

Galatians 6:2-10

² Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. ³ For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. ⁴ But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵ For every man shall bear his own burden. ⁶ Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. ⁷ Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸ For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. ⁹ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. ¹⁰ As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Notes: St. John Chrysostom says that since it is impossible for any of us to be without failings, that St. Paul exhorts not to scrutinize the offences of others too closely. So 'bear one another's burdens' in this case refers to being tolerant of each other's faults and trying to help one another, love one another and pray for one another—as opposed to judging and condemning one another. Then, as St. Paul says in this passage from Galatians, we will be engaged in planting spiritual seeds that will bear the spiritual fruits of the virtues and life everlasting. If we do not do this and plant seeds of sin and worldliness, then we should not be surprised when we reap evil fruits of corruption and vice.

St. Nikolai Velimirovic says that if our hearts have been softened either by repentance or learning the boundless love of God towards us, that we should not be proud with those whose hearts are still hard, but rather remember that our hearts were also hard. He gives an image of 7 brothers who were all ill in the hospital. One recovered and got up and served the other sick ones in order to help speed their recovery. St. Nikolai says that we should be like that brother and consider all men to be our brothers and sick brothers at that. If God has given us better health than someone else, this is given through His mercy so that we may serve our frailer brothers.

Mark 7:14-24

¹⁴ And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. ¹⁶ If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁷ And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. ¹⁸ And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; ¹⁹ Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? ²⁰ And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: ²³ All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. ²⁴ And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.

Before Christ came, the Law was given by Moses as a sort of preparation for the higher Law Christ would bring. However, the Jews had lost sight of the spirit of the law and mostly focused on the letter of the Law. They had many practices and ordinances of the law concerning food, but St. Theophylact points out that the Lord is revealing a deeper intent and spirit of the law. Here the Lord shows that passions and sins come from our hearts and can defile us, but that which we eat does not defile us.

The Holy Fathers have given us an Orthodox understanding of how a person comes to actually committing a sin. First a sinful suggestion appears in our thoughts, then feelings are attached to the suggestion in which one indulges in imagining how good it would be to if one were to act on this sin. If it goes further, a person begins to think of ways to carry out the sinful intention and finally if a person is in captivity to the sinful idea, they commit the sinful act. This describes the practice of struggling against sin and with God's help, acquiring the virtues which we call unseen or spiritual warfare; that is—ascetic struggle.

Eastern Orthodox Christian Evangelism is different

The first and most important thing to remember is that we do not bring anyone into the Church - its not our job. We do not attract people to the faith, we do not convince people of the Truth, we don't do any of that. God is the One Who attracts people, Who brings them in the door, Who convicts their hearts, Who brings them to repentance, Who convinces them of the Truth; we do none of this. Too often in the North American model of evangelism, the individual person is made responsible for doing God's task, but in attempting to do God's work, we neglect our own. What is our task? Our task is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit (St Seraphim), our task is the working out of our salvation, our task is to repent and weep for our sins, our task is to enter the Kingdom of God. This more than anything else is what we must do. This is an evangelistic task - indeed the primary evangelistic task.

There are other "tasks", however, which derive from this one which are a bit more specific to "evangelism". It is God who brings people to the door of the Church and who convinces them that they should enter - however, we must keep the door to the Church open and visible. Hence, Orthodox evangelism must center on the Church - the beauty of the building, the beauty of the services, the frequency and availability of the services. Orthodox evangelism is served by beautiful icons, gold onion domes and crosses rising against the sky, the smell of incense, the

pious and holy singing of the services. Orthodox evangelism is served by our visibility as Orthodox Christians in the world - the clothing of the clergy (and in these days the modest and humble clothing of the laymen as well) - the sign of the cross as we pray at each juncture of our lives - beginning and ending a task, eating and finishing a meal, starting and ending a trip, etc. Orthodox evangelism is the keeping of icons in our homes, in our offices, in our cars. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the fast without excuses or compromises. Orthodox evangelism is setting our priorities to forgo the allures of the world in order to be at divine services whenever they are held. Orthodox evangelism is denying ourselves and bearing our cross. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the door of the Church open and visible. While the Holy Spirit is the one who draws the world to Himself, it is you and I who keep the doors of the Church open and who welcome all who come.

The second specific task that we as Orthodox Christians have in evangelism is the practical expression of God's love to mankind. Orthodox evangelism is greeting visitors as they come to the Church and then modeling (neither instructing nor condemning the visitor) for them proper behavior and demeanor in the Church. Orthodox evangelism is hospitality offered to share meals, to provide shelter and clothing as needed. Orthodox evangelism is to pray for our neighbor and to love our neighbor as ourself. Orthodox evangelism is going to the soup kitchen and serving there - Orthodox evangelism is giving to the poor without regard for "how the money will be used". Orthodox evangelism is visiting the sick in hospitals and praying for them. Orthodox evangelism is going the prisons (contact your local prison chaplain regarding how this might be done) and offering comfort and kindness to the imprisoned. Orthodox evangelism is loving your enemies (Elder Silouan of Mt Athos says that this is the true mark of a Christian - the love of one's enemies). Orthodox Evangelism is loving your neighbor as yourself. If we all did these things (and I am a wretched sinner and fall short of all that I have just said) then our Churches would be open and filled with light and glory drawing all who see her by the grace and action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. We don't have to preach on street corners, we don't have to have "events" or revivals or seminars as evangelistic tools - we simply have to be Orthodox Christians "to the max" without reservation or compromise. That is Orthodox evangelism.

From a Post to the Orthodox mailing list, dated October, 1999 by Priest David Moser
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A few reflections on Orthodox evangelism:

Why is Orthodox evangelism different from the more conventional Protestant concept of evangelism?

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to a deeper, spiritual, other-worldly Christian life and faith. Just to consider oneself a practicing Orthodox Christian means a great deal: fasting, praying, doing good deeds, frequent participation in the Holy Mysteries of Confession & Communion, deepening our understanding of our faith through daily study of Lives of Saints, Holy Scriptures and other spiritually beneficial writings from Holy Fathers and other righteous ones. An Orthodox Christian THINKS differently than others and lives with one foot planted upon the earth and the other foot planted in the kingdom of heaven. While we are called to love our neighbor, that does not mean imitating our neighbor in worldly fashions and ways of thinking.

What kind of witness can an Orthodox Christian provide if they only come to church when there is a wedding or maybe to attend the Paschal service for a short time once a year; or if they do not bother keeping the fasts, if there are no icons in their home, no practice of prayer or efforts to study our faith? When others see this, it's no wonder that they don't consider giving Orthodoxy a try. On the other hand, when Orthodox Christians do make a sincere effort and try to practice their faith, then God sends us the Grace of the Holy Spirit and suddenly we find that people are drawn to our church.