is not due to human merit, say that evil works will not affect the salvation of a believer! Thus, their views regarding salvation turned into a heresy that needed to be refuted. This understanding of salvation is focused entirely on the words of St. John, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (**Jn 3:16**), as if this verse was the only one speaking about salvation in the entire Holy Bible. No one argues regarding the necessity of faith for salvation, all (except the pluralists) agree that whoever does not believe will perish. When we say to the Protestants that good works are important for salvation, they reply, ‘the thief was saved without any good works’, when we say that baptism is necessary for salvation, they answer, ‘the thief went to paradise without being baptized’. Protestants teach that faith is a feeling in the heart, which is obtain in a moment and consequently a person is saved in a moment without any Church Sacraments or Priesthood. They support this heresy by saying that the thief was saved in a moment without Church or Priesthood mediation. Before we provide, by the grace of God, the Orthodox refutations of the Protestants claims concerning the salvation of the thief, we should understand that the way the thief was saved is irrelevant for the Christian era since neither the Church nor the Christian Priesthood had yet been established.

The Church was born on the Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles as divided tongues of fire (**Acts 2**). The Christian Priesthood was established after the Resurrection, when our Lord breathed on the disciples saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained” (**Jn 20:22-23**). Nevertheless, the thief was saved through our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the head of the Church (**Col 1:18**) and the Chief High Priest (**Heb 8:1**) who represents both the Church and the Christian Priesthood. In what follows, we shall, by the grace of God, discuss the 10 good works performed by the crucified thief, we shall prove that he was indeed baptized, we shall demonstrate that he was not saved in a moment and finally, we shall consider his position in the Coptic Tradition.

### **The Ten Good Works of The Thief:**

The **first** good deed of the thief was to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord said to the Jews, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (**Jn 6:29**). Just to believe was not an easy task for the thief because he believed in the Lord Jesus while He was crucified, humiliated, despised, and in a weak state in front of all. The cross of the Lord made many to stumble, even the disciples, the Lord said, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered” (**Mk 14:27**). And it happened that the sheep were scattered! No one could stand by the cross except the Maries, St. John the beloved and this thief!

*“O blessed thief, what did you see and what did you observe; that you confessed the crucified Christ in the flesh, the King of heaven and the Lord of all? You did not see Christ, God, glorified on Mt. Tabor in the glory of His Father; but you did see Him in the Kranion; the*

*disciple denied and the thief cried out saying: Remember me O Lord when You come into Your Kingdom.”* (The commemoration of the thief – Good Friday – 6<sup>th</sup> Hour)

Certainly, the thief needed to strive hard against himself in order to believe, he fought a ferocious fight against his own doubts; he fought and overcame, “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (**Rev 2:7**). No wonder our Lord said to him, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (**Lk 2:43**)

St. Matthew said, “Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing” (**Mt 27:44**), and St. Mark said, “Those who were crucified with Him reviled Him” (**Mk 15:32**).

Evidently, this thief had reviled the Lord in the beginning and then repented! So repentance was his **second** good work. Our Lord said, “Unless you repent you will likewise perish” (**Lk 13:3,5**).

King Solomon said, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (**Prov 28:13**), this verse leads us to the **third** good work the thief performed, i.e. confessing his sins. He said, “We receive the due reward of our deeds” (**Lk 23:41**). Thus, he confessed his sins and acknowledged that the death penalty on the cross was the due reward for his evil deeds. His conduct was also spiritual, for while the other thief was thinking of means to escape the punishment saying to the Lord, “Save Yourself and us” (**Lk 23:39**), the good thief was concerned about his spiritual salvation and eternity. He even tried to talk some sense into the other thief when he told him, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?” (**Lk 23:40**)

The **fourth** good work of the thief was to have tremendous hope in spite of his evil life and his reviling the Lord in the beginning. He had hope than an evil person like himself could be saved and allowed to enter the Kingdom of heaven if he repents and confesses his sins. Judas Iscariot, the disciple, did not have such hope and perished as a result!

The thief loved our Lord Jesus and although he never heard the words of St. John, “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (**1 Jn 3:18**), he truly loved in deed and performed his **fifth** good work and defended the Lord saying, “This Man has done nothing wrong” (**Lk 23:41**). Our Lord stood alone, no one defended Him of those who enjoyed His gifts and miracles, not even His disciples or followers, but the voice of this thief came out loud to put to shame the ungrateful thousands. At this point, it is noteworthy to mention that this blessed thief, by his good deeds, became an example of the three major virtues of Christianity: Faith, Hope, and Love (**2 Cor 13:13**).

The **sixth** good work of the thief was actually done for Virgin Mary who was standing by the cross in overwhelming pain that is best described by the prophetic words of Simeon the elder, “A sword will pierce through your own soul also” (**Lk 2:35**). The words of the thief, “This Man has done nothing wrong”, comforted Virgin Mary’s heart in the midst of all the reviling, the mocking and the blaspheming against the Lord.

The **seventh** good work of the thief was to declare a complete confession of faith. He said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom” (**Lk 23:42**), these words imply many meanings; they imply that the crucified person is a Lord and a King, that He will be coming into His Kingdom, i.e. death has no power over Him, and that salvation is through this

person crucified next to him. The thief declared this confession publicly, before all, without being ashamed, a matter that St. Peter and many disciples could not dare to do. He declared his faith before the people passing by blaspheming and wagging their heads (**Mt 27:39**), before the rulers who sneered saying, “He saved others, let Him save Himself” (**Lk 23:35**), before the Roman soldiers who also mocked our Lord (**Lk 23:36**), and finally before his fellow crucified criminal who blasphemed (**Lk 23:39**). This bold and public declaration of faith and defense must have provoked all these people to revile and mock the thief also as they did to our Lord. This leads us to the **eighth** good work of the thief, which was to endure mocking and insults for the sake of the Lord, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (**Mt 5:11-12**)

In order to identify the **ninth** good work of the thief, we need to appreciate the symbolic similarity between the story of the Samaritan woman (**Jn 4**) and the story of the crucifixion: They started at the sixth hour, the disciples had left, and the Lord said that He was thirsty in both stories. The Holy Bible doesn't tell us that the Samaritan woman actually drew water from the well and gave our Lord to drink, but was He simply thirsty for this water about which He said, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again” (**Jn 4:13**)? When the disciples urged Him saying, “Rabbi eat”, He said, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” (**Jn 4:32**). Indeed, He also had water to drink that we do not know. Our Lord said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (**Jn 4:34**)

St. Augustine commented on this verse saying, “Therefore, in the case of that woman, it was even His drink to do the will of Him who sent Him. That was the reason why He said to the woman ‘give Me a drink’, namely to work faith in her and to drink of her faith”. So although the Samaritan woman may not have given Him water from the well, she truly quenched His thirst by her faith.

Now on the cross, Our Lord said, “I thirst” (**Jn 19:28**) and “They gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink, but when He had tasted it, He would not drink” (**Mt 27:34**); He refused to drink and remained thirsty but this blessed thief quenched His thirst by his faith and good works. Our Lord said, “Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (**Mt 10:42**) and “Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (**Mk 10:41**). A cup of water given to a little child or to an apostle will not be forgotten before God and will be rewarded. What about this cup of spiritual water given to the Lord Himself on the cross? In the last day, the Lord will say to the thief, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was thirsty and you gave Me drink” (**Mt 25:34-35**). Our Lord said, “He who endures to the end will be saved” (**Mt 24:13**). Our Lord died in the ninth hour (**Mk 15:34-37; Lk 23:44-45**), both thieves were still alive and the soldiers had to break their legs to speed their death at sunset (**Jn 19:32**). So the good thief remained on the cross after the death of our Lord for approximately three hours during which his faith was put to the test; can you imagine what the other thief might have told him about our Lord who is now dead and in whom the blessed thief had hope? By enduring to the end the thief performed his **tenth** good work and was saved.

→ “You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only” (**Jam 2: 24**)

### **The Baptism of The Thief:**

It is a common practice by the Protestants to cite a situation in which water baptism is physically impossible (Lost in a desert, pinned down by enemy gunfire, etc....) and to conclude from such that baptism has no necessary connection with salvation at all. The thief on the cross is a commonly misused example in this context.

Baptism, in its essence, is death with our Lord Jesus Christ, “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized **into His death?**” (**Rom 6:3**). Nevertheless, the baptismal water is not a literal death but rather a simulation of the death of the Lord, “We have been united together **in the likeness of His death**” (**Rom 6:5**)

Therefore, since baptism is death with our Lord Jesus Christ, and the thief literally died with the Lord, not just ‘in the likeness of His death’, his death in this manner became for him a baptism in the deepest meaning. The only believer in the whole world who can literally say, “I have been crucified with Christ” (**Gal 2:20**) is this thief. Thus, his unique death became an ideal baptism and a model for the Sacrament. Likewise, those who believed and were martyred before being baptized with water are considered baptized in the ‘baptism of blood’. Their martyrdom for the sake of the faith became for them a baptism. This possibility was quite prevalent in the early Christian centuries when initial faith and baptism were often separated by lengthy periods of catechetical instruction.

Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ asked the sons of Zebedee, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and **be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?**” (**Mt 20:22; Mk 10:35**), and he said also, “**I have a baptism to be baptized with** and how distressed I am **till it is accomplished**” (**Lk 12:50**). Now on the cross the Lord said, “It is finished [accomplished]” (**Jn 19:30**)

**→ Our Lord called the death on the cross a baptism, would anyone now dare to say that the crucified thief who believed was not baptized?**

### **Was the thief saved instantly?**

According to the Protestants’ heresy of ‘salvation in a moment’, a person can obtain eternal salvation the moment he/she believes and accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal savior. Salvation, to them, is merely a personal experience attained in one’s room in a moment or in the moment one hears a moving sermon. Their salvation is based on faith alone, which is defined as a feeling within the heart and on grace that is from God. Thus, when you speak to one of them, he will ask you, ‘have you been saved? Have you accepted Christ as your savior and redeemer?’ Some of them might present you with a copy of the Holy Bible with a vow to sign and date by which you declare that you accepted the Lord as a savior. As a result, one’s life becomes an individual relation with God and the Holy Bible becomes the heavenly instruction manual for this do-it-yourself salvation. The role of the Church, Priesthood, and Sacraments disappears from one’s spiritual life. Protestants try to justify themselves by saying that they are making the way of salvation easy before the people by telling them that it is not difficult to attain; it can be attained in a moment. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not do the same, He said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (**Mt 7:14**). Protestants try to support their false teaching by saying that the thief was saved in a moment without striving, good works or baptism. We have already discussed the issues of striving, good works and baptism, now we need to answer this question, “was this thief really saved in a moment?”

They say that the thief was saved in the moment he believed and said, “Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom” and the Lord replied, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”. Of course the thief was **not** saved at this moment because “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (**Heb 9:22**) and at this point the Lord had not yet shed His precious blood. Actually, the Lord promised salvation to the thief in the sixth hour of the day, which is the first hour of the crucifixion, and He actually died and shed His blood three hours later; in the ninth hour of the day. So, was the thief saved in the ninth hour? **NO**. In the ninth hour, the Lord died for him but still the thief had to die and share the Lord’s death to be saved. This thief actually died in the eleventh hour, at sunset and only then was he saved. So, the Lord told him, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” and he was saved five hours later!

### **The Thief in the Coptic Tradition:**

The thief has a unique position in the Coptic Holy Tradition and the Church gives him a great deal of attention by reminding her children of his story every single day of the week. In the ninth hour of the day, the Church teaches us to commemorate the redemptive death of our Lord in the flesh on the cross and His acceptance of the repentance of the thief. We pray that our savior may mortify our carnal lusts, make us partakers of His grace, and accept our repentance:

*“O You, who commended the spirit into the hands of the Father as You hung on the cross, in the ninth hour, and guided the thief who was crucified with You into entering Paradise, do not neglect me, O good One, nor reject me, I, the lost one”*

*“When the thief saw the Prince of Life hung on the cross, he said: had not the One crucified with us been God Incarnate, the sun would not hide its ray, nor would the earth have quaked trembling. But O the Almighty One who endures all things remember me O Lord when You come into Your Kingdom”*

*“O You who accepted unto Him the confession of the thief on the cross, accept us unto You, O Good One; we who deserve the sentence of death because of our sins. We all confess our sins with him and acknowledging Your Divinity we cry with him saying: remember us O Lord when You come into Your Kingdom”*

*“Lord, abolish for us the power of the adversary and all his evil armies, as Your Only Begotten Son has trampled on them by the power of His life giving cross. Accept us unto You, our Lord Jesus Christ, as You accepted the thief at Your right hand while You were hung on the cross” (From the prayer of the ninth hour of the day – Coptic Book of Hours)*

The Holy Bible mentioned that the Lord was crucified between two evildoers (**Mt 27:37; Mk 15:27; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:18**) but it did not specify which of the two was saved. Was it the right thief or the left one? According to Holy Tradition, it was Demas the thief who was crucified on the right hand of the Lord. Hence, he is known as **The Right Thief**. Another simple example of Tradition is Adam’s apple; the Holy Scripture did not specify whether the forbidden fruit was an apple or a banana. It doesn’t make much difference to most of us to know the kind of the forbidden fruit, but in the case of the thief it is more fitting to call him ‘the right thief’ rather than the ‘left’ because this title not only points to his position in relation to our Lord on the day of crucifixion but also to his position in the Day of Judgment, “He will set the sheep on His right and the goats on the left” (**Mt 25:33**). Therefore, even if this thief was crucified on the left, he still ought to be called “The Right Thief”.

The words of the thief “Lord Remember Me when You come into Your Kingdom” are highlighted in the beautiful hymn of “Golgotha” which is sung at the twelfth hour of Good Friday. Also during the commemoration of the thief at the sixth hour of the same day the whole congregation pray saying:

*“Remember me, O Lord when You come into Your Kingdom; Remember me, O Holy One when You come into Your Kingdom; Remember me, O Master when You come into Your Kingdom”*

In the nighttime litanies of the Holy Pascha Week the Coptic Priests pray saying:

*“O You, who accepted the repentance of the Ninivites, when they fasted and received the confession of the right thief on the cross, likewise make us worthy to please You and to gain Your compassion, crying and saying: Remember us, O Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom.”*

During the prayer for the departed, the Coptic Priests ask the Lord to open the door of Paradise before the soul that departed from our world as He opened it before the right thief. The story of this blessed thief should not be a stumbling block to Christians, but unfortunately it is commonly misused by Protestants to support their heresies. A good explanation of this sad state is provided by the following words of St. John Chrysostom:

→ **“Diseased persons are injured even by healthy food”<sup>†</sup>**

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\* This lecture is adapted from ‘*The Heresy of Salvation in a Moment*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

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<sup>†</sup> Introduction to the Holy Epistle to the Galatians.